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Book reviews

Getting Agencies to Work Together: The Practice and Theory of Managerial Craftsmanship

Eugene Bardach; Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 1998, 348 pages
Reviewed by Joan Subirats and Raquel Gallego

The theme of this book is interagency collaboration in the public sector, and the author succeeds in revealing its interest both to public management researchers and to practitioners. Eugene Bardach defines interagency collaboration as the creation of joint production capabilities in the delivery of services and in regulatory enforcement. He sees interagency collaboration capacity (ICC)—namely, the potential to engage in collaborative activities—as a necessary basis for innovation and for the creation of public value.¹ The public sector needs to innovate in both its products and its processes, so as to be effective and efficient in an ever more complex social and economic context. However, both theorists and practitioners agree that, despite being increasingly necessary, ICC is still a *rara avis*. The existing literature on public management in general, and on best practice research in particular, has reported a wealth of experiences and cases in which collaboration was a management tool, but has shown how difficult it was to use it effectively.

Bardach considers that ICC and innovation are special cases of a broader phenomenon that has not been explained so far—creativity in public management. Creativity and effort characterize purposive practitioners, who are able to exploit opportunities to create new value out of existing resources. In his view, the existing literature fails to understand managerial creativity because it has not tried to solve an underlying analytic problem: the need to design a conceptual framework for understanding purposive creativity—what he calls craftsmanship activity. The design of one such framework is the central aim of his book. In Bardach's own words, he intends to “develop a conceptual framework that permits social scientists to achieve a more realistic and methodologically defensible conceptualization of the creative process in public management than we have had” (p. 18). He asserts that the explanation he provides is not only theoretically oriented, but also aims at providing purposive public management practitioners with available ideas.

Bardach makes the hypothesis that substantial public value is currently being lost to insufficient collaboration. Latent opportunities to create public value through ICC exist that are not being exploited by purposeful public managers. He asserts that purposiveness is the product of the interaction between individual will and certain conditions of the organizational environment. Thus, the author analyzes the main factors on the side of human agency and on the side of structure that hinder and/or facilitate the actual exploitation of collaborative

opportunities. First, he explores the quality of human and material resources available to those who might engage in ICC. The blend of resources an ICC manager is supposed to deal with is highly complex, including people's purposes (careerist, bureaucratic, value-creating), financial resources, political support, professional competence of front-line workers, and climate of confidence, among others. Second, he focuses on the efficacy of smart practices used to exploit opportunities for collaboration. Third, there is the availability of skills and abilities among would-be collaborators, particularly a suitable kind of leadership and networking relations based on trust. Finally, he includes the vulnerability of the emerging ICC structure to hostile forces and skills to protect against it.

Bardach uses case evidence to theorize about how the different factors at play influenced the possibilities for potential collaborators to take advantage of opportunities—namely, latent potential to create value. The ICC development process is illustrated and analyzed by examining nineteen cases of this type of phenomenon.² These cases were drawn from a range of policy domains and were selected to exhibit varying levels of success. Case evidence was derived from in-depth interviews with practitioners. With these numerous cases, Bardach does not attempt to lessen the criticism of the lack of empirical assessment traditionally made at Best Practice Research (BPR). Instead, he tries to avoid another criticism that he himself stresses—that BPR does not sufficiently analyze the qualitative strengths of the practice in question, or the nature of the opportunities taken advantage of by the practice.

Bardach's work succeeds in his objective of building a normative theory of the creative process in public management, by suggesting relevant relationships between agency and structure variables that could consistently guide both research and practice. The main conclusion of his analysis is that the development of ICC springs from a long term and complex process that involves, on one hand, the following agency variables: leveraging personnel and financial resources, designing and managing an operating system, building sufficient consensus, creating an effective culture of interpersonal working relations, and securing the consent of elected officials. On the other hand, he identifies a series of potentialities that derive from structural variables and that may bear on ICC success: the relative clarity of technical means-ends relationship across the policy domains affected, the strength of political and financial incentives to collaborate, the cultural climate regarding bureaucratic flexibility, and the quality of leadership. Ultimately, the ICC development process requires attaining suitable configurations of structural specialization-integration of functions, and working relationships.

Bardach's smart practice approach to interorganizational collaboration could be further refined, in order to explain how all this is achieved. His approach emerges as an internal critique of BPR, and is more ambitious than the latter in its use of theory to improve policy-relevant knowledge. But his approach might share a risk which characterizes BPR, and which Bardach intended to overcome in his work—that success in getting agencies to work together is to a large extent a function of inherently heroic managers, as there is no easy recipe to change one's predisposition. In sum, the added value of the smart practice approach in relation to BPR should be strengthened, so that the weight of case idiosyncrasy and exceptional personality endowments of managers do not make recommendations inapplicable and the influence of structural variables impossible to generalize.

A line of research that would be complementary to the smart practice approach proposed by Bardach, could be aimed at building a descriptive—instead of normative—theory. For a

conceptualization of the ICC creative process to be theoretically and methodologically defensible in descriptive terms, it may be necessary to go beyond BPR itself—and beyond the smart practice approach as an internal critique of it. It would be necessary to think of a theoretical framework which could be relevant not only for the study of public management, but also for the study of public administration and public policy. To this aim, the research could be framed, for example, within existing theories on coordination in the public sector: collaboration could be conceptualized as a way to achieve coordination at the low politics or policy implementation level. In fact, Bardach is aware of the theoretical potential of this topic and he points to possible further developments. Using an argument of coordination theory, he asserts that if ICC is to help improve agency performance, problems need to be conceptualized in a more integrated and holistic way than traditional bureaucracy has been able to do so far. He points out that the main difficulty will stem from key defining features of traditional bureaucracy itself: functional and professional specialization, on one hand, and structural separation and differentiation down the line of hierarchy on the other. However, it would be interesting to add that these features are rooted in specific accountability systems on which the relation between bureaucracy and democracy are based. Current public sector reforms that try to confront those difficulties could be another starting research point.

Notes

1. Bardach uses the concept of public value defined by Mark Moore (1996), *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*. Harvard University Press, p. 10.
2. This research was mainly funded by the Innovations in American Government Program of the Ford Foundation and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

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Missing Organizational Linkage: Tools for Cross-Level Research

Paul Goodman; Thousand Oaks Sage, 2000, 193 pages

In his new book, *Missing Organizational Linkage: Tools for Cross-Level Research*, Paul Goodman introduces organizational linkage analysis. The book asks an important question—