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Collaborative Governance

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Summary

Collaborative governance (CG) refers to a mode of policy and service delivery that shifts away from government- or market-centric settings to a setting in which public, private nonprofit, and private business actors are jointly involved in and accountable for policymaking and service delivery to create public value that could otherwise not be achieved. This mode has arisen as a result of societal issues' becoming increasingly "wicked," lacking consensus about what the exact nature of the problem is and what the appropriate solutions are (e.g., migration and refugees, climate change, poverty). These CG networks can often be fragmented and deprived of resources as part of increased fiscal stress, stimulating the search for cross-boundary arrangements for policy and management. Consequently, both practitioners and academics explore how more and better collaboration between semi-autonomous actors with different interests and resources can be achieved in efforts to tackle wicked issues. CG refers to a trend, an era, a practice, a paradigm, and a holistic framework. While there are variations in the way scholars conceptualize or define it as a model, some common features can be discerned. CG is about identifying/being aware of/dealing with the initial conditions of collaboration and the broader context or system in which cross-sectoral governance is situated. We seek ways of structuring and institutionalizing the collaboration in smart and effective ways that are deemed critical to achieving success and performance. The intentional and deliberative design and implementation of CG arrangements can result from deeper awareness of process and structure, as well as requiring active and smart management strategies and leadership roles to be used and played, while acknowledging the importance of being aware of downsides, risks, and constraints in doing so. Effective CG must be accountable, it must lead to public value and effective outcomes, and, in many countries, it must be democratically legitimate.

Keywords: collaboration, governance, networks, interorganizational relations, collaborative innovation, collaborative public management, public administration and policy

Subjects: Governance/Political Change

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The Emergence and Meaning of Collaborative Governance

In recent decades, the concept of collaborative governance (CG) has received much more attention, in part due to the desire to leverage partnerships within and across sectors to deliver public goods and services. Acknowledging the fuzziness of the concept and the variety of definitions and conceptualizations, this article begins with a general definition of how CG is usually understood in the public administration and management literature. Next, it discusses the context in which CG as a concept has gained increased importance in (the thinking about) public policymaking and public administration. Third, it tries to grasp the fuzziness of the concept by discussing three different and well-cited conceptualizations of CG. It finishes with issues to tackle in the theorizing about CG and gaps in our knowledge that warrant further research.

What Is CG?

CG is a successor to traditional public administration (i.e., the Weberian bureaucracy that delivers policies and services) and New Public Management (i.e., making government more businesslike and bringing in the market). CG is distinguished by a shift in policy and service delivery away from government- or market-centric settings to settings in which public, private nonprofit, and private business actors are jointly involved in and accountable for policymaking and service delivery, and in which private actors are considered as broadly as possible (companies, interest groups, volunteering organizations, citizens). So, rather than dealing with private actors through contracting out and economic or consumer logic, as is the case in New Public Management, the era of CG implies joint decision-making, implementation, and shared accountability across public, nonprofit, and private actors (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Drawing on Frederickson (2007), Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) discussed governance as “the act of governing, or how actors use processes and make decisions to exercise authority and control, grant power, take action, and ensure performance—all of which are guided by sets of principles, norms, roles, and procedures around which actors converge” (p. 15). Bearing this definition of governance in mind, it is clear that CG is indeed one of the possible modes of governance, next to the hierarchical and market governance (Koliba et al., 2019). As will be seen, CG unfolds within the context of networked relationships. In this view, networks are the structures through which CG unfolds. CG results from the processes employed through networks. Networks also support other “noncollaborative” functions, such as principal–agent, markets, and competition. Therefore, although not all network ties are collaborative, all collaborations are carried out through interactions between actors—essentially, nodes and edges of networks.

The Increasing Scientific Popularity of the CG Concept

CG as a major theoretical construct in public administration and management has gained broad prominence at increasing speed. A citation report search on “collaborative governance” in the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection for the period 1955–2020 (generated on December 4, 2020) resulted in 1,067 records. The records were distributed in various WoS categories, but the bulk of them were cited in “Public Administration,” “Environmental Studies,” “Environmental Sciences,” “Political Science,” and “Management.” These findings

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should come as no surprise, as the intentional use of cross-sector collaborations was first pioneered in environmental policy and management (Gerlak, 2006), as public-private–nonprofit partnerships were pursued to achieve environmental sustainability goals (Koontz et al., 2004).

The Drivers of CG

CG is a concept in which different streams of literature join up. Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) traced the first use of the term "collaborative governance" to 1978, in the education literature that discussed new ways of teaching. However, the intellectual roots of CG can be traced much farther back in time. The literature on interorganizational relations grew out of both scholarship in organizational sociology, which sought to explore the strategic interactions between organizations and the social systems by which these interactions were governed (see Child et al., 1993; Friedberg & Crozier, 1980; Mayntz, 1993), and political science, where interest in the dispersion of power in pluralist and elitist systems (Dahl, 1961) grew into the analysis of the unequal distribution of power within interorganizational relationships (see Benson, 1982; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In the field of public administration and management, this translated into research into how governments solved problems (or failed to do so) across organizations and levels, and how such networks are governed (see Hanf & Scharpf, 1978; Kickert et al., 1997; Klijn, 1996; Klijn et al., 1995). CG can be regarded as a subset of this broader literature on networks and interorganizational coordination.

