

# Research and Prospect of Collaborative Governance Theory

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## Abstract

With the deepening of public management reform, collaborative governance theory has aroused widespread concern in academia and has become one of the important research hotspots. This paper focuses on the definition of collaborative governance concept, the theoretical characteristics and the operational mechanism through systematical analysis of collaborative governance theory research. On the basis of three dimensions, the collaborative governance theory itself, the relationship between the collaborative governance and other elements and the specific application of collaborative governance theory, this paper puts forward the collaborative governance theory research prospects in order to promote the further integration and development of collaborative governance theory.

**Keywords:** Collaborative governance, Research review, Research Prospects

## 1. Introduction

Collaborative governance is the innovation and breakthrough of current research in the field of public management theory paradigm. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a general review and explanation of the research process of public management in order to understand and grasp the research context. Modern public administration originated from the paper *administrative research* by Woodrow Wilson in the United States in 1887, since then the public administration gradually developed. However, the traditional public administration model adapted to the early industrial age gradually exposed the shortcomings, and it was found that the hierarchical structure did not necessarily lead to maximum efficiency. Since the 1980s, with the expansion of government scale, financial pressures, the increase of complex social problems and the acceleration of the global scientific and technological revolution and other factors, the western developed countries have started the government reengineering movement, namely New Public Management (NPM). New Public Management breaks the inherent pattern of the social subject and promotes the spread of publicity. However, in the 1990s, with the failure of government, market failure and volunteer failure, New Public Management could not solve the complicated social problems well, which prompted people to find a better public administration paradigm. In 1995, the Commission on Global Governance defined governance as "the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affair" (Commission on Global Governance 1995). Since then, the academic perspective has gradually shifted from "management" to "governance", and the term "governance" has been widely used in the field of social public management, thus providing the possibility for the emergence of collaborative governance theory.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Concept of Collaborative Governance

According to the existing literature, "Collaborative governance" was first used by Dohahue of Harvard University in 2004 (Dohahue 2004) and was mentioned again in 2008 with Zeckhauser in *Public Private Collaboration* (Dohahue and Zeckhauser 2006). From the narrow sense, Ansell and Gash (2008) consider that one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative, which aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets. The narrow concept emphasizes the public sector, and the decision-making process is usually formal. From the broad sense, Emerson and Nabatchi et al (2012) define collaborative governance broadly as the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished. Therefore, collaborative governance is not limited to public actors initiated by one-way participation, but can also provide public goods and services through formal or informal relationships between the public and private sectors. This governance strategy (Calanni, Leach et al. 2010) breaks down the single way of government management, emphasizing that a group of interdependent stakeholders can solve a complex, multi-faceted problem or situation through joint development or implementation of policies, and the negotiation has gradually embedded into the local governance work (Cooper, Bryer et al. 2006). It is worth noting that this does not mean that the government does not act, and to return to standard in the formulation and implementation of public policies, and actively guide and create a good environment for the operation of cooperative governance. In any case, the role of the government are very important.

About the definition of the collaborative governance of academic research is mainly divided into three types: first, the initiator that collaborative governance is the government; second, the collaborative governance is a process of negotiation; the last, the emphasis on collaborative governance includes multi-agent hybrid arrangements (Lan Cai, 2015). The optimal state of collaborative governance should be the last type, that is, the social entity can be free to achieve a common purpose, rather than limited to the government, in this case the co-governance mechanism will be more skilled. In summary, this paper argues that collaborative governance refers to the social entity based on the collaborative operation mechanism, equally participates in decision-making process and implementation process, in order to maximize the common interests.

## *2.2 The Theoretical Characteristics of Collaborative Governance*

### *2.2.1 Diversity*

Diversity, namely the diversity of the main body of collaborative governance, is an important prerequisite for collaborative governance theory. In the era of network information, many social problems have been not solved by a single organization alone, but need to be incorporated into the wisdom of pluralistic social subjects. The main body of collaborative governance is broad, in addition to the government, including non-governmental organizations, enterprises and the public and other subjects, these subjects can participate in social management activities. Therefore, collaborative governance covers a variety of forms of network organization. It can be seen in the longitudinal levels of government, but also can occur in the lateral body. The diversity of the main body of collaborative governance is conducive to play the collective decision-making advantage, the formation of "1+1>2" situation, so that the overall function is greater than the individual system performance alone.

