

10th CEPA Meeting
April 4-8, 2011

Public Governance for Results: A Conceptual and Operational Framework

Francisco Longo
Director
Institute of Public Governance and Management.
ESADE Business School. Barcelona, Spain.

Abstract

In recent years, understanding institutions has become extremely important to analyse current reality. This is due, on the one hand, to the success of neo-institutionalist approaches within Social Sciences and, on the other, to the rapid changes in how the state intervenes to address the *wicked problems* (Clarke and Stewart, 1997) which have arisen and for which the government is not prepared or legitimated to face alone. This has led some authors to talk about the evolution towards a relational state (Mendoza and Vernis, 2008, 37) or a cooperative one (Innerarity, 2006). In this context, there is a need to stop looking merely at the 'government' of societies –too attached to public decision-making models borrowed from the old hierarchical setting– and begin to examine the 'governance' of societies.

This article aims to address the conceptual meaning of the term, 'governance.' To this end, the author advocates adopting two approaches: a descriptive approach, according to which governance can be viewed as a set of institutional arrangements through which public decisions are designed, adopted and implemented in a particular social environment; and the normative or prescriptive approach, related to the desire for quality public actions. The governance concept is closely related to both formal and informal institutions across all perspectives and meanings.

The result of the interactions between the various factors that condition a society's governance leads to a certain public result. Understanding the root causes and the process of causal change involved in achieving that public result is of fundamental importance to generate knowledge in the field of societal governance. In recent years, the explanatory factors that have been used to analyse certain 'public results' have fundamentally been centred on efficiency criteria and on a rather technical view of efficacy. However, while it is important to assess the actual outcomes of governmental action in relation to the resources used, it is crucial we analyse the institutional and political components of such actions, in other words, evaluate *how* the actions have been carried out. For this, this paper proposes five axes that systemise basic institutional arrangements, applying a synthetic normative approach to the notion of governance: the political institutions; the rule of law institutions; market institutions; public administration; and civil society.

This paper suggests how to assess governance, whether the aim is to direct political and social attention to the not-always-evident causes of certain problems, to generate knowledge to improve interventions in the public sphere, or to make the accountability process possible. This paper not only identifies the typical problems to be avoided in assessing governance, but also exposes the criteria that should be taken into account when selecting governance indicators.