The recent scientific popularity of the concept can be explained in several ways.

First, society is faced with complex new challenges that require new policies and adapted service delivery that cannot be tackled by government on its own (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). Many of these challenges can be framed as wicked problems or issues (Rittel & Webber, 1973): there often can be no clear agreement on the definition of the problem, nor what suitable and acceptable solutions might be, because they are highly contested (see Head, 2019, for an overview). Wicked problems have included climate change and global warming at the international level, but tackling poverty or providing integrated youth care also fits the description, and such challenges cannot be tackled by single governments or within the public realm alone. They require engagement of actors in the private realm as well, such as third-sector organizations (Brandsen & Johnston, 2018). Global pandemics like COVID-19 are another example of a wicked problem that is currently high on the agenda. From a resource dependency perspective, this means that there are increased interdependencies between public, private nonprofit, and private business actors to tackle important policy issues and to provide high-quality integrated services. CG then is part of the range of concepts and perspectives that are all dealing with the challenge of identifying, connecting, and/or jointly developing solutions to wicked problems. There is a growing literature that speaks of "collaborative innovation," regarding innovation as a key objective of collaboration (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011; Torfing, 2019).

Second, another trend that fuels the push for collaborative solutions is fiscal stress. While the ideological context in which New Public Management arose in the late 1980s and early 1990s was also in part budgetary (i.e., putting the alleged fat state on a diet), in the last decade, since the global financial crisis, the mantra of savings and cutbacks has been sounding more

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forceful than ever, leading to a push for a leaner government and resulting in organizational decline of public departments and agencies in many countries. In such a context, public organizations need to strategize and to think about their core tasks, while at the same time look for ways to access resources outside government to achieve those tasks. While cutback management might lead to a decline, rather than increase, in collaborative efforts (i.e., because collaborative efforts may be considered a luxury one cannot afford any longer), ultimately, collaborative paths are likely to re-emerge because of political and societal necessity, as in the case of any public–private partnerships for infrastructure development that are collaborative responses to resource scarcity (Bovaird, 2004; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011). In current collaboration, this focus seems to be expanding, also resulting from co-creation and co-production with citizens and societal groups for an increasingly wide range of issues (Brandsen et al., 2018).

Interestingly, economists talk in similar terms: from the age of competition, over the age of cooperation, to the current age of collaboration (Snow, 2015). Essentially, in this age, organizations that survive or even thrive in the marketplace or civil society are the organizations that opt for strategies of collaboration with a wide range of other partners (Daft, 2013).

Some claim that the rise of CG fits a new paradigm, such as new public governance (Osborne, 2006), network governance (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Koliba et al., 2019), and collaborative public management (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Bingham & O'Leary, 2008), or even claim that it is a new paradigm in itself (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). In the *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, edited by Ansell and Torfing in 2016, "collaborative governance" is listed as a "form of governance," next to regulatory governance, network governance, multilevel governance, metagovernance, adaptive governance, and other forms. To distinguish it from network governance, Keast (2016, p. 447) considered CG a "higher-order form of network governance—one that moves beyond task integration to the synthesis of people and their resources for the broader good."

Key Scientific Sources

As noted, much of the work underpinning CG did not use the term itself but drew on early literature on interorganizational relations and alliances, political economy, and networks. The wider literature is far beyond the scope of this article, so the article refers primarily to literature that has a direct line to current CG literature, keeping in mind the literature's wider ancestry.

Many relevant books have been published over the past decades, including: Barbara Gray's *Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems* in 1989 and her recent sequel with Jill Purdy, *Collaborating for Our Future: Multistakeholder Partnerships for Solving Complex Problems* in 2018; *Managing to Collaborate: The Theory and Practice of Collaborative Advantage* (Huxham & Vangen, 2005); *Collaborative Governance Regimes* (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015); *Leadership for the Common Good: Tackling Public Problems in a Shared-Power World* (Crosby & Bryson, 2005); *Working Across Boundaries: Collaboration in the Public Services* (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2007); two books on governance networks in the public sector (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Koliba et al., 2019); two books on collaborative public

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management (Agranoff, 2012; Agranoff & McGuire, 2003); edited volumes like *Big Ideas in Collaborative Public Management* (edited by Bingham & O'Leary, 2008); *Collaboration: Using Networks and Partnerships* (edited by Kamensky & Burlin, 2004); *Network Theory in the Public Sector* (edited by Agranoff et al., 2014); *Public Innovation through Collaboration and Design* (edited by Ansell & Torfing, 2014); and *Networks and Collaboration in the Public Sector: Essential Research Approaches, Methodologies and Analytic Tools* (edited by Voets et al., 2019).

A good start for exploring the CG concept is the article by Ansell and Gash titled "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice" (2008), in which the authors developed a contingency model of CG. Another is the article by Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh titled "An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance" (2012) and the elaboration in the book *Collaborative Governance Regimes* in 2015. A third is the article "Designing and Implementing Cross-Sector Collaborations: Needed *and* Challenging" by Bryson et al. (2015). These three sources provide a good starting point for listing the main components, insights, and challenges of CG.

