Governance and Collaboration: Review Article

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Introduction

From a term used largely within political science in the mid-1990s, 'governance' has become a key conceptual and analytical convention adopted by social policy, largely because of its usefulness in examining questions that are key to the discipline: citizenship; welfare rights and responsibilities; accountability; legitimacy and partnership working. Clarence and Painter (1998) have constructed a useful characterisation of public policy, identifying a shift in emphasis from hierarchies, to markets and now to collaboration. Networks, 'joined up' governance and partnership working are now central in both policy practice and analysis. These processes are not new, but New Labour have clearly expanded and accelerated them. For New Labour, collaborative working is now perceived as central in their response to key policy challenges: improving public services, tackling social exclusion and revitalising local democracy. These processes are now evident at all levels of policy making from supranational organisations such as the European Union down to neighbourhood-based initiatives. It appears that we are moving from the closed, unitary system of government of the Westminster model to a more open, decentralised system of governance. Our conceptions of citizenship have accordingly shifted, from one based on representation to one based on active participation, particularly within local communities. Governance is an issue which concerns all levels of government and citizen participation, from international-level World Bank concerns about commitment to efficiency and accountable government, to highly devolved localised urban regeneration partnerships.

New Labour have introduced an almost bewildering array of reforms and initiatives aimed at introducing and embedding these processes of governance across the public sector. Yet, there are a number of clearly unresolved tensions that remain within these policies and they raise several broader questions that require reassessment of several given norms of social policy analysis. This has given rise to an extensive, cross cutting and diverse policy and broader academic literature which can sometimes appear bewildering, drawing as it often does on theoretical work developed outside the mainstream of social

policy, particularly within political science. We have therefore chosen four texts we consider to be key within the area of governance, citizenship and partnership working which we feel are the key texts, mapping the territory theoretically and empirically in a way that is accessible to a social policy audience and providing a useful basis for further developments in analysis.

Rhodes: Understanding Governance

This text is almost entirely an edited collection of previously published articles addressing the subject of governance. More specifically, the text focuses on the perceived reduction of the capacities of the institutions of the British government, the so-called 'hollowing out' of the state. Rod Rhodes argues that the British state has gradually transformed from a unitary state with a strong executive into a 'differentiated polity' characterised by a plethora of policy networks. These policy networks are understood to be 'self steering' and policy a process of even greater negotiation with more and more organisations involved. British government is now characterised by a persistent tension between the wish for authoritative action and dependence on the compliance and actions of self-governing networks.

Though Rhodes' work here is useful in descriptively outlining the existence and importance of policy networks, he falters in demonstrating that the existence of those networks renders government incapable of 'steering' or otherwise governing society. The role of the government and the public sector can in many cases still be perceived as strong. Often the government is a key facilitator and partner in 'joined-up' working and partnerships, for example regeneration programmes such as New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Indeed, this is often paralleled by the government's clear determination and arguable success in retaining control at the centre.

However, the salience and value of this text has clearly expanded since New Labour's coming to office, with even greater importance now resting on joined-up working and decentralised decision making. However, Rhodes' focus on policy networks at national and supranational levels now needs to be expanded to consider the existence and importance of policy networks at the local level. New Labour understand and assert the value of localised action. This goes beyond developing the role for local government to include private, voluntary and community sector organisations, social enterprises and the wider public in decision making. This certainly raises important practical questions of how we can understand partnerships, how these partnerships may work, along with questions of governance, and what this mean for accountability, sustainability and responsiveness? Some material has begun to answer these questions, notably the other texts covered here. However, Rhodes' work lacks consideration of these questions; we do not gain an understanding of how partnerships may operate other than through bargaining; we also do not gain any insight into the wider consequences this may have for citizenship, as addressed in this edition. This work also lacks a normative element: will policy networks allow for 'better' policy making?

