

CONTROVERSIES-COMMENTARIES

Developing Management Practices to Support Joined-Up Governance

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Various forms of ‘boundary-crossing’ practices continue to proliferate in public management and public service provision (i.e. activities that require engagement and collaboration across sectors, institutions, and organisations). Yet the dynamic nature of this type of joined-up working is proving to be a major management challenge. In this paper, we bring a number of concepts to bear on the management of joined-up and cross-boundary working in public management of complex social issues. Firstly, we present the concept of ‘adaptive management’, which we draw from field of environmental policy and planning (and human ecology). Secondly, we introduce a rethinking of the role of ‘policy targets’ using a complexity lens. These concepts are integrated into a practice heuristic (or framework) designed to assist cross-boundary policy implementation in real-world settings. We argue that adaptive management approaches may have significant utility for ensuring effective governance in uncertain environments.

Key words: *joined-up governance, joined-up government, adaptive management*

Introduction

Various forms of ‘boundary-crossing’ practices continue to proliferate in public management (i.e. those that require engagement across, e.g. government, NGOs, and the private sector) (O’Flynn, 2013; Osborne, 2006). In accordance, a wide range of terms have evolved in attempt to describe and capture both the need to work across boundaries and the practices that have emerged, including: joined-up government, horizontal government, boundary-spanning, cross-boundary initiatives, and joined-up governance (Hood, 2005; O’Flynn, 2013; Pollitt, 2003). This paper is concerned joined-up governance, as articulated in discourses of new public governance. New public governance perspectives

posit a *plural* state, with multiple interdependent actors contributing to the delivery of services, as well as a *pluralist* state, where multiple processes inform the policy-making system (Osborne, 2010). These two aspects of plurality place a greater emphasis on inter-organisational relationships and governance both across government and sectors (Osborne, 2010). In reflection of this, we use the terms ‘joined-up governance’ to refer to the overall design of such initiatives, and ‘joined-up working’ to refer to day-to-day implementation practices.

As Sullivan (2015) recently noted, collaboration – between sectors, organisations, and administrative layers – is now ‘the new normal’. Here, collaboration is used to refer to dense interdependent relationships aimed at systemic

change, as opposed to coordination or cooperation, which captures ‘weaker’ forms of integration such as low-level resource and information sharing (Himmelman, 2001; Keast, 2011; Keast et al., 2007). A recent evidence synthesis of the literature on joined-up governance found that dynamic nature of joined-up working is a major management challenge (Carey and Crammond, 2015). For example, what works to kick start joined-up working, such as the creation of a new agency or working group, can in time become a barrier to success and effectiveness – creating new administrative silos. Hence, management practices and implementation instruments need to adapt accordingly (but rarely do). For successful joined-up governance and working, it appears that there needs to be a willingness to add, remove, or refine mechanisms (i.e. instruments, tools, and processes) as joining-up progresses (Carey and Crammond, 2015). Arguably, this has not been aided by a focus of outcome targets and quotas as a means of monitoring progress of joined-up governance (i.e. clients served, progress of particular social issues) (Gemma Carey et al., 2015; Hood and Bevan, 2006; Hood and Dixon, 2010).

In this paper, we bring a number of concepts to bear on the implementation of joined-up governance to assist in implementation. Firstly, we present the concept of ‘adaptive management’, which we draw from field of environmental policy and planning (and human ecology) (Berkes et al., 2000; Holling, 1978; Olsson et al., 2004). Secondly, we introduce a rethinking of the role of ‘policy targets’ using a complexity lens (consistent with adaptive management approaches in human ecology, which similarly view policy problems through a complexity lens). We integrate concepts from these two fields into a practice heuristic designed to assist in the implementation of joined-up governance in real-world settings.