### *2.2.2 Order*

Order, the order of collaborative governance mechanism, is the essential feature of collaborative governance theory. The connotation of "collaborative" means that the system is orderly, and it mainly refers to the order of the mechanism under the collaborative governance theory. On the one hand, the main body status is equal. Although the actual power of the main body of different sizes, but this is not equivalent to the main control between the control and control of the relationship, but to maintain the autonomy of the subject itself, so as to be able to mobilize the enthusiasm of the main body. On the other hand, the subsystem functions in collaboration. Each subsystem in the process of collaborative governance mechanism, often exchange the resources and information sharing, etc., in order to achieve the overall function of the system. And this requires a common compliance with the rules of the system as a prerequisite, or it is prone to multi-subject "melee" situation, which is not conducive to the sustainable development of the system.

### *2.2.3 Purpose*

Purpose, the purpose of collaborative governance results, is the basic characteristics of collaborative governance theory. The purpose is to set the starting point and motive of the co-governance of the plural subject, either in order to achieve common interests or to solve common problems. At present, the mainstream thinking of academic circles believes that collaborative governance is initiated by the government. Therefore, the purpose of collaborative governance is to better achieve and maintain the social public interests. In addition, unlike the previous public administration model in the pursuit of continuous conversion between efficiency and fairness, collaborative governance model, although it is difficult to balance efficiency and fairness, but more is to achieve the purpose of transcendence. The pursuit of instrumental rationality and rational value of organic Unity, and is committed to the realization of the government and the social forces of the relative balance. Therefore, the value orientation of collaborative governance is more in line with the spirit of the times of today's society.

## *2.3 The Operating Mechanism of Collaborative Governance*

### *2.3.1 Factors*

#### *(1) Subjective Factors*

Different from the traditional public administration model, collaborative governance is not hierarchical bureaucratic system, and the main body is equal. The main body of collaborative governance is often from different social fields, with different background knowledge and experience. Therefore, in the consultation process to give full play to their advantages and achieve complementary advantages. Among them, an important ability is leadership, the key is the distribution of leadership and trade-offs. The government should fully guarantee the equal rights of the participants, and give different weights according to the specific situation. At the same time, we should pay attention to the quality and structure of members, especially the pre-existing relationship, this relationship or positive or negative, will affect the collaborative governance process. Therefore, should pay attention to appropriate, personnel appropriate.

#### *(2) Objective Factors*

With the continuous progress of the development of social economy and science and technology environment, the complexity and uncertainty of the social problems are often in a complex system, involving many elements, especially the important resources more scarce. Collaborative governance solves public problems and achieves

the maximization of public interest through the integration of all resources. On the one hand, the government can provide policy guidance, information resources and project funding support effectively; on the other hand, the non-government organizations have more advantages in management experience, professional skills and market acumen than government departments. Therefore, the collaborative governance process should focus on resources, ensure effective operation of collaborative governance mechanisms of the "blood" of the source.

### 2.3.2 Process

#### (1) System Design

First, the legitimacy of collaborative governance. The legitimacy of collaborative governance includes the legal content and legal process, which is the inevitable requirement of the construction of modern rule of law. The collaborative governance process should be integrated into all stakeholders as much as possible to reduce the unnecessary conflict of operation of the mechanism. Second, the normative of the collaborative governance. Collaboration seeks to change the system from irregular chaos to macroscopic orderly state. It is important to develop clear, specific and operational code of conduct and norms, to ensure a clear participation in the role and responsibilities of all parties, which will provide protection to achieve collaborative governance system.

#### (2) Set the Agenda

The collaborative governance agenda mainly as follows: problem definition, objectives, project design, project evaluation and project decision. The problem definition refers to the processing problem of collaborative governance. The objectives is to determine the overall goal and the stage goal according to the actual situation. The project design is the scheme refinement based on the preliminary outline design. The project evaluation, a predictive assessment scheme that predicting the future possible returns and risk, the two is a feasibility assessment, which make the feasibility of the scheme. The project decision refers to the partners to coordinate the final solution to deal with the problem.