This is a text with substantive and clear theoretical value and goes some way to reasserting the discipline of public administration; perhaps, though, it should most importantly be seen as 'throwing the gauntlet down' to the wider academic community, particularly the social policy community, to respond to the questions, tensions and issues left unresolved here and also to provide a more contemporary empirically grounded

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analysis. Rhodes leaves largely undeveloped the issue of outcomes of governance, but the way in which government action (and inaction) affects the lives of individuals and communities is central to the discipline of social policy and is not one that can be left unexamined.

A broader point should be made here, not directly in response to Rhodes' work but the literature around 'governance' more generally; the term 'governance' itself and the process it describes has been fraught with lack of clarity. 'Networks' are a great example of this: should networks be understood as interchangeable with partnerships or joined up working? Though empirically grounded work is essential, it is important that the theoretical basis of governance is further explicated, the work of both Rhodes (1997) and Stoker (1998) is central here.

Stoker: Governance as theory – five propositions

Gerry Stoker's (1998) paper draws on work carried out as part of the ESRC Local Governance Research Programme and along with Rhodes' seminal book puts together some of the most comprehensive theoretical discussions of governance which later empirical and theoretical development work carried out by Sullivan, Skelcher and Newman, as well as many others, draw on. Stoker points to the ambiguity of 'governance', which remains a contested term to this day, by introducing some of the key propositions associated with it. His five propositions are:

- Governance is concerned with a set of institutions and actors drawn from, but also beyond government. Within this framework, studying governance (rather than just government) allows us to recognise the role of private and voluntary sectors in the exercise of power, and shifts the focus away from the formalities of politics. It also allows us to raise concerns about the legitimacy of this exercise of power.
- Governance identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues. This moves us into territory long familiar within the discipline of social policy – the balance of rights and responsibilities in welfare, and the ways in which different groups are taking over the tasks previously carried out by the state.
- Governance identifies the power dependence involved in the relationships between institutions involved in collective action. This allows us to examine the way in which organisations who are committed to collective action are dependent upon other organisations to achieve their goals, and that the outcomes of joint working between these organisations is determined not just by resources, but by the rules of the game and the context in which such collaboration take place.
- Governance is about autonomous self-governing networks of actors, which moves us into the territory of partnership working, one of the key elements of governance. It allows the development of informal, yet stable and ultimately very powerful partnerships of actors and organisations with access to enhanced resources. It also raises the recurring problem with governance and partnerships: that of accountability and legitimacy. Whilst government, and New Labour in particular, may be committed to taking a back seat to the development of local networks, it must take on some steering role in order to ensure accountability.
- Governance recognises the capacity to get things done which does not rest on the power of government to command – it challenges traditional hierarchical modes of

service planning and delivery, and also allows for the possibility of 'governance failure', whereby it is possible to examine in greater depth the complexity of welfare that would not be possible if we were only examining the issue through the lens of government organisation and action.

Many commentators have picked up on both Rhodes' and Stoker's ideas of governance as being about 'networks' and launched investigations of such networks, finding, somewhat predictably, that New Labour is not the 'hands-off enabler' that such a framing would suggest. However, that is to miss some of the main points that both Rhodes and Stoker make: that amidst the complexity of new actors and organisations in the planning and delivery of welfare, the role of central and local government in ensuring accountability and legitimacy is vital.

Stoker's contribution is vital in enabling us to start mapping the territory of governance in ways which are manageable, yet theoretically robust enough to start building frameworks to explain the complexity of the area. In raising the key questions of responsibilities, boundaries, legitimacy and accountability, and moves beyond ideas of government as being sidelined by the explosion of multiple actors and organisations which characterise the contemporary, 'Third Way' welfare state epitomised by New Labour. Stoker enables us to see that government still plays a central role in the planning and delivery of welfare, without that role necessarily being either completely hierarchical, centrally driven and bureaucratic, nor being completely market-driven, laissez-faire liberalism. Stoker also makes the point that the governance perspective is largely date and place specific.

