

7-27-2018

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### Recommended Citation

Yani, Andi Ahmad (2018) "Reframing Concept of Governance in Public Administration Researches: A Philosophical Discussion," *BISNIS & BIROKRASI: Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi dan Organisasi*: Vol. 25 : No. 1 , Article 1.

DOI: 10.20476/jbb.v25i1.9719

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/jbb/vol25/iss1/1>

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# Reframing Concept of Governance in Public Administration Researches: A Philosophical Discussion

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**Abstract.** The concept of governance is widely employed in various field of studies. Governance also commonly employed to characterize institutions both in public sector institutions and private domains, describe both formal and informal organizations, and define both international and local networks. In the field of public administration, the concept of governance has been explored in last three decades. The usage of the word of governance could be in diverse ways and has various meanings which seems that governance is tending to be applied as rhetorical reasons rather than theoretical argumentations. This review article provides two philosophical approaches to understand governance concept in public administration study. They are pragmatic philosophy and phenomenology philosophy. Both philosophical approaches provide dynamic and complex issues that be considering by public administration scholars in future research agendas.

**Keywords:** governance, pragmatism, phenomenology, philosophy of public administration

**Abstrak.** Konsep tata kelola pemerintahan (governance) selama ini telah banyak digunakan di berbagai bidang studi. Governance juga seringkali digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi organisasi baik di sektor publik maupun swasta, menggambarkan organisasi formal maupun informal, dan menjelaskan organisasi sebagai sebuah jaringan internasional dan lokal. Di bidang administrasi publik, governance sebagai konsep telah diteliti dalam tiga dekade terakhir. Penggunaan kata governance menjadi sangat beragam dan memiliki berbagai makna yang cenderung membuat penggunaan kata governance cenderung sekedar retorika belaka dibandingkan sebagai sebuah argumentasi teoritis. Untuk menghindari kekeliruan pemahaman dalam pemaknaan governance, artikel ini mengurai dua pendekatan filosofis untuk memahami konsep tata kelola pemerintahan (governance) dalam kajian administrasi publik. Kedua pendekatan tersebut adalah pragmatik dan fenomenologi. Kedua pendekatan filosofis tersebut menawarkan berbagai isu riset yang dinamis dan kompleks yang bisa dipertimbangkan oleh para ilmuwan administrasi publik dalam agenda penelitian di masa mendatang.

**Kata kunci:** governance, pragmatisme, fenomenologi, filsafat administrasi publik

## INTRODUCTION

Social change in current global world due to rapid development of technology information, democratization wave, and various global challenges - such as global warming or global financial crisis – increase citizens' expectations on government institutions to tackle those challenges and other unexpected societal problems. Accordingly, the role and practice of government based on traditional theories of public administration are questioned that lead to theory of governance which is expected to transform a new strategy to access and exercise authority (Frederickson and Smith, 2003).

The concept of governance is commonly employed to characterize institutions both in public sector institutions and private domains, describe both formal and informal organizations, and define both international and local networks (Frederickson, 2005). In order to basically understand governance concept, let's start with a discussion of literal meaning of word of "governance" to develop fundamental understanding of governance concept. The word of governance is derived from Greek term *kubernan* means "steer" (Hughes, 2010) or *kybernesis* (κυβέρνησις) connotes to "piloting" (Morrel, 2009). The word of governance also lies in Latin term *gubernare* (Latin) which express

"steer", "direct, and "rule" (Hughes, 2010). Hughes (ibid) also quotes three related meanings for governance from the New Shorter Oxford. The first meaning refers to Middle English which is "the action, manner, or fact of governing"; government; "controlling or regulating influence, control, mastery" and "the state of being governed; good order". The second meaning of governance implies to later Middle English to the end of sixteenth century which means "the function or power of governing; authority to govern" and "a governing person or body". The last meaning derives from the late Middle English to mid-seventeenth century which stands for "conduct of life or business, behavior" (2010; p. 88). Another source also explains that governance comes from the word of "governance" which is a term of Middle English and it denotes government, control, behavior, self-control.

In the field of public administration, the concept of governance has been widely explored in last three decades. According to Frederickson (2005), the word of "governance" was firstly employed by Cleveland (1972) who stated that "what the people want is less government and more governance". Cleveland explored the concept of governance as a future organization system in his book *The Future Executive: A Guide for Tomorrow's Managers*. He argued that the organization is no longer managed by

hierarchical structure and controlled along by the top managers level. The organization will transform to be a system which is less control, power diffused and multilateral decision making. Cleveland assumed that organization will be structured in more horizontal way and governed in “collegial, consensual, and consultative manner” (Frederickson 2005; pp. 2-3).