All three central theoretical and analytical frameworks focus on the importance of individuals working closely to establish common norms based on relative degrees of trust and mutuality. These frameworks also take a systems perspective on CG, identifying those structures, functions, and processes common to the development of CG.

Conceptualization 1: Ansell and Gash

Ansell and Gash (2008) defined CG as "a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage nonstate stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or [to] manage public programs or assets" (p. 544). They stressed that their definition aimed to be sufficiently restrictive to counter the critique of fuzziness that often persists around considerations of governance in general and to allow for theory-building. From their definition, it is clear that public organizations act as instigators for the collaboration (and hence are still in a way "in the lead" and have a special responsibility), and that it is not merely a matter of collaboration between public organizations but needs to bridge the public–private divide. They also asserted that there needs to be an actual joint decision-making process across or between organizations across all sectoral divides (as opposed to traditional consultation processes) in which all actors seek to find a consensus. This consensus-driven process requires some level of established formal or reified status (so it is not just an informal platform or deal-making in back rooms). The other key feature of CG is that it must seek to achieve public policy or public management (pp. 544–545). Gray and Purdy (2018) considered CG a specific, more formal form of multisector partnership in which government is involved, as opposed to less formal types, such as round tables, dialogues, and transnational networks. Although authors like Ansell and Gash tried to ensure that CG has a particular definition to differentiate it from other multi-actor arrangements, their definition of CG still has much in common with participatory management, network governance, interactive policymaking, stakeholder governance, collaborative public management, and alliance public–private partnerships (Edelenbos & Teisman, 2008; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016) and is therefore still subject to critiques of fuzzy definition.

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Bevir, who has written and edited key volumes on governance, considered CG more broadly to be about "attempts to create and conduct policy that involve the participation of nongovernmental and nontraditional political actors. … Collaborative governance is an interactive process in which myriad actors with various interests, perspectives, and knowledge are brought together" (Bevir, 2009, p. 47). Key aspects, then, are the inclusion of nontraditional actors (not the classic iron triangles studied and criticized in the 1980s for being undemocratic and lacking transparency), the explicit presence of citizens and citizen groups in such processes, and the fact that it is—or should be—about negotiation starting from the premise that everyone should have a say (whatever their institutional or power base) rather than traditional consultation in a democratic process. It is clear that the main elements that Bevir put forward are also present in the definition by Ansell and Gash, whose framework is shown in figure 1.

