Challenges & Strategies for Conducting International Public Management Research

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Digital Government:
An International Phenomenon

- Necessity to share experiences across countries

- Requires increasing international public management research

Cross-Cultural
Public Management Research

- A complex & error prone endeavor that poses particular methodological challenges

- Our experience: the New Models Project
  - A multi-national study of new models of collaboration for delivering electronic government services
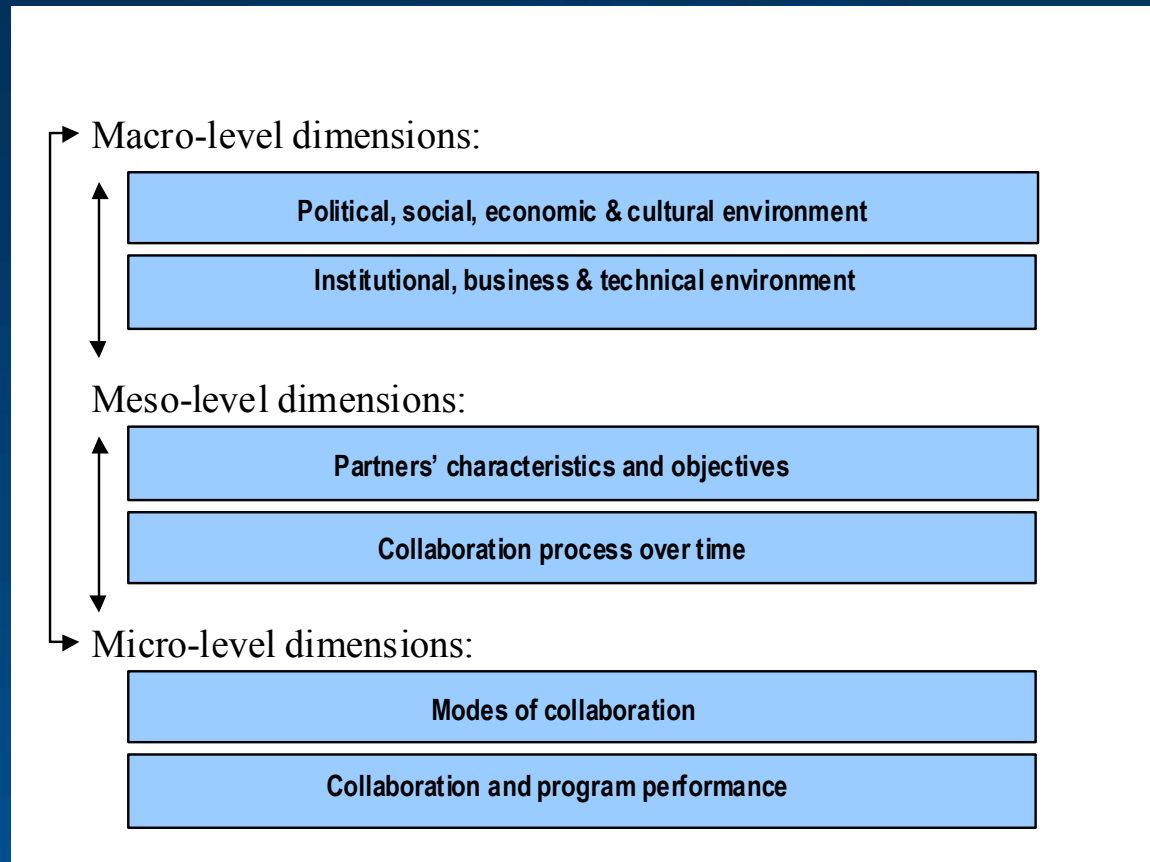 - Case studies in the United States, Canada, and Europe

The New Models Project

- A comparative study

- Using consistent methods of data collection & description across countries

- Attempting to understand the fundamental elements that transcend national boundaries

- Enabling a sharing of models and experiences in delivering electronic public services

Complexity of the New Models Project

- 2 continents, 4 countries, 3 different languages

- 11 research institutions involved

- 3 different funding agencies

- 15 case studies

Simplified Conceptual Model

Macro-level dimensions:

Political, social, economic & cultural environment

Institutional, business & technical environment

Meso-level dimensions:

Partners' characteristics and objectives

Collaboration process over time

Micro-level dimensions:

Modes of collaboration

Collaboration and program performance

Data Collection & Analysis

- Interviews + document analysis

- Coding scheme keyed to the specific variables of each dimension of the conceptual model

- Data analysis using a qualitative data analysis software

Main Challenges Encountered

Accounting for Cultural Factors

- Conceptual model dealing with culture only at the macro level (dimension 1)

- Attempt to capture culture from secondary sources rather than from the open-ended interviews

- Assumption that culture is contextual, negligence of its behavioral aspects

Conceptual Equivalence of Key Management Terms

- Key management terms have different meanings in different cultures

- Example 1: leadership

- Example 2: stakeholder

Translation

- A matter of epistomological consequence

- Difficulty in finding a translator with language skills, cultural understanding, and disciplinary knowledge

Research Design

- Type of cross-cultural research

- Selection of countries
    - Rationale for selection

- Languages involved
    - Official languages & regional dialects

- Culture
    - Definition of culture for the purposes of the study

Execution

- Composition of the research team
  - Unicultural or multicultural research team?

- Conceptual equivalence
  - Definition of the core concepts of the study

- Selection of translators
  - Knowledge of both languages & cultures?
  - Specialization in the field of study?
  - Native speaker of the target language?

Analysis

- Culturally-specific vs. universal findings
  - Error 1: Cultural stereotype
  - Error 2: Universality assumption

- Cross-national analysis
  - Juxtaposition of national results or cross-country analysis?
  - Divergent research agendas of the teams?

To Conclude…

Validity & reliability of international e-gov research can be increased…

…and enable us to determine the extent to which models & experiences around the world can be shared

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