Background

Implementation research has consistently shown that gaps frequently emerge between policy as intended and policy as executed (Hill and Hupe, 2009). This is because imple-

mentation occurs through complex interactions between the layered characteristics of policy administration systems (de Bruijn and Heuvelhof, 1997; Kickert et al., 1997). Implementing across boundaries (whether governmental boundaries, such as between departments, or sectors) is particularly difficult, because of the greater number and diversity of actors and interests involved. Indeed, research on joined-up governance suggest that the instruments (such as cross-departmental committees and working groups and policy targets) used to create integration and collaboration are often inadequate or inappropriate for their context (Keast, 2011). However, this may be the result of the dynamic nature of joining up. Carey and Crammond (2015) note that approaches to joined-up governance need to be flexible – able to shift in concert with evolving practices and contexts. Hence, to make joined-up governance work, it appears that multiple instruments and flexibility are required (Carey and Crammond, 2015; Keast, 2011; O’Flynn et al., 2011). Yet, this presents a new set of challenges – how can this type of dynamic process be effectively created and managed?

Resource management and human ecology have grappled with similar questions since the 1970s (Berkes and Folke, 2000; Holling, 1978; Walters, 1997; Williams and Brown, 2014). In response, adaptive management has emerged as a potential tool for dealing with the complexities of managing initiatives with many moving parts and changing contexts – viewed as an intuitive and effective way to make decisions in the face of uncertainties (Olsson et al., 2004; Williams and Brown, 2014). Broadly, ‘adaptive decision-making involves the use of management itself to pursue management objectives and simultaneously learn about management consequences’ (Williams and Brown, 2014, p. 465). In the context of joined-up working, it is a means by which to operationalise adaptive forms of joined-up governance (which the current evidence on joined-up governance suggests is needed; Carey and Crammond, 2015).

Many of the challenges faced in resource management echo concerns in the literature on joined-up governance (though the two literatures remain largely distinct). For example,

Williams and Brown (2014, p. 446) argue for resource management, an adaptive approach is important because the 'system being managed is dynamic, with changes over time that occur in response to environmental conditions and management actions, which themselves vary over time'. In the case of joined-up governance, the factors influencing management and governance decisions include politics, change in other policy areas, organisational change, funding in addition to emergent relationships between governance instruments and organisational contexts (Carey et al., 2015).

Similarly, environmental and resource management relies on the collaboration of diverse sets of stakeholders operating at different levels. Olsson et al (2004) argue that successful management in this field requires shared management power, multiple institutional linkages across hierarchical administrative systems (including civil society groups), and engagement with community members. In this sense, they require both top-down and bottom-up approaches along with horizontal and vertical coordination and collaboration (Keast, 2011). Considered in relation to Table 1 (adapted from Carey et al., 2015), which provides an overview of features associated with success in joined-up working, it is clear that many shared challenges exist. In environmental and resource management, the concept of adaptive management is seen as a potential way forward. In the following section, we draw on this work to explore how such an approach might progress challenges associated with implementing joined-up governance.

Adaptive Management Approaches for Joined-Up Governance

As noted above, adaptive management provides a platform for exploring how to operationalise the type of governance required to successfully govern complex systems. Adaptive management is distinct from discourses and practices of new public management, which have dominated in the public administration literature in recent years. New public management uses markets as the adaptive mechanism to

Table 1. Characteristics associated with successful joined-up government initiatives adapted from Carey and Crammond (2015)

	Factors found to aid joined-up approaches
Operational level	Target multiple levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic government • Managerial • Practitioner • Community
Top-down/bottom-up Nature of control Membership	Top-down and bottom-up Decentralised Reflects the multiple levels targeted for change (i.e. strategic government, managerial, practitioner, community)
Focus	Designed based on both the purpose and the context
Instruments and their functions	Fulfil a range of functions depending on objectives. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • governance and structure (e.g. committees/taskforces, creation of shared leadership) • Managerial changes (e.g. to improve relationships) • Adjusted systems, processes, and finances • Cultural and institutional change

respond to emergent issues (Hood and Dixon, 2015; Osborne, 2010). In an ideal world, once designed government and non-government actors would be able to rely on demand and supply mechanisms to ensure effective and efficient public service delivery (LeGrand, 2007; LeGrand and Bartlett, 1993). It is now well established that such approaches have limited efficacy (Considine et al., 2014; Considine and Lewis, 2012; Hood and Dixon, 2015), leading to the emergence of new public governance (Osborne, 2010). In contrast, adaptive management (applied at the level of governance) integrates learning and adaptation into the practice of all those charged with designing, implementing, and governing public programs.