Sullivan and Skelcher: Working across Boundaries

Helen Sullivan and Chris Skelcher (2002) take the work done by Rhodes and Stoker within the field of political science in developing theories of governance and apply them empirically to an area now long familiar to the discipline of social policy: that of collaboration in public services, both between statutory organisations, and between the public and private, and public and voluntary sectors. It draws heavily on a series of studies investigating questions of accountability, governance, collaboration and citizenship carried out by the authors funded by the ESRC, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Department of Health and others. These focussed on several New Labour collaborative schemes, including Health Action Zones, City Challenge, Sure Start, community safety, public involvement and neighbourhood management programmes. Ignoring Stoker's warning about the specificity of governance issues to place and time, they attempt to draw out universal themes from a very broad range of diverse research findings, and in doing so do a valuable job in pushing some of the theoretical analysis into more empirically grounded territory.

The book works in two key ways. Firstly, it provides a useful way in which collaboration between organisations and actors in the delivery of public services can be conceptualised, looking at the roots of the collaborative agenda, and examining ways in which changes in both the organisation of government and the state, and the wider economic, social and political terrain have affected the way in which public services are planned, organised and delivered. Secondly, through drawing on the extensive research evidence, particularly in the later chapters, it provides a useful empirical insight into

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some of the key collaborative initiatives developed and funded by New Labour. The book provides a level of analytical detail that makes it extremely useful to academics, whilst focussing on practical as well as theoretical issues, which makes it of use to practitioners and policy makers as well.

In examining the ways in which actors and organisations collaborate around cross-cutting issues, the authors draw on examples from urban policy, community safety policy and health and social care. They found five key imperatives which dictate whether or not actors and organisations will be pushed towards collaborating with each other: achieving shared vision; maximising the use of available resources; addressing complexity in policy or service environments; maximising power and influence in relation to a policy or service area; and resolving conflict. Moving on to examining collaboration across sectors, the authors discuss public–private collaboration, public–voluntary sector collaboration and multi-level 'vertical' collaboration, particularly within the European Union context. The latter provides some useful context for a debate which can very easily become focussed upon the minutia of locally driven initiatives.

The authors then move into what might be termed the 'governance issues' surrounding collaboration in public services: capacity issues, the dynamics and organisational issues, the ways in which citizens participate (or do not) in collaborative initiatives, and the way in which collaboration forms part of the modernisation programme of the public sector beloved of New Labour. In choosing to use the language of 'collaboration', the authors avoid the issue of 'partnerships' – that is, the describing, defining, mapping and evaluating issues that have been explored in great detail elsewhere. Instead, they have chosen to focus their attention on bringing some order and clarity to the confusing myriad of research evidence in this area.

Of course, as well as providing empirical analysis of the dynamics of collaboration – who is doing it, why are they doing it, what are they achieving? – the book also raises many questions about the legitimacy and accountability issues raised by collaborative ventures, particularly the thorny issue of citizen involvement.

Newman *et al.*: public participation in collaborative governance

This paper draws on the findings of a study within the ESRC's Democracy and Participation Programme carried out by Janet Newman and her colleagues. It explores the processes of participation within deliberative forums, such as user panels, youth forums and area-based committees, developed as a means of encouraging a more active, participating mode of citizenship and of improving welfare services by making them more responsive to users. This paper serves to explicate further the comments made at the beginning of this discussion by considering the extent to which New Labour's policies for increasing public participation actually represents a shift towards a more collaborative form of governance. Newman *et al.* argue that these initiatives need to be understood within the context of government policy and that consideration should be given to how strategic actors in local organisations and participants more widely interpret and enact policy. These findings highlight the constraints on the 'political opportunity structures' created by the enhanced policy focus on public participation, and the consequent limits to collaborative governance.

The paper looks at senior officials and local politicians responsible for local policy development and also officials and citizen participants involved in the forums themselves.

The recognition of the importance of these actors, particularly public sector officials, in 'interpreting government policy, developing local policy or in shaping the ways in which policies are implemented and enacted (2004: 207) is both insightful and is a focus that has been long neglected.

