


Research

Fostering effective governance through intragovernmental networks: a case of a justice, crime prevention and security cluster network

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Received: 23 October 2023 / Accepted: 20 March 2024

Published online: 28 March 2024

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Abstract

South Africa's crime challenge remains despite substantial public sector efforts. As wicked problems, including crime, often transcend the conventional capacities of public authorities to address them effectively, the primary aim of this research was to uncover the underlying dimensions that contribute to the effective functioning of an intragovernmental collaboration network. This research adopted a case study approach to delve into the structure and efficacy of the South African Justice, Crime Prevention, and Security Cluster. The chosen methodology and insider access to senior management produced rich descriptions not previously available to offer a conceptual understanding of balances and trade-offs required during a mandated and directed collaboration. Findings offer enhanced understanding, contributing to overcoming traditional barriers in public administration networks and reforming traditional hierarchical structures to offer meaningful governance alternatives or improvements to existing structures. Specifically, this study reveals gaps in the intragovernmental network and offers insights for governance and performance enhancements. Findings emphasize the importance of fostering a collaborative culture based on performance and accountability. The study underscores the need for more robust network directives, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and enhancing leadership attributes. It stresses the importance of efficient coordination, collaborative capability, and shared purpose. The study also suggests cluster-oriented budgeting and greater involvement of key stakeholders, including civil societies, research institutions, and academic establishments. These findings contribute to improving government-led networks in addressing complex challenges.

Keywords Intragovernmental collaboration · Governance · Collaborative governance

1 Introduction

If governing wicked problems is a balancing act [1], it seems fair to question how to reach a balance when governance involves multiple units of government representing, at times, conflicting or competing mandates. Daviter [2] recasts the governance focus, in these circumstances, from balance to trade-offs, which involves choosing one strategy over another and questioning the relevance of established policy evaluation criteria. His argument supports the notion that wicked problems often elude the autonomous capabilities of public authorities and that alternative problem-solving structures are required, given the complex, ill-defined, and interdependent nature of wicked problems [3, 4]. Thus, instead of trying to fit the governance of a wicked problem into the prisms of preexisting public sector reform agendas or seeking out

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universally applicable governance solutions, this study responds to calls to identify dimensions of policy governance that may offer a way out of the dilemma and help to advance the debate more systematically [2].

This paper contends that the crime phenomenon in South Africa qualifies as a wicked problem, given its enduring and pervasive characteristics and its intricate and multifaceted causation. Crime traverses across multiple organizational domains, necessitating comprehensive cooperation across all strata necessitating proficient inter-organizational alliances. Nevertheless, notwithstanding substantial collaborative endeavors among diverse entities and considerable resource allocation, the issue of crime in South Africa continues to elude effective control. For example, the South African Police Service (SAPS) reports that, on average, there were 520 murders per week in the country during the 2022 calendar year, making it one of the highest murder rates globally. This trend is in stark contrast to the global pattern, where the risk of being murdered has consistently declined over the past 25 years, as reported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in their 2019 Global Study on Homicide, which examined data from 202 countries. In South Africa, aside from a minor decrease due to COVID-19 in the 2020/21 reporting year, murders have increased annually since 2011/12 [5]. Like other policy programs established to address complex social policy issues, critics widely acknowledge that success is virtually impossible because the required levels of information, goal clarity, and coordination are too challenging to meet. Additionally, it is contended that technical approaches are bound to overlook the values, perspectives, and lived experiences of the stakeholders and citizens directly or indirectly assisted or involved in these interventions. Finally, attempting to address or tame wicked problems through applying an 'engineering' approach or 'orthodox planning rationally' proves inappropriate. Nevertheless, the consensus prevails that the paramount challenge for public governance in the modern era lies in identifying suitable policy processes to address wicked problems [6].

Given that wicked problems are unique and require unique solutions, this paper aims to uncover the key dimensions affecting efforts in addressing crime through the experiences of managers involved in intragovernmental collaborations at a strategic level. The Justice, Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) Cluster, one of the seven primary clusters within the South African government, was utilized as a case study to investigate the public sector governance context for addressing crime. While scholarly research has broadly identified dimensions of inter-organizational networks [7, 8], researchers have called for further investigation to understand how specific types of inter-organizational networks experience these dimensions [9, 10]. This paper presents a framework that sets clear guidelines for managers and policymakers to establish and direct intragovernmental networks. The chosen methodology and insider access to senior management produced rich descriptions not previously available to offer a conceptual understanding of balances and trade-offs required during a mandated and directed collaboration. Enhanced understanding will contribute to overcoming traditional barriers in public administration networks and reforming traditional hierarchical structures to offer meaningful governance alternatives or improvements to existing structures.