Adaptive management centres on the creation (and harnessing) of feedback processes between learning and decision making. This means that learning contributes to governance and implementation by ‘helping to inform decision-making, and management contributes to learning by the use of interventions’ (Williams and Brown, 2014, p. 465). Like the concept of adaptation itself, attention to feedback processes and information flows is consistent with the central concerns of systems science (Finegood, 2012). Systems science encourages an understanding of the relationships between different components of systems – such as individuals, organisations, communities, and so on (Atwood et al., 2003; De Savigny et al., 2009; Trochim et al., 2006). Systems thinking invokes theories of feedback, where the overall behaviour of a system emerges from an underlying structure, made up of components that interact over time in linear and non-linear ways to create differing patterns and outcomes (Best and Holmes, 2010; Johnston et al., 2014; Mahamoud et al., 2013). Here, ‘feedback loops’ moderate or drive particular systems patterns.

Although a range of frameworks exist for adaptive management, in this paper we draw on William and Brown’s (2014), because of its emphasis on both technical and institutional learning; joined-up governance requires both technical skills/tools as well as a gradual institutional shifts through the adoption of different norms and values to support collaborative working (Carey et al., 2015).

William and Brown’s (2014) framework has two principle phases: (a) the deliberative (or planning) phase and (b) an iterative phase, which takes the elements and results of the deliberative phase and folds them into a sequential process of decision making and learning. This second iterative phase uses elements of the planning phase in an ongoing cycle of learning.

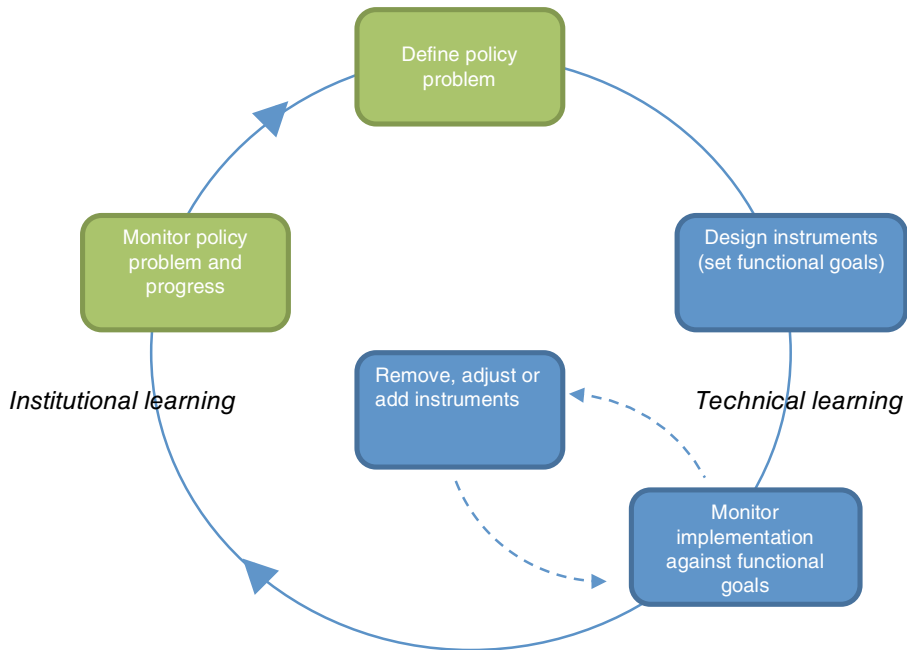
For an adaptive approach to joined-up governance to be effective, we argue that this iterative phase needs to be built on functional targets that may change over time. Often, the success of joined-up governance is measured by its impact or lack of impact on overall policy targets, set centrally (Hood and Bevan, 2006).