Following Cleveland’s exploration of the governance concept as a future public management approach, the word “governance” comes up in everywhere and means anything and everything (Rhodes, 2000; Frederickson, 2005). Accordingly, this introduction section offers some definitions which examined by following scholars, international organizations and think thank institutions to characterize word “governance” to explore meaning of this concept. Governance is the way government gets its job done (Kettle, 1993). Governance is a transforming system from the bureaucratic state to third-party government or the hollow state (Rhodes 1997; Milward and Provan, 2000; Frederickson, 1997;2005). Governance refers to “a participatory process of governing the social, economic, and political affairs of a country, state, or local community through structures and values that mirror the society” (Farazmand, 2004; p.11). Governance is the interactions among government, public bodies, private sector and civil society institutions which aim to solve societal problems and create societal opportunities (Meuleman, 2008). Governance is “about running organizations, about steering as in the original derivation, how to organize, and how to set procedures for an organization to be run” (Hughes, 2010; p.88). In a recent article, Enroth (2014) interprets the discourse on governance as a shift perspective from “an art of governing premised on producing policy for a society or a population to an art of governing premised on solving problems with no necessary reference to any kind of society or population” (Ibid; p.61).

In addition, Weiss’s (2000) identifies some governance definitions which examined by some international organizations. The World Bank (1994) indicates governance is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources. United Nations for Development Program (1997) defines governance as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. International Institute of Administrative Sciences views governance refers to the process whereby elements in society wield power and authority, and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life, and economic and social development. Tokyo Institute of Technology articulates governance as the complex set of values, norms, processes and institutions by which society manages its development and resolves conflict, formally and informally. Institute of Governance, Ottawa describes governance as the institutions, processes and conventions in a society which determine how power is exercised, how important decisions affecting society are made and how various interests are accorded a place in such decisions. The Commission on Global Governance illustrate governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs in which a continuing process through co-operative action (Weiss, 2000; p.797).

In a more comprehensive perspective, Stoker (1998) characterizes five propositions of governance as following. The first is governance refers to a form of institutions and actors which have similar function with government. The second, governance identifies sharing responsibility and authority for solving societal problems. The third, governance is determined by dependence value among institutions and actors involved in collective actions. The fourth, governance implies to autonomous self-governing networks of agents. The last proposition is governance acknowledges government in flexible way to more focus on steering or guiding functions rather than commanding and controlling tasks.

From the previous discussion, it can be seen that the usage of the word of governance could be in diverse ways and has various meanings (Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1998). Moreover, Stoker (1998) highlights that “of course governance is sometimes used for rhetorical rather than substantive reasons” (p.18). Interestingly, some public administration scholars address different name of concept which theoretically same meaning with governance theory in terms of the involvement of private networks and non-state actors to response societal challenges. This stream of ideas would be referred to following theories: “administration conjunction” (See Frederickson, 1999), “hollow state” (See Milward and Provan, 2000) and “policy networks” (See Rhodes, 2006).

Accordingly, in order to clearly understand the concept of governance, it’s should be started from analyzing philosophical background and theoretical roots which inspire, influence and construct how the governance concept would be applied in empirical ways. In the body of governance literatures, some scholars examine various social and political theories which are considered to contributes in developing the theory of governance (See: Frederickson and Smith, 2003, Werlin, 2003; Meuleman, 2008; Chotray and Stoker, 2009; and Davies, 2011). This paper respectively suggests two main streams of philosophy which essentially shape the concept of governance; they are pragmatic philosophy and phenomenology philosophy. These philosophical perspectives are elaborated in the following discussion section.

## DISCUSSION

The pragmatic philosophy is based on the pragmatism concept. Pragmatism is commonly acknowledged as the American’s root of philosophical thought which initially developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), popularized by William James (1842-1910) and later extensively explored by two influential pragmatism philosophers, Thorstein Veblen (1857-1927) and John Dewey (1859-1953). Peirce criticizes subjective rationality of Cartesian-Kantian which considers the truth based on experience and self-reflection and recognizes the main function of knowledge is merely to describe and represent reality. In contrast, Peirce and James argue that the truth should be tested by practical consequence which means that it is not derived from “any particular event that did happen to somebody in the dead past, but what surely will happen to everybody in the living future who shall fulfill certain conditions” (Peirce, 1938; quoted in Halton, 2004;

p. 596). In other word, pragmatism regards the function of knowledge as an instrument for minimizing failure or problem solving.