The paper initially proposes that the expansion of new forms of engagement between state and citizen might be viewed as evidence of a new form of collaborative governance, a form that can more readily respond to complex, diverse and dynamic societies. Whilst new forms of interaction are clearly being offered and the process of policy making is being opened up, this is not without its difficulties. Constraints are formed by limited opportunity structures and institutional barriers. As noted, 'such processes represent a much more active set of dynamics than those captured by popular conceptions of individual resistance or organisational inertia (2004: 217).

This paper seeks to however go beyond 'common sense' observations drawn from this expansive fieldwork and go on to discuss how these processes may be analysed and assert that in order to 'understand the dynamics of change we need to inflect and enrich governance theory with concepts drawn from other perspectives' (2004: 219). Whilst governance theory's narrative of a differentiated polity characterised by relationships of co-dependence and reciprocity is useful, it does not allow an understanding of the complex dynamics evidenced by respondents. As Newman *et al*. assert, 'new forms of governance do not displace the old, but interact with them, often uncomfortably' (2004: 218). This narrative is also unable to capture the full complexity of New Labour's policies and objectives. Social movement theory is able to assist in the analysis of these processes with its focus on the interaction between social and political agency and existing institutions. However, this discussion is reciprocal with several fruitful points of engagement between the two bodies of theory.

This paper serves as an exemplar in how to respond to the twin challenges within governance theory, how to ground theorising effectively and develop an understanding of the complexities and dynamics of the processes of governance and how this may inform governance theorising; also the importance of drawing on other bodies of theory, here social movement theory, but also discourse analysis and new institutionalism to develop theory further. Newman *et al*.'s work here is indicative of a healthy reciprocal and symbiotic literature which is aiming to meet and inform the twin challenges of theory and practice.

Conclusion

Although its roots are firmly within political science, in the best traditions of learning extensively from other disciplines, governance has become a concept and term with significance within social policy. This is due to the realisation by several key writers in the field that as a concept it is relevant and illuminating to challenges central to social policy, notably to how to innovatively address the so-called 'wicked problems' of social exclusion and public service improvement which have proved difficult for single-agency action to tackle, specifically through partnership and 'joined up' working. The relationship has proved reciprocal, with social policy as a discipline also bringing questions and challenges to the governance literature, particularly concerning the impact and outcome of new governance arrangements on users and the reconfiguration of citizenship and

social rights that such arrangements inherently bring. These literatures and disciplines clearly intersect and can positively inform each other.

However, governance is also a term with resonance beyond academic convention: processes and innovations in governance are central to the New Labour's policy focus. This is evident at all levels of policy making. The immediacy and relevance of the term has informed a thriving and challenging literature which we have hoped to display in the texts under discussion here.

Rhodes' text theorises the ways in which governance works, understood here primarily in terms of self-regulating and autonomous networks. Stoker attempts to add to this sparse theoretical framework by addressing the ambiguity of the term 'governance' and sets out basic propositions associated with it. Both publications are seminal in their attempts to theorise the relatively new and accelerating processes of governance. However, the plethora of initiatives introduced by New Labour has forced continual renewal and expansion of such work. Stoker's assertion of the specificity of governance arrangements according to time and place accords a valued position to empirical work in the formation of theory which is where the role of research becomes paramount. Social policy, as an inherently empirical as well as theoretically driven discipline, is well placed to provide such evidence, as we can see in works such as those reviewed here by Sullivan and Skelcher, outlining the application of these theories of governance to an area well known in social policy – cross organisational partnership – and Newman *et al.*'s consideration the role of the wider public, of citizen participation within such partnerships. Each of these articles is able to add and contribute to the understanding of what we mean by governance, and the diversity of these articles brings different perspectives and focuses to the literature and informs its continued resonance and value.

Drawing on the best academic traditions of social policy as a discipline, there is a clearly reciprocal relationship between grounded empirical work and theory within the governance literature. This, combined with the intersection with other literatures will hopefully allow useful critical analysis of policy and its outcomes and impacts.

Reference

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