Transforming Public Governance: Reform and Transformation of Public Institutions

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Abstract: Objectives

This paper seeks to deepen the understanding of how public institutions can be transformed to address the short comings of existing institutions, to address the loss of public trust (Pew, 2024) and to have significant public expenditures adding policy requirements that accrete over time (Pahlka, 2024) ultimately undermining the capacity of public service to produce the housing, health, income, education, environment, infrastructure that was the intended public good and protect democratic governance.

The paper explores strategies to transform public governance institutions to address democratic backsliding (Bauer and Becker, 202o) and administrative pathways to illiberal rule Bauer, 2025) through Institutional learning from past and ongoing crises in times of high uncertainty, with the need for cross-sector cooperation and intergovernmental coordination.

Methodology

Public Governance Institutions are defined here as by North (1990) as the "…humanly devised constraints that shape…" authoritative collective choice and action, including:

Constitutions and formal governments, p

Public policies which shape capacity for collective choice and action

Judicial, Legislative, and Executive actions that shape capacity for collective choice and action

Ballot initiatives and propositions which affect capacity for collective choice and action

This research offers a distinct framing to address issues confronting the United States of America, many of which are shared with peer economically advanced and formally democratic nations. Public governance institutions warrant critical attention today and more than they have received by policy makers, public administration professionals and scholars in the recent past.

This research draws on case studies to systematically learn at the national and sub-national level from transformation institutions efforts and to develop intellectual arguments that inform, and guide transformation is needed.

Context

The speed with which President Donald Trump, in his second term, has changed structures long championed by the public administration community, including the Senior Executive Service and Inspectors General, revealed unanticipated fragility and has startled and alarmed many public administrators and scholars. Public administration is in a period of transformation, perhaps not anticipated nor desired, but unrelenting. None of this discussion on transforming institutions implies an ease of chang but rather recognize the realities of impact of the vicissitude of politics on the design of public institutions (Moe, 1997).

Main Objectives

The strategies explore recognize four imperatives: (1) the need for effective implementation of public policies remains, (2) the current US Supreme Court is establishing the constitutional boundaries of acceptable institutions for the foreseeable future, (3) technology and global dynamics will change economies and societies, including in the United States, and (4) public finances will tighten as an aging population requires more services and slower increase in the labor force simultaneously reduces growth in public revenues (CBO 2024).

These failures cannot be effectively addressed by improvements in single programs or at the organizational level. Transformation of institutions is required. First steps include shifting from any expectations that either the past choices, initiatives dominated by the federal/national government, or simply a focus on bureaucracies is sufficient