Following this ontology, James formulates epistemology of pragmatism that “an idea is true if it works” not because it complies any abstract verification method (Der Pijl, 2009; p. 116). Similarly, as a pragmatist, Dewey (1948) also identifies truth as “merely the solution that most fully resolved the friction or strain” (Ross, 1991; quoted in Der Pijl, 2009; p. 120). Accordingly, Dewey presents a pragmatic rule which holds “in order to discover the meaning of idea ask for its consequence” (quoted in Knight and Johnson, 1999; p. 567). This concept is acknowledged as the logic of consequence which inspired from Pierce (1958) who encouraged pragmatist to “consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (Ibid).

As one of philosophical mainstreams in social science, pragmatism is expected to inspire scholars of public administration, especially researcher and public managers in the American public administration. Accordingly, Snider (2008) points out that Dewey’s book, *The Public and Its Problem*, shows an example of pragmatism in public administration issues. Dewey (1954) addresses the concept of public and function of the state in the frame of logic of consequence in this book. He begins with contrasting direct and indirect consequence of acts whereas “...those which affect the persons directly engaged in a transaction (refers to private), and those which affect others beyond those immediately concerned (refers to public)” (p. 12). However, although Dewey differentiates them but demarcation between private and public is movable that depends on experimental conception of the state. As Dewey states “the distinction between private and public is thus in no sense equivalent to the distinction between individual and social, ... Many private acts are social; their consequences contribute to the welfare of the community or affect its status and prospects. In the broad sense any transaction deliberately carried on between two or more persons in social in quality (Ibid; p. 13). Dewey then identifies public “consist of all those who are affected by the indirect consequence of transaction to such an extent that is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for” (Ibid; p. 15). Dewey then points out that the government refers to officials who regulate indirect consequences of social interaction and the state encompasses both public and government. Dewey defines “the state is the organization the public effected through official for protection of its interest shared by its members” (Ibid; p.33). The state, Dewey adds, should concern on ensuring stabilization of society. Therefore, “it demands power to perceive and recognize the consequences of the behavior of individuals joined in groups and to trace them to their source and origin” (Ibid; p. 32). Additionally, “it requires institution of government such that those having the renown and power which goes with the exercise of these functions shall employ them for the public and do not turn them to their own private benefit” (Ibid). In short, Dewey underlines the important role of institutions because social institutions

and reality social idea are interrelated in the context of causal nexus between action and outcomes. As Dewey says that, “[t]o say ... [something] is institutionalized is to say that it involves a tough body of customs, ingrained habits of actions, organized and authorized standards and methods of procedure” (quoted in Ralston, 2010; p. 77). Acknowledging institution in pragmatism follows the pragmatism perspective of rationality as “an outcome of the social process, a (set of) mental habit(s) developed over time (‘the rational consensus’), which has become encrusted, institutionalized” (Der Pijl, 2009; p. 119).

In the last decades, some public administration scholars still focus on classical pragmatism to explore current public administration issues, such as Shields (1998; 2003; 2008), Snider (2000; 2008) and Hildebrand (2005; 2008) (See also: Garrison, 2000; Stever, 2000; Evans, 2000; Stivers, 2008 and Ansell, 2011). Shields (1998) in her journal article *Pragmatism as Philosophy of Science: A Tool for Public Administration*, proposes the frame of pragmatism in conducting research in public administration. Snider (2000) addresses roots of public administration in pragmatism which refers to a found of public administration Charles A. Beard. Similarly, Hilderbrand (2008) supports the idea of Shields and Sniders about the influence of classical pragmatism into public administration. Hilderbrand highlights two main concepts of pragmatism, pragmatic objectivity and community inquiry, enhance democracy and support the public administration in solving public problems (Ibid). As he states that “the adoption of pragmatist principles can help public administration become more transparently objective in their judgments and more overtly democratic in their practices” (2008; p. 226).

