

Evaluating and Analyzing Collaboration In Cross-cultural and Cross-sectoral Perspective: Indicators from The Internet Governance Forum

Background and Goals

There has been a large growth in the literature dealing with internet governance over the past several years. (See Levinson, 2009 for a list of relevant references.) The number of books and articles with the keyword 'internet governance' has increased; the domains and methods of these writings cross multiple disciplines and focus on an extraordinarily broad range of topics. (Google Scholar lists over 9,000 references with the keyword 'internet governance' and the constraint of "since 2010"; over 3,000 of these contain a reference to "Internet Governance Forum").

Within the realm of research directly dealing with the Internet Governance Forum, a subset of the internet governance domain, there is a particularly timely need to evaluate and assess the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as an entity. This paper reviews the related incipient research, builds on this author's 2009 preliminary review (with D. Cogburn) of Internet Governance Forum evaluation, and particularly addresses the methodological and substantive challenges of evaluating a distinctive entity such as the IGF which has both a cross-cultural, multistakeholder membership and a focus on dialogue and possible collaboration across stakeholder groups. It presents findings from this author's 2010 study that first conceptualizes collaboration in multistakeholder settings in a range of research areas and then provides and uses a multidimensional model for evaluating collaboration processes (which this author calls co-processes) in the IGF.

Methods

The challenges of examining and evaluating co-processes are many. As noted above, there is a very large literature on co-processes in arenas other than internet governance. In the area of U.S. public administration research in particular, there is a relevant and methodologically rigorous study that tests the construct validity of collaboration in a large national U.S. service program involving a number of collaborating organizations (Thomson, Perry and Miller, 2009). While there, of course, is an absence of cross-national, multicultural, and cross-sector communication in Thomson, Perry and Miller's work, it provides a methodological foundation for addressing such research challenges. Thus, the study reported here uses the Thomson, Perry and Miller indicators, builds on this author's earlier work (Levinson, 2009; Levinson and Cogburn, 2009) related to this topic, and applies the Thomson, Perry and Miller indicators to the Internet Governance Forum. It also adds the elements of adaptation over time and collaborative improvisation. Since the Internet Governance Forum is now in its fifth year, the variable of time becomes increasingly important in at least two ways: first, the presence of ties and co-processes prior to the initiation of the IGF; and second, the development (and adaptation) of co-processes in the IGF over time, following its initiation. With regard to collaborative improvisation, there is very little prior work that captures such processes in a formal evaluation study. These dimensions possess implications for any evaluation of collaboration processes and, especially, for evaluation of internet-governance forum related processes.

Significance

The model used by Thomson, Perry and Miller has been used in several other U.S. policy contexts (Chen, 2004; Graddy and Chen 2006). These findings cross-validate the work of Thomson, Miller and Perry and provide a platform for this 2010 study that focuses on measuring co-processes as a part of evaluating the Internet Governance Forum. It also provides, then, a third and a cross-national, and cross-cultural context for evaluating co-processes, a vital aspect of dealing with today's complex, messy and multiple global governance issues and opportunities. The study presented here also contributes to placing the evaluation of the IGF into research traditions used in public policy studies and in global governance studies (see Bach, 2010) and adds to that work by including (as noted in the methods section above) cross-cultural, time, and cross-institutional components. Finally, it provides a list of key indicators related to co-processes and collaborative creation and improvisation in multicultural, cross-sector and cross-institutional settings related to discussing internet governance in 2010 that can, then, add to the various types of evaluations now being carried out in the public policy arena as well as in the specific domain of internet governance.

Notes

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