#### (3) Reach a consensus

Before taking action, all organizations and individuals have a clear understanding of the policy in order to reach a consensus. There are two essential elements: communication and trust. Communication can improve the enthusiasm of the main body to participate, to enhance understanding and creativity. On the contrary, no communication can only be "behind closed doors", leading to "as a mere formality" phenomenon. Trust can be seen as a dependency or as a kind of capital. The establishment of trust is not the beginning of the existence, and often be gradually strengthened as time goes on. There are many factors that affect trust, such as the historical relationship of members, cultural background and cognitive level and so on. Trust is a "stabilizer" of collaborative governance that helps reduce the risk of failure and reduce the transaction costs of cooperation.

#### (4) Take action

In the policy implementation phase, to clear the rights and responsibilities of all parties, to give full play to their strengths, and to ensure the efficiency and quality of implementation. First, the resources needed to implement the policy, namely, people, financial and material; second, to determine the specific arrangements for policy enforcement agencies and personnel; again, prepare the policy experiment to verify the feasibility and effectiveness of policy options, and to be timely adjusted according to the results of the policy; finally, a sound supervision mechanism should be established to enhance the cohesion of the parties, while paying attention to temporary emergencies.

#### (5) Stage results

In the process of collaborative governance, collaborative governance is often accompanied by short-term results, or experience or lessons. It is necessary to sum up and exchange in a timely manner, which will be conducive to the smooth development of collaborative governance. Benefit results will drive the collaborative process to speed up the confidence and participation of the parties. And the negative results are not completely excluded. When the results are inconsistent with the expected, first of all to correct attitude, identify the reasons for a clear attribution of responsibility, specific issues specific analysis.

### 2.3.3 Outcome

The operating mechanism of collaborative governance tends to experience the three stages proposed by Zadek (2008), that is, the early stages of the larger conflicting tendencies of the parties, with a high degree of consensus in the medium-term phase of policy development, reaching a highly consistent policy-making stage. The results of collaborative governance include direct and indirect results, while the analysis of the results is mainly used for regression analysis, matrix analysis and comparative analysis. For direct results, the results of collaborative governance will eventually be presented in two states: one is to solve the problem, achieve the goal; the second is not solve the problem or only solve some of the problems. In addition to direct results, collaborative governance often lead to external effects, which leads to indirect results. Through the external effects, the parties have an objective understanding in the positioning of their own and others. In the implementation of this stage, regardless of the success or not, the parties should be summed up in accordance with the results of scientific analysis.

### 3. Research Prospects

With the progress and development of the times, the voice of collaborative governance will become stronger, and future collaborative governance can be explored from the following aspects.

#### 3.1 *The Collaborative Governance Theory Itself*

Theory is the understanding and discussion of things about knowledge, to be used to explain one or a series of phenomena, to provide the direction of the ideological guidance. At present, many aspects of research in academic circles: concept analysis, path analysis, defect challenges, influencing factors and research review and so on. But the study on the scale of collaborative governance research is less (Ansell 2015). Research methods have to be innovative, and collaborative governance concept has not yet reached a consensus and so on. The research in the future should pay attention to the dynamic factors of collaborative governance, reward and punishment mechanism and the use and ranking of policy tools. Only when the collaborative governance theory system has been completed, will the theoretical innovation and social progress be better.

#### 3.2 *The Relationship between the Collaborative Governance and other Elements*

In recent years, the academia is not limited to the study of collaborative governance theory itself, but try to explore the relationship between the theory and other elements. Such as adaptive management, social capital, harmonious society, community development, service-oriented government and so on. By exploring the relationship, it reveals the inherent law of collaborative governance in all directions, which can help to promote the further development of collaborative governance theory and to exploit potentialities.

#### 3.3 *The Specific Application of Collaborative Governance Theory*

In the theoretical application level, collaborative governance has been widely used in natural geography, resources, environment and humanities and other fields, such as sustainable water resources management, European and American power system reform, public health, citizen participation, land ecological protection and national sports organizations and so on. In the future, with the deepening of the research of collaborative governance theory, the specific application scope will be gradually expanded, which will be conducive to the further integration and development of collaborative governance theory.

### 4. Conclusion

Collaborative governance is conducive to the use of collective wisdom, to promote the concept of democracy, to solve the complex problems. It is the innovation of traditional public administration model, breaking the concept of value between the fair and efficient shift. At this stage, the localized color is more serious, the response to global problems is less, and the negotiation process is equal to a certain stage of collaborative governance. But with the social progress, academic attention and public recognition, collaborative governance research will be greater development.

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