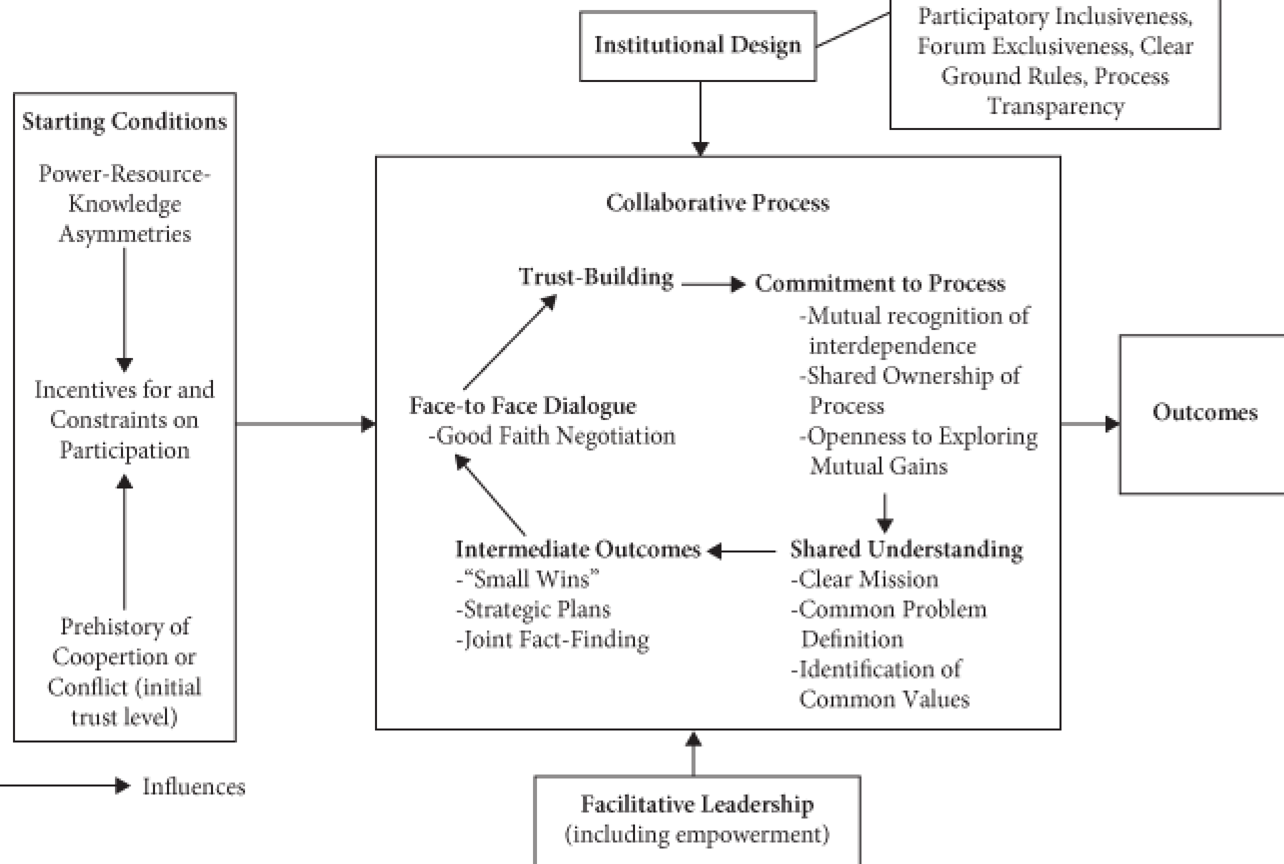

Figure 1. The Ansell and Gash model of collaborative governance.

Source: Ansell and Gash (2008, p. 550).

The Ansell and Gash framework is systemic, in the sense that it pays attention to the starting context of a collaborative arrangement, it is heavily focused on the actual process within that arrangement and the dynamics it generates, and it pays separate attention to facilitative leadership and institutional design as well as ultimately to the output from the process.

By listing starting conditions, this framework reasserts that collaboration does not come about in a void: it concerns actors who often have asymmetries in terms of resources (including knowledge) and power (thus linking to a key foundation of collaborative and network research, namely resource dependency theory; see Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016, for an overview).

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The actors experience incentives and constraints to collaborate, and their joint history of either cooperation or conflict already defines the initial level of trust. The collaborative process itself is a cycle of dialogue, negotiations, trust, commitment, shared understanding, and evaluation that can lead to "intermediate outcomes" that lay the foundation for societal outcomes in the end. Thus, Ansell and Gash joined together main insights on trust and mutual gains that have been developed in the past decades in the literature and tried to demonstrate how they connect and influence one another. Two main components that are important to understand or to make the collaboration work are institutional design and facilitative leadership. Therefore, Ansell and Gash demonstrated that collaboration does not simply "happen" but requires proper design (e.g., defining ground rules, the position of the collaboration, and its membership) and that it requires leadership that can be exerted by various actors to make the collaboration work (compare this to the management of strategic and institutional complexity defined by Klijn and Koppenjan [2016]). Ultimately, a successful collaborative process should result in outcomes that address societal issues at hand.

The strength of the Ansell and Gash model is that it follows a systems logic model of inputs, processes, and outputs but also builds on a systematic literature review of 137 cases; in doing so, it tries to build a common architecture for future collaborative research and practice.

Ansell and Gash explicitly referred to CG as a strategy or mode of governance (2008), as a proactive policy instrument (2018), and also as a contingency theory that draws heavily on empirical studies to construct an analytical framework that should be helpful to practitioners who want to set up, or are engaged in, collaborative arrangements. While a lot has been written on why CG is important, what challenges it brings, and what solutions might come from it, "the imperatives for effective collaboration are easy to state but difficult to accomplish" (Donahue & Zeckhauser, 2011, p. 60). The work of scholars like Ansell and Gash tries to deal with this gap.

When considering what conditions best suit collaboration, Gash (2016) found that all CG settings:

- need to be problem-driven to identify and address policy shortfalls,
- entail networks of partners with various interests, and diversity among them needs to be high enough to creative substantive variety,
- require an authority and autonomy to discuss, to decide, and to act upon the issues it is dealing with; and
- ideally, aim to promote shared learning and consensus-building.

This list reasserts the input-process-output nature of CG. Problem definitions and solution-oriented incentives help to set the initial conditions for collaboration. Collaborative processes are structured through networks of organizations and individuals (Koliba et al., 2019). The actors are guided by formal and informal norms (including trust, dialogue protocols, and transparent decision-making). Ideally, the process is guided by, and through, shared learning and democratic norms.

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Conceptualization 2: Emerson and Nabatchi

While Ansell and Gash tried to be somewhat limitative in their definition, Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) expanded the definition to capture more actors, structures, and processes. For Emerson and Nabatchi, then, CG refers to "the processes and structures of public policy decision-making and management that engage people across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private, and civic spheres to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished" (p. 18). Emerson and Nabatchi drew on this broad definition to join various theoretical, normative, and empirical perspectives and to develop the concept of collaborative governance regimes (CGRs) as the core of their framework. A CGR is "a particular mode of, or system for, public decision making in which cross-boundary collaboration represents the prevailing pattern of behavior and activity" (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 6). Their use of terms like "regime" and "system" makes it clear that they want to stress that there needs to be a sufficient level of stability and formalization in which a real joint commitment to the goals and the process is essential (Gray & Purdy, 2018). For Emerson and Nabatchi, the "integrative" character of their framework means drawing on new institutionalism, social network studies, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993), the study of negotiations, and performance literature (figure 2).

