

Chapter 11

Response of the Public Sector to COVID-19 With Organizational Design and Ad hoc Structure: Complexity and Contingency

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ABSTRACT

The public sector, like other socio-economic sectors, has been impacted by the pandemic COVID-19. Furthermore, regardless of their national, supranational, and international contexts or capacities, public sectors in almost every country were tasked with more than just coordinating society and economy, mitigating population health risks, and keeping economies afloat. The complexity and interconnectedness of various types of policies necessitates the adoption of new organisational models. This chapter investigates the public sector's challenges in turbulent times. It also describes how organisational design and architecture, other than the dominant new public management model complementary to new public governance model can provide viable, sustainable solutions as well as more democratic leadership and decision making. Based on the theoretical analysis and the methodologies of contingency and complexity theories, the chapter emphasizes the multi-governance model in mitigating the COVID-19 effects through a loose and organic organisational system instead of a bureaucracy.

INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous pandemics throughout history that have killed millions of people and even wiped-out entire civilizations. Diseases have also played an important role as historical moderators throughout human history (Diamond, 1999). The current pandemic has had the unintended consequence of bringing to an unprecedented climax and a very difficult foresight norms, beliefs, ways of working, and living to which most people were accustomed.

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National economies have been dispersed, entire economic sectors have been shattered, unemployment is on the rise, and the entire economic system is being put to the test, while the environment is also under attack as a result of economic system operations. Since the first outbreak, policymakers and decision-makers have attempted to deal with the pandemic on a health level while also attempting to stabilize the adversary economic effects. To keep national economies afloat, national governments, public administrations, and international organisations took unprecedented economic measures. Aside from teleworking, it is assumed that no significant changes in the organisational context have occurred.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how the state, in general, and the public sector in particular, can effectively deal with the aftermath of the pandemic. Covid-19 like other massive-gravity problems (such as climate change, poverty and economic inequality) is a so-called wicked problem whereas according to late Russel Ackoff a “wicked mess” (Mitroff, 2019, 2020). As a result, both traditional public administration models and the New Public Management model appear to be underperforming due to centralization and market-oriented solutions, at a time when networks, co-production, and co-design are needed to address these anomalies.

Dunlop, Ongaro and Baker (2020) delineate seven broad themes, namely a) policy design and instruments, b) policy learning and evaluation, c) public service and its publics, d) organisational capacity, e) public governance, f) administrative traditions, and g) public sector reforms in multilevel governance, for enhancing public policies for a post pandemic period. Given the scope and length of our research we will deal with “policy design and instruments”, “organisational capacity”, “public governance” and “public sector in multi-level governance”.

The theoretical framework is developed in section 2. Section 3 develops the empirical analysis, in which the author examines data from various countries using the OPSI Covid-19 Innovative Response Tracker database and present the preliminary results from a survey of 2.000 public organisations that use Common Assessment Framework and self-assess their organisational capacity and resilience in Covid-19 times. Finally in Section 4 the conclusion is presented.

BACKGROUND

An extensive literature review in the thematic fields of public administration, complex adaptive systems model, adhocracy, and dynamic governance model is considered as a supplement to the New Public Governance Model, as well as literature on wicked problems and Covid-19 responses.

Governments, according to Mazzucato and Kattel (2020), must develop dynamic capabilities in the following areas: capacity to adapt and learn; capacity to align public services and citizen needs; capacity to govern resilient production systems; and capacity to govern data and digital platforms. Stiglitz (2021) urges governments to develop better institutions in order to design and implement non-market-oriented strategies.

As shown by Dunlop, Ongaro and Baker (2020) seven analytical themes are central to the COVID-19 challenges: policy design and instruments, policy learning, public service and its publics, organisational capacity, public governance, administrative traditions and public sector reforms in multi-level governance.

According to Klijn and Koppenjan (2016) New Public Governance is a problem-solving governance network that seeks to reduce substantive, strategic, and institutional complexity. For Rhodes (2015) New Public Governance (NPG) has its theoretical roots in new institutionalism and network theory, whereas

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