“New Public Governance” or “Complex Governance Networks”? 

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“New Public Governance” and Other Recent Conceptualizations of Public Administration

• The recent literature in public administration suggests that this academic field of study has moved beyond the “Old (Traditional) Public Administration” and the “New Public Management.”

• It is argued that this is the era of “New Public Governance,” “Public Value Governance,” or “New Public Service.”

• Common to all these conceptualizations is the acceptance that this is the era of “governance.”
“Governance”

The term is used to signify a “new situation”:

- The central role governments (or governmental agencies) has been replaced by a multi-centered (“polycentric”) process of governing.

- Private and non-profit entities play significant roles in the making of public policies and delivering public services.

- The boundary between “public” and “private” is blurred.

- The governance process is complex and it takes place in networked relationships.
Broader Project and This Paper

This paper is part of a broader project in which I make the case for a “complex governance networks” (CGN) conceptualization.

In my earlier works, I

• Proposed a “complexity theory” conceptualization of policy processes

• Elaborated on the implications of the complexity theory conceptualization, and

• Began to articulate a CGN conceptualization
Broader Project and This Paper

The overall question I ask in my broader project:

- Can CGN help us understand the governance processes better than other conceptualizations?

In this paper:

- I attempt to distinguish CGN from the “new public service,” “new public governance,” and “public value governance” conceptualizations.

- These are normative assumptions/theories.
- CGN is a descriptive theory.
Questions and Concerns

Why does the normative versus descriptive contention matter for public administration theory?

Why should a valid theory be empirically relevant (it should have empirical referents)?

Normative conceptualizations are problematic because:

- Their authors do not make any attempts to make them empirically relevant, or
- They fall short in their attempts to do so.
Questions and Concerns

• There are valuable concepts in normative theories that the CGN theorists can engage in for productive conceptual discussions.

• I will specifically engage Brian Cook’s argument that public administration is “constitutive,” as well as being “instrumental.”

— I will compare his argument with the “emergence” concept in CGN.
Public Administration Theory: Normative or Descriptive?

• The intellectual roots of the contention is in the Waldo versus Simon debate of the mid-20th century:
  – Their respective books in the 1940s
  – Their debate in the American Political Science Review (1952).

• Waldo’s normative position:
  – Administration is “suffused with value” and that democracy is the core value of public administration.

• Simon’s descriptive position:
  • Values should be separated from empirical facts.
  • A scientific investigations should be based on consistent and coherent theories.
Problems with Normative Approaches in PA (e.g., the NPG approach)

1. The relativism and narrowness problem:

   • Which values should PA be based on?

     – “Regime values” (U.S. Constitution) (Rohr)
       • Then, is PA only American?
       • If so, why should others care?
       • If PA is uniquely American, why America is so unique (exceptional?) among human societies?
       • Are the values of any “given regime” (Morgan & Shinn) acceptable (authoritarian, democratic, etc.)

     • “Public values” (Bozeman)
       • Broader
       • But, what are they? How do we know?
Problems with Normative Approaches in PA (e.g., the NPG approach)

2. The empirical verification problem:

   - “Regime values” (U.S. Constitution) (Rohr)
     - Are scholars’ interpretations of the U.S. Constitution shared by the public administrators themselves and the public in general? How do we know?

   - “Public values” (Bozeman)
     - They are based on “normative consensus.”
       - How do we know that there is consensus?
     - Bozeman’s “public value mapping” is a recognition of the verification problem.
       - Is it sufficient?
Was Simon Right?

• Did Waldo’s emphasis on the normative lead to “blind alleys” in public administration research and stunted the growth of scientific understanding of public administration?

• In his recent PAR article, Meier (2015) revisit Simon’s “Proverbs.”

  • He argues that Simon was perhaps too ambitious in his expectations for public administration, but the direction he pointed to was right.

  • The propositions of public administration scholars should have scientific validity.

  • Public administration scholars must develop consistent and coherent theories and gather a body of empirical evidence to test such theories.
Was Simon Right?

I agree with Meier’s general points, but

• The **methods of “scientific investigation”** instigated **backlash** in public administration and other areas of social science.

• Theory building in the name of “positivism” did not serve social theorists well.

• **Complexity theory and network theories offer a different vision of science,**
  – which can help address some of the rightful concerns of scholars who have been critical of positivist epistemological implications and methods.
What Does CGN Offer?

• CGN is not a complete, or well-articulated, theory yet.

• The concepts and methods of complexity and network theories were formulated in fields of study that are quite far from public administration of policy (mathematics, information sciences, physics, biology, etc.).
  – SNA has deep roots in sociometry, however.

• There has been a growing enthusiasm for applying complexity and network concepts and methods in PA and other areas of study.

• It is not easy to translate the original concepts of these theories to our areas of study.
  • My attempt is to articulate these concepts in a coherent and consistent theory (CGN).
What Does CGN Offer?

• I will not discuss CGN in general, but I will focus on its concept of “emergence.”
  – Because it is relevant to some of the propositions of normative theorists (Cook’s “constitutive effect”).

• Emergence occurs through micro–macro relations and transformations in complex systems.
  – the relations between the (inter)actions among the actors of governance systems/networks and the whole network-level, collective, structural properties.

  – Three areas of investigation in emergence studies:
    1. Micro to macro transformations,
    2. Irreducibility of macro structural properties, and
    3. Macro to micro effects (“downward causation”).
Brian Cook’s concept of “constitutive effect”

• “Constitutive effect” means “the creation or modification of public purposes”

• Political institutions have formative effects (“formative bearing”) on two levels:
  1. They impact individual citizens’ definitions of their political identities.
  2. They affect the “organized existence” of citizens at the collective level.

• Institutions, such as public administration, actually “both confirm and modify national character.”
  - Institutions are both formed by the collective character and actions of citizens and in turn they form their characters and actions.
Brian Cook’s concept of “constitutive effect”

• How do we know whether Cook’s arguments are valid?

• Can they be empirically verified?

• If his concepts can be reconciled with those of CGN, the tools of CGN can be used to verify them.

• His “constitutive effect” roughly corresponds to “downward causation” (macro to micro effects).

  – There are very few studies on this in CGN.

  – This is the most difficult area of emergence to study.
Cook’s concept of “‘both confirm and modify national character’”

- His concept of “both confirm and modify national character” sounds like a the whole emergence process:
  - Micro to macro, Irreducibility, and macro to micro

- The whole process is even more difficult to study.
  - Conceptualization may be daunting.
  - I proposed Giddens’ “structuration theory” as a possible solution.
  - Giddens’ theory is consistent and coherent and offers possibilities for empirical verification, but a complete verification is difficult.

  - There are studies that provide validation for micro–macro transformations (#1).
    - A recent example is Musso and Weare’s (2015) PAR article.
Conclusions

• PA needs coherent and consistent descriptive theories and empirical verification.

• “Governance” is a good, but a vague starting point for conceptualization.

• Normative theories represent justifiable reactions to scientific theories and methods that are applied.
  – They are not most fruitful approaches.
  – But some their concepts can be valid.

• CGN offers viable alternative conceptualizations and methods.

• Particularly the concept of “emergence” can be useful in a dialog between CGN researchers and normative theorists.
Thank you.

Questions? Comments?