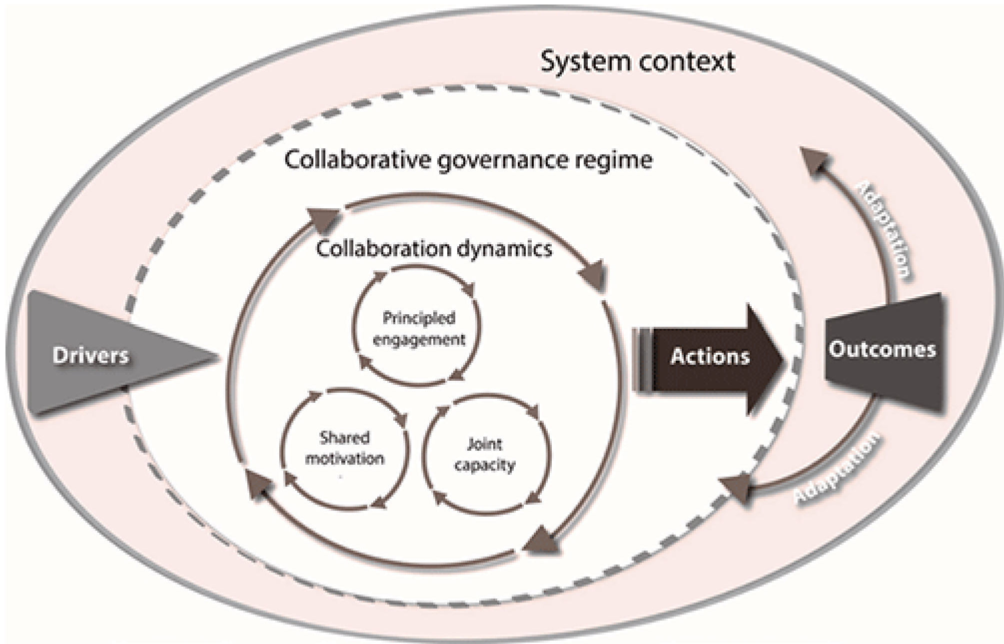

Figure 2. The integrative framework for collaborative governance.

Source: Emerson, K., & Nabatchi, T. (2015). Collaborative governance and collaborative governance regimes. In *Collaborative governance regimes* (p. 27). Copyright 2015 by Georgetown University Press. Reprinted with permission. press.georgetown.edu.

There are three things to be noted in relation to the Emerson and Nabatchi model: it opens for informal CG, it creates a new link to public value/purpose, and it refers indirectly to collaborative advantage. It is clear that the framework is dynamic, starting from the system context and drivers in which a collaborative regime is situated and develops, looking at the interaction process within the regime labeled collaboration dynamics, and paying attention to the actions, outcomes, and ultimately adaptions that come out of it.

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The dynamic nature of the CGR allows for the inclusion of additional systems-level properties (Meadows, 2008), namely a clear sense of temporality, some loose allusions to feedback relationships, and a recognition of broader system context or exogenous factors. The model also takes into consideration the role that feedback regarding outcomes can play (in best-case scenarios) in informing regime learning and adaptation.

Effective CG begins with what Emerson and Nabatchi described as "principled engagement" for involving key stakeholders. As the stakeholders engage, common or shared goals emerge. Definitions of performance goals and objectives are said to follow. A process of deliberation leads to a set of decisions (or determinations) that lead to action. This process mirrors what John Goodlad and others have noted as the "cycle of inquiry," which is a process of dialogue, decision-making, action, and evaluation (Goodlad et al., 2004). If the process of establishing common ground and a shared purpose is successful, this in turn fuels a cycle of "shared motivation" to make the collaboration work, requiring commitment, trust, mutual understanding, and establishing internal legitimacy (Gajda & Koliba, 2007). Their third cycle, "capacity for joint action," refers to the foundational idea of CG that collaboration should help to do things that each actor separately cannot achieve. By developing procedural and institutional arrangements, leadership, resources, and knowledge, the collaboration is strengthened, both fueling the cycles of principled engagement and shared motivation and jointly leading to meaningful actions (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

The key premise of CGR theory lies in the notion that forms of strong engagement "will produce determinations that are fairer and more durable, robust, and efficacious" (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015, p. 63). Emerson and Nabatchi recognized that many collaborative arrangements call for the intentional use of institutional design (p. 69) and the utilization of resources (p. 73). Emerson and Nabatchi laid out a typology of CGRs that includes self-initiated, independently convened, and externally directed CGRs (2015, p. 163). This typology provides a useful indicator for where, and how, to define one or more locus of control in both the initiation and the implementation phases of collaborative activities.

A major critique of the CGR model is that it places heavy emphasis on the motivations to establish CG arrangements. The model's internal dynamics also place a heavy emphasis on idealized conditions, consensus-like deliberations, and some level of common agreement around norms.

Both the Ansell and Gash approach and the Emerson and Nabatchi approach to CG tend to place an emphasis on idealized collaborative processes and dynamics. They do not take into account the inherent "messiness" of practice. They do not account for the possibility and inherent likelihood of power and informational asymmetries, nor do they present a strong foundation regarding the role that institutional rules play in governing interorganizational relations.

Conceptualization 3: Bryson, Crosby, and Middleton Stone

The work of Bryson, Crosby, and Middleton Stone is a third important source for an overview of CG. In contrast to Ansell and Gash and Emerson and Nabatchi, Bryson and colleagues (2015) provided an overview of the major theoretical frameworks and empirical findings between 2006 and 2015. In doing so, they brought in their 2006 framework to study what they referred to as cross-sectoral collaboration (see Bryson et al., 2006).