In relating to governance theory, Shields (2008) argues that “networked world of governance relies less on formal institutional structures” which derives from Dewey’s and Addams’s concept of social democracy that accentuate independent institutional structure and collaborative action with all parties (p. 214). Furthermore, Shields also highlights that collaborative and participatory governance are clearly correlated with pragmatism’s community of inquiry in which those ideas concern on involvement of citizens and cooperation among public and private institutions to resolve public problems (Ibid).

Exploring pragmatism view in the sense of governance framework is expected to influence public administration scholars to employ two main theories - namely institutionalism theory and the New Public Management (NPM) theory – in conducting researches. The institutionalism views all societies are formed in a structural system which can be organized in formal or informal patterns (Peter, 2005). The institutionalism, especially as applied by rational choice perspective, configures governance as collective results of the institutions’ actions by reference of incentive and transaction costs through outsourcing and performance measure (Frederickson and Smith, 2003; Scott, 2004). Similarly, the NPM is characterized by a global public management that promotes market mechanism to relieve the pathologies of traditional bureaucracy (Kettle, 2000). Governance in the frame of NPM scholars derives to principle cooperation between government and society to tackle societal problem through encouraging

market competitions in public sectors (Rhodes, 1997; Kettle, 2000; Kooiman, 2003; Frederickson and Smith, 2003).

On the other side of the coin, phenomenological philosophy is based on phenomenology concept. Phenomenology is commonly acknowledged as the tradition of continental European philosophy throughout the 20th century which was firstly introduced by Edmund Husserl and later on extensively explored by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Smith, 2013). In his book *Ideas I*, Husserl addresses that "natural knowledge based on facts which become known through experience" (Macann, 1993; p. 24). Phenomenology refers to the philosophy of consciousness which analyzes experience based on subjective perspective or from the first person's viewpoint. They criticize the Cartesian which differentiating subject-object and offer a new perspective which make human existence and/or human consciousness as the starting point of the knowledge process (Morçöl, 2005). Deutscher (1973) argues that phenomenological discipline "is the social version of Descartes' *cogito, ergo sum* [I think, therefore I am]. For the phenomenologist, it becomes *cogitamus, ergo est* --- we think, therefore it is" (quoted in Greenfield, 1974; p. 7). Accordingly, phenomenologists argue that truth can only be understood based on the context that creates knowledge in which objective and participatory (Morçöl, 2005).

Additionally, the phenomenologists characterize knowledge based on three modes of contextuality, namely: biological, social and temporal. In the biological mode, knowledge is generated by biological process through five sense organs of human body. Knowledge is socially contextual means that the influence of social relations to knowing process shaped by social surrounded through value, legal norms, and language. Lastly, knowledge is temporally contextual because the knowledge process is dynamic in the sense of humans employ their previously acquired knowledge as a form of thinking to observe new knowledge (Morçöl, 2005).

Further, Merleau-Ponty argues that human beings as biological interactive and interdependent with their social and biological environments. Language and perceptions are interdependent whereas "on the one hand the speaking subject is rooted in the natural expressivity of the body situated in its perceptual field. On the other hand, the lived experience of the body as motor subject transcends itself through language and enters a linguistic field beyond its immediate perceptual one" (Chamberlain, 1993; quoted in Morçöl, 2005; p. 9). In this vein, Heidegger also points out that we experience ourselves in as part of others which means that we are "co-beings." We share our co-being through communication, and through communication we understand our environment. In short, being and knowing are socially contextual (Morçöl, 2005; p. 9).

In the public administration field, Ralph P. Hummel in his distinguished book *The Bureaucratic Experience* exercises phenomenological approach in criticizing bureaucracy. Hummel (1977) argues that bureaucracy converts social relation into control relation which tends to dehumanize human beings. It also changes the responsive way of communication to one way command

and defines reality from top down perspective. In short, Hummel views bureaucracy disconnects its participants from their contextuality (Ibid).

There are some public administration scholars who employ phenomenological approach in analyzing public organizations, public policy and relationship between state and citizens, such as Norton Long (1954), Michael M. Harmon (1980), and Morçöl (2005). Norton Long (1954) highlights negative impacts of shifting goals of public administration from public interests to merely organizational efficiency and control that tend to diminish its mission to serve the public (Waugh, Jr and Waugh, 2006). Michael M. Harmon (1980) offers the application of action theory to address active and intersubjective as social construction of reality within organizational process (Morçöl, 2005; Waugh, Jr and Waugh, 2006). Göktuğ Morçöl (2005) extensively elaborates complexity theory based on phenomenology and their implication to public administration theories. More recently, in his book *A Complexity Theory for Public Policy*, (Morçöl, 2012) outlines complexity theory to study dynamic nature of public policy. He argues that public policy is a complex system, which the relations among actors of this system are nonlinear and relations with its elements and with other system are co-evolutionary.