Using an Australian example, the progress of the Social Inclusion Agenda (a national joined-up initiative to address complex disadvantage) used a set of social inclusion indicators to measure progress (Carey et al., 2012; Social Inclusion Board, 2009). These included employment and housing targets, in addition to measures of social and health inequalities (Social Inclusion Board, 2009). In resource management, similar ‘system level’ goals have been used in the iterative phase (i.e. management practices are adjusted iteratively on the basis of monitoring data of system level outcomes). However, this has presented a significant challenge to the implementation of adaptive management, even when dealing with environmental systems – rather than social system – indicators (Walters, 1997). Arguably, system-level measures take significant time to shift – often years (Berkes, 2009).

Setting functional targets involves determining how particular implementation instruments ‘function’ to bring about change. For example, common instruments for joined-up governance include interdepartmental working groups, intersectoral working groups, and new lines of accountability (Carey et al., 2014, 2015). Functional targets would require identifying what change and or key implementation tasks are associated with these different instruments, and then determining monitoring frameworks to assess progress. Implementing adaptive approaches would see these ‘functional targets’ form the basis for monitoring in the iterative phase. On the basis of performance, implementation tools/instruments can be adjusted, removed, or added (see Figure 1).

The monitoring of functional goals or targets is embedded within a broader adaptive process of institutional learning. For joined-up governance, this is critically important because of the central role of organisational contexts in implementation (Carey et al., 2015; Hill and Hupe, 2009; Meyers and Dillon, 1999; Sandfort, 1999). How organisations respond to efforts to ‘join-up’ depend on existing organisational norms and values. For successful implementation, knowledge of these differing institutions needs to be fed back into planning and implementation. Moreover, this must be

Figure 1. Adaptive Management for Joined-Up Governance (Adapted from Williams and Brown, 2014).



an iterative process, as shifts in norms, values (or ‘context’) shift in response to previous implementation efforts.

Adaptive management approaches link technical and institutional learning through key leaders or ‘stewards’ (Hallsworth, 2011). These stewards are not necessarily located within government (in accordance with new public governance), though there is a need for them to be closely connected with government and other important implementation actors (Hallsworth, 2011). These individuals are part of the ‘social memory and capacity to deal with change’ (Olsson et al., 2004, p. 86). This attention to key individuals (and their requisite skills for management across boundaries) is consistent with emerging research that highlights the importance of leadership and ‘soft skill’ development of leaders within public management (Melbourne School of Government and the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2013, p. 8). Skills required for joined-up governance include ‘problem-solving skills, coordination skills (getting people to the table), brokering skills (seeing what needs to happen), flexibility, deep knowledge of the system and, for front line

workers, both knowledge of how to work with their community . . . a willingness to undertake the emotional labour associated with relational working’ (Carey and Crammond, 2015; see also Melbourne School of Government and the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2013). Leaders with these types of skills are likely to create contexts whereby technical and instrumental learning can co-evolve.

Conclusion

With collaboration of the ‘new normal’ (Sullivan, 2015), finding effective ways to progress joined-up working is imperative. In this paper, we have presented several new concepts drawn from related fields that may assist in the design and implementation of joined-up governance. We argue that adaptive management governance approaches may have significant utility for managing in uncertain environments. It is worth noting that managing (and addressing) complex problems requires investment in and supportive leadership for innovative methods and approaches.

Although these ideas provide novel food for thought academically, in practice they may still face barriers. For example, managers may be reluctant to fund iterative phases, or may be averse to risks inherent in experimental approaches, or may have value preferences for rational order rather than iterative complexity. We suggest that focusing on functional targets (as opposed to outcome targets alone) may help to mitigate this reluctance, however functional targets may still be difficult to agree upon and secure in practice. Arguably, in the face of institutional constraints to novel approaches surrounding public policy and public management, the lack of knowledge on how to create effective and successful joined-up governance suggests all approaches are experimental (Carey and Crammond, 2015; Walters, 1997; Williams and Brown, 2014).

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