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With a strong grounding in sustained empirical observations of cross-sector collaborations, the Bryson, Crosby, and Middleton Stone framework took into consideration the common realities of power and authority by emphasizing the potential for conflict and tension, and the important role that accountability plays. Their model of CG echoed components found in the work of Ansell and Gash or Emerson and Nabatchi. First, they also brought to light the important general antecedent conditions that can provide incentives or that can help to reveal if collaboration is the best approach. Second, Bryson, Crosby, and Middleton Stone also took a dynamic view. They started with the importance of defining initial conditions, drivers, and linking mechanisms to get the collaboration going. Next, they pointed out key process and structuration challenges to making the collaboration work, and they stressed the important of leadership, governance, and capacity and competences to do so, but they also pointed to the importance of conflicts and tensions that can stem from power imbalances, different logics, and the like. Finally, they also put the focus on the final component, in terms of outcomes, but broadened this point to accountability questions. Their explicit focus on conflicts and tensions as well as the issue of accountability for (the lack of) outcomes can be considered two main "new" conceptual components.

Bryson et al. (2015) also added to the literature by defining both propositions that allow better theory development by scholars and key points needed by practitioners who engage in CG that serve as important indicators of what practitioners must be aware of. The propositions were deduced from literature reviews and extensive empirical studies of cross-sector collaborations. The propositions, which are organized along the main components of Bryson et al.'s synthesizing framework, are most likely of great use to practitioners and serve as an effective bridge between CG as theory and making collaboration work in practice. Regarding initial conditions, Bryson et al. stated, among other things, that collaboration is likely to develop in turbulent environments (see the impact of COVID-19 as an extreme illustration of that point) and linking mechanisms (like powerful sponsors, policy tools, or project calls requiring collaboration) increase chances of success. In regard to designing effective processes, they posited that the latter includes establishing legitimacy with internal and external stakeholders and finding the right mix of deliberate and emergent planning. In terms of structuring the collaboration, propositions include the need to manage temporal, spatial, and structural ambidexterity. Collaborating in a turbulent environment also requires active management of contingencies and constraints, leading to propositions that consciously prepare for windows of opportunity, power issues, and shocks; such propositions increase chances for success. A final set of propositions deals with the need to manage outcomes and accountabilities, including the "warning" that achieving success in collaborative arrangements is very difficult and one should always be aware of that beforehand. Furthermore, smart results management and reporting systems and accountability loops with relevant political and professional forums also increase chances of success (Bryson et al., 2015, p. 17).

Synthesizing CG as a Model

Drawing on the three main sources of CG as a model then implies:

1. It is necessary to identify, be aware of, and deal with conditions that a collaboration could start from, as well as the broader context in which it is situated.

2.

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It is important to invest in and to organize the intentional interaction processes among the actors involved.

3. Structuring and institutionalizing the collaboration in a smart and effective way is critical to success.
4. Awareness of process and structure require active and smart management strategies and leadership roles.
5. It is important to be aware of downsides, risks, and constraints in step 4.
6. It is important to tackle the crucial question and to pay attention to what finally comes out of the collaborative arrangement.
7. It is also important to address critical accountability and democratic legitimacy issues.
8. These components are not simply a staged, causal chain, but an iterative and complex interacting setting.

Pitfalls and Conceptual Gaps in CG Theory

Several limitations of, and pitfalls in, CG theories and frameworks deserve to be mentioned here. The first potential pitfall is making collaboration *the* preferred standard mode of tackling public-policy and service-delivery issues (Gash, 2016). To some, it might appear that CG will save the world, and to some extent those who have advanced CG theory have held onto the idea that CG is an inherent good. It should be clear, however, that it only “works” in the pursuit of the public good under certain conditions and that it often requires sufficient investment in the long-term interaction process to get results (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). CG should be explored to tackle wicked issues, while hierarchy and market are more likely strategies to deal with issues requiring authority and standardized, efficient service delivery (Torfing et al., 2012).

An increasing amount of research is demonstrating collaborative failure rather than collaborative success. Smart metagovernance, facilitative leadership, and network management can help to limit or even counter collaborative failure to a certain extent, but they are not miracle solutions (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). But even if conditions do seem right for collaboration, good design and management of the network is imperative. While there are many efforts by researchers to contribute to practice in this respect (many CG scholars are in fact action-researchers—see, for instance, Huxham and Vangen), it is remarkable how much still needs to be learned by public organizations in this respect. The pitfall of pursuing collaboration in all cases and contexts is also related to the risk of abusing this mode of governance to push political and organizational responsibilities away (“the working group syndrome”). If it is a delicate matter and politicians and public managers are not willing to take difficult decisions, declaring “that collaboration is needed to address the issue” becomes a convenient way out, buying time and providing an opportunity for blame-shifting if the CG network fails. CG should not ignore the importance of power and politics (Torfing et al., 2012).