On the basis of governance discourse, phenomenologists view governance as a reciprocal cooperation between people and each other, their organizations and their environments to respond problems. This study suggests two main theories that analyze governance system based on phenomenological framework, namely: the complexity theory and the actor and network theory (ANT). These theories will be elaborated in following paragraphs.

The complexity theory actually derives from natural sciences such as biology, physics, chemistry, computer simulation, and mathematics. The complexity theory also applied in social science - including public administration - which emphasizes the emergence of order in dynamic non-linear system; addresses interconnectivity between or/and within the system and its environment; and acknowledges self-organization is the root of order in which co-evolve with other organizations (Kauffman, 1995; Mitleton-Kelly, 2003; Burnes, 2004; Klijn, 2008; Cairney, 2012). Accordingly, there are two essential concepts of the complexity theory interconnected with the governance concept, they are: self-organization and co-evaluation.

Self-organization implies to a process which determined by spontaneous communication among various groups or persons and abruptly cooperate in coordinated pattern to perform a task that further regenerate by itself with a distinctive internal dynamic (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003; Bovaird, 2008). The concept of self-organization associates with the concept of autopoiesis and acknowledged as a principal mode of governance system by Kooiman (2003) and Meuleman (2008). According to Kooiman (2003), self-governance is considered as an inherent capacity of societal entities at the actor level of governing interactions with specific capacity for dealing with internal societal dynamics and responding external influences (p. 92).

Co-evolution, in biological perspective, refers to a

reciprocal evolution that means organisms are related each other and particular organism changes in the context of the others (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003; Klijn, 2008). In addition, co-evolution is essentially determined by connectivity that can shape institutions and interactions between the co-evolving domains (individual, organizations, and groups) (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003; p.7). In the context of governance system, co-evolution implies to mutual and equal influences among institutions, agents, and/or individuals to respond and adapt with dynamic societal interaction in direct or indirect ways and further produce “combination of strategic actions” (Klijn, 2008).

The second essential theory which is also influenced by phenomenological approach is the actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005). The ANT was developed by French sociologists - Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law - who address a reciprocal action between nature (technology) and human (society). As Latour (1996) states that:

“[The ANT] does not limit itself to human individual actors but extend the word actor -or actant- to non-human, non-individual entities. Whereas social network adds information on the relations of humans in a social and natural world which is left untouched by the analysis, A[N]T aims at accounting for the very essence of societies and natures” (p. 370).

This concept is in line with the role of technology in societal dynamic in which technology plays role in shaping the society and vice versa (Cordella and Shaikh, 2006). Nevertheless, the ANT extends these “techno-deterministic and socio-deterministic” approaches and emphasizes equal interaction both human and non-human entities in the sense of “mutual constituency” (Ibid; p. 7).

In the light of governance perspective, the ANT is employed to analyze a pivotal role of technology information to enhance cooperation and coordination in public services between state and non-state networks through digital governance. Some studies apply the ANT in the frame of governance perspective are briefly explained as following. McBride (2003) studies the use of mobile communication technology in different countries to understand the relationship between the technology, the geographical, and the social environments. Stanforth (2006) employs the ANT as a framework to investigate the processes of implementing e-government as part of public sector reform in developing countries, particularly in Sri Lanka. Lastly, Dunleavy et al. (2006) argues that the NPM is dead and replaced by digital governance which offers “opportunity to create self-sustaining change in a broad range of closely connected technological, organizational, cultural, and social effects” (p. 467).

## CONCLUSION

Concept of governance has been explored in various field of studies. This paper provides a framework to understand governance issues in public administration approach based on two philosophical perspectives, namely pragmatism and phenomenologism.

Pragmatism shows governance as collaborative institutions - public, private and quasi-public-private agencies -and active involvement of citizens to better

resolve public problems and to achieve common goals based on useful approaches. Conversely, phenomenologists consider governance as a mutual influence system between governmental organizations, various societal institutions - including self-organizing units and networks - and individuals to respond societal challenges in the frame of co-evolutionary process.

Hence, these two philosophical approaches provide broad theoretical explanation to generate complex and dynamic issues of study that should be examined by public administration scholars in future research agendas.

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