A second pitfall is that collaborative arrangements can be weak on monitoring and evaluation. Often, collaborative networks fail to draw up indicators, only monitor progress informally, and have no clear evaluation strategy or culture. It is crucial to avoid the pitfalls of performance

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management, and a clear monitoring and evaluation strategy can help the network to adapt as necessary (Boland & Fowler, 2000; Bryson et al., 2015; Frederickson & Frederickson, 2006; Koliba et al., 2019; O'Leary et al., 2015; Silvia, 2018).

A third pitfall is that CG networks "avoid," willingly or unwillingly, the challenges of accountability and legitimacy, or do not thoroughly consider how to organize for this. In this context, the literature on network accountability (Koliba et al., 2011, 2019; Mashaw, 2006; Newman, 2004) is useful, as is the governance network literature pertaining to democratic anchorage (Sørensen & Torfing, 2005). But if CG networks are really dealing with important public issues, they need to ensure that they give account not only to their organizations, but also to society at large. This implies that they can be held to account for collaborative outcomes (or the lack thereof) and that they ensure legitimacy through a transparent and sufficiently open process, etc. (Voets et al., 2008). While some might argue that ensuring accountability and legitimacy is in the DNA of CG, the risk of going back to iron triangles and closed policy networks can be real. The challenge for scholars then is not only to bring legitimacy and accountability into the models or frameworks, but also to critically apply them (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007).

A fourth pitfall is insufficient attention to the need for collaborative capacity, which is often lacking in practice. In times of fiscal stress, investing sufficient resources in a CG network proves even more difficult. However, the fact that people "sit around the table" is often not enough to solve the challenges they are expected to tackle. Often, CG networks are underorganized, and building up a sufficiently strong collaborative capacity seems impossible, despite motivated participants, a dedicated manager, etc. Even if the relational capacity is achieved, it is not enough to tackle the actual challenges being discussed. This pitfall is also related to the first one: if governments are more selective in setting up collaborative arrangements, they can invest more in those that are the most promising and that deal with real policy priorities.

Limitations of CG Theory and Models

With the pitfalls in mind, there are several gaps in CG theory that require further examination. The first gap is the need for a fuller integration of CG into network governance theory. Network governance structures include three ideal types: shared governance modalities, third-party network administration, and lead organization modalities (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Although the three ideal types of network governance structure call on some amount of trust and decision-making protocols, they do account for the possibility, particularly in the lead organization structure, for power and authority differentiation. The lead organization structure may imply, or at least allow for, a possibility that is recognized by CG theory, but that is not necessarily fully accounted for: the possibility of mandated collaboration in which participants do not enter into the collaboration voluntarily, and the possibility that some CG arrangement may actually contain more traditional bureaucratic or hierarchical ties. The growing consensus in the network governance literature around the prevalence of "mixed tie" networks speaks to this point (Koliba et al., 2019). Within the context of network governance theory and frameworks, collaboration is understood as one (but likely very important and effective) tool for addressing public policy issues. In some instances, mandates and regulation, as well as incentives, may be used to forge network ties.

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Although these arrangements are much more challenging to study, they are likely to be more common. Because networks are ubiquitous (Barabasi, 2016) and a foundational structure of social systems, more effort is needed to integrate CG processes, regimes, and dynamics into certain network structures.

A second major consideration for CG theory is the matter of institutional rules. Consideration of this matter cannot fail to refer to Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom's work on the governance of common pool resources (1990, 2005). CG theory can benefit from a stronger link to Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development Framework, which includes action situations and action arenas, as well as an acknowledgment that any form of CG unfolds within environments shaped by operational, process, and often constitutional rule structures. The effects of institutional rules place serious constraints on any collaborator's engagement in CGRs, as the existence of shared norms around principled engagement and trust may be overwritten by legal, bureaucratic, or procedural standards. It should be noted that these standards impact not only the dynamics of interorganizational networks themselves, but also the actions of individual actors (be they construed at the organizational or individual levels). While current CG models do refer to the institutional level, they can be explored more in depth, as is currently the case.

CG in the Future?

While CG research already has provided many valuable insights and has reached a level of maturity as scholars develop integrated models, this does not mean that researchers are now of a single mind or have stopped developing CG research further.

One key question gaining importance is the relationship between CG and performance. Ansell and Gash (2008) set out to address the question whether CG is more effective than adversarial or managerial governance. They found that "very few of the [137] studies [we] reviewed actually evaluated governance outcomes" (p. 549). This is a criticism that is still valid: What has the call for collaboration delivered in terms of tackling the issues that such collaborations are set up for? Calls for strong hierarchical leadership may be seen as an indication that CG is considered either undesirable or ineffective. Therefore, more studies of CG performance are needed. A recent edited volume by Voet et al. (2019) discussed the relationship of methods to theories of collaboration and networks. The methods enable the study of collaborations as dynamic and complex processes (Koliba et al., 2016).

A related question concerns the impact of, and reasons for, collaborative failure. Because the discourse on collaboration is increasingly popular, and as more governments, nonprofits, and businesses take a collaborative path, the question of collaborative failure is important to address. There are enough warning signs that collaboration is not easy and has substantial transaction costs—and Huxham and Vangen (2005) essentially said "Don't do it unless you have to"—but it seems that many public organizations, policymakers, and administrators apply it as a "standard format solution" for any issue. But what are the pitfalls if governments engage in collaboration without sufficient preparatory thinking about the design and consequences of this path? The intentional development of cross-sector collaboration has

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become an important tool in the policymaker's and public manager's toolbox (see, for instance, the collective impact literature; Kania & Kramer, 2011). More empirical work and theoretical testing of such tools are needed (Keast et al., 2020).

This is also a matter of transparency, accountability, and legitimacy, and ultimately a matter of the relationship between CG and democracy. This raises the question: If too many collaborative efforts fail, who is held accountable, and what then is the alternative strategy? Is the solution to "bring the state back in," strengthening hierarchical governance? Does the failure of CG lead to a stronger role for markets? Gray and Purdy (2018), for instance, argued that one should be careful to consider other governance modes, such as dealing with common pool resource issues (Ostrom, 1990, 2007), which might be more successful than CG networks. It seems, however, that decisions about the desired governance mode (assuming that the governance mode is more likely to result in the desired outcomes) are often not reflected upon by many governments. More insight into the process of metagovernance—considered here as the informed choice to opt for hierarchy, market, or network or a mix of governance styles (Sørensen, 2006)—is warranted (Meuleman, 2018).

Another related question is capacity-building and collaborative capacity. While many CG scholars aspire to develop insights and to create knowledge that can benefit practitioners, the step from providing interesting analytical frameworks and formulating relevant recommendations to actually contributing to collaborative success remains challenging. Being able to collaborate requires specific skills of participants and of those taking up leadership or management roles (see O'Leary et al., 2012, for five sets of skills). What is the impact of training program and learning experiences on the capacity of individuals? (For example, what is to be learned from the collaborative case database of Syracuse University?) And how does all this translate into a genuine working culture? Collaboration is a human enterprise by its very nature, and it is important to take into account the broader capacity for collaboration and to link it to the way managers try to manage and control their separate organizations: What is required and feasible in this respect? What are the "resource levels" that might be identified up front to ensure collaborative capacity is likely to be sufficient to help achieve outcomes?

An important question is whether CG is likely to continue to converge into one model and theory, or whether models will continue to develop alongside one another. The similarities across the three major CG frameworks highlighted here offer promise. A challenge is the extent to which the various CG frameworks are likely to be developed further and will be (or will continue to be) tested empirically. The comments about network governance and institutional rules are particularly relevant here. Paraphrasing the first methodological challenge identified by Bryson et al. (2015): There is a risk of having strong theorizing on the one hand and interesting empirical and action-oriented research on the other hand, and they both need to be connected more strongly in the future.

Fortunately, new and interesting work is being done. For example, work is demonstrating how structural characteristics of CG networks influence advocacy of stakeholders (Mosley & Jarpe, 2019), what types of structural designs help to improve collaborations (Bryson et al., 2019), how actively working with performance information can help collaboration move forward (Douglas & Ansell, 2020), how to better deal with paradoxes during collaboration (Waardenburg et al., 2020), and how CG theory can be developed further by linking it to existing theories (Koebele, 2018). Other relevant studies include the work by Cepiku et al. (2020) demonstrating that different configurations of causal conditions lead to high or poor

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collaborative performance, work by Warsen et al. (2019) demonstrating which combination of contractual and relations conditions results in success, and work on how the network characteristics of the network structure combine with individual leadership to achieve performance (Cristofoli et al., 2021). CG topics have been expanded in work focusing on the way CG can lead to innovation (Torfing & Ansell, 2017) and exploring the understudied role of politicians as boundary spanners between CG and representative democracy (Sørensen et al., 2020), and CG topics have been revisited, as in the work on the relation between core CG concepts like trust and power (Ran & Qi, 2019). But the extent to which it is possible to expand into a grand model of CG—which is perhaps a utopian or even an undesirable idea—remains to be seen. Interestingly, both methodological convergence and methodological innovation may prove to be links in the expanding CG field between researchers and research and practice (Keast et al., 2020).

Added Value of CG for Students and Researchers

CG brings added value to students and researchers in different ways. First, CG attempts to grasp, connect, and explain the complexities associated with dealing with wicked issues in the public sector. In doing so, CG draws on different literatures and theories, providing students and researchers interested in studying and grasping much of contemporary public action with a particularly good basis to start from. Rather than having to go through the history of all the literature strands and theories supporting the CG theory and models, students and researchers can start directly with applying, operationalizing, or amending the theory and models to fit their research needs.

Second, another added value linked to the synthesizing qualities is the holistic nature of CG, which not only tries to capture what goes on within governance arrangements, but also connects to the broader institutional and systems context. While that holistic nature, connecting different levels of analysis and the interplay among them, might be challenging, it can help students and researchers to avoid tunnel vision or a narrow focus and to develop an authentic “situational awareness” of systems properties (Endsely, 1995).

Third, CG is relevant for students and researchers in other fields (such as environmental management, urban studies, planning, social work, and health care) that have their own substantive frames, issues, challenges, theories, and methods. CG offers a sufficiently “generic” framework to connect, complement, and support that knowledge, and it might even prove to be a useful metaframework in studying and tackling governance challenges in other fields.

So, despite CG’s pitfalls, its limitations, and the questions about the future of CG, CG is now part of the ever-expanding canon of contemporary theories and models in public administration and management.

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