2 Theoretical framework

A framework for intragovernmental collaborations requires understanding the dimensions affecting collaborations and the interrelationships between these dimensions. No work was found that established this for mandated and directed collaborations, particularly in developing countries [11]. Existing literature predominantly concentrates on inter-organizational networks with a specific focus on selected dimensions of networks [12, 13]. Since less is known about the dimensions of intragovernmental networks [14], the theoretical foundation of this research study relied on the explanatory power of the resource dependency theory (RDT), principles of transaction cost economics (TCE), and the general systems theory supported by principles of complexity to identify dimensions of intragovernmental collaborations that are anchored in theory. RDT explains the need for an organization to rely on other organizations to reach some of its organizational goals. TCE explains cost considerations for inter-organizational networks, and the general systems theory and complexity principles identified dimensions specific to addressing wicked problems.

2.1 Resource dependency theory

Literature established that organizations often form inter-organizational relationships in response to uncertainty [15, 16]. A meta-analytical study [17] confirmed that the key factor in seeking inter-organizational relationships is resource dependence (i.e., seeking stability of resource availability or access to scarce resources).

As control over critical resources is often considered a determinant of organizational behavior, it is necessary to understand the expected resource exchange [18]. Applying the explanatory value of the Social Exchange Theory, exchange

dimensions relevant to explaining resource exchanges include goal clarity and consensus, power, and trust [19]. Participants achieve goal clarity and consensus when they clearly define and agree upon the domain of each participant in terms of their function to attain the overall objective of the agreement [20]. Typically, clusters structure government agreements for coordination rather than collaboration. In this regard, problems that require government units to work together in a much tighter formation become more challenging and require a more intensive collaborative effort [21], resulting in potential domain conflicts.

Power is relevant as it reduces the dependence and risks associated with the external environment. Hence, gaining power over resources means an organization has more control over its objectives [15, 16]. The primary power source within the criminal justice system and the South African public service is political. Cabinet Ministers are the most powerful politically. The strength of their constituencies or the complex social relationships within their political organizations determines their powers, which are not equal. The agenda of the organizations within the criminal justice system is thus affected by the power play within the political environment. Additionally, power within the criminal justice system lies in the relative size of organizations and their control of resources.

Finally, exchange relationships have elements of risk and trust due to uncertainties associated with other parties' intentions, availability of resources, and expected results [22, 23].

2.2 Principles of transaction cost economics

Even nonprofit organizations compete against each other for the resources within their environment but simultaneously collaborate to meet their common objectives, which are usually for the public good [24]. TCE concerns economic decisions on sourcing goods and services outside the organization [25]. This theory finds resonance with the current research since the challenge of intragovernmental collaborations is not only a sociological problem of coordination but also an economic problem of efficiency. Intragovernmental networks, therefore, must address coordination in delivering public services and ensure that the collaboration lowers the transaction costs to achieve efficiencies from working collaboratively [26]. The current study extends the Resource Based View of a firm [27] to include the relational view and knowledge-based views of the organization [28]. The relational view of the firm identifies the ability to build inter-organizational relationships, resulting in a collaborative advantage at an inter-organizational level [29]. The current study further acknowledged the argument that an effective inter-organizational network needs effective knowledge management to be successful [30]. Organizations and participants need to effectively disseminate, receive, and integrate knowledge to successfully integrate different perspectives from various organizations in knowledge management [31].

2.3 General systems theory and complexity

The RBT and TCE provided insight into understanding networks. However, in recognition of the pervasive and aggressive nature of crime as a wicked problem and the complex structure of the South African criminal justice system, the study further relied on the General Systems Theory's explanatory powers supported by principles of complexity [1, 32, 33]. Wicked problems are pervasive and multidimensional; they involve diverse stakeholders and require considerable inter-organizational effort to tame. These problems have been described as incomprehensible and resistant to solution [32, 34].

Crime in South Africa is a wicked problem because it portrays all characteristics. Furthermore, straightforward rules do not govern the JCPS Cluster; instead, it operates as a complex adaptive system that evolved through interactions with other subsystems and its operating environment [35–38]. The criminal justice system consists mainly of three subsystems, namely police services, courts, and correctional services [38, 39]. Different sets of legislation and conflicting mandates govern individual subsystems, making them complex. For example, high conviction rates and lengthy prison sentences pursued by prosecutors tend to overstress the correctional facilities. Different subsystems complicate the system further due to their varying levels of independence. For example, prosecutorial and judicial independence enshrined in the South African Constitution can present practical coordination challenges. Moreover, the system and its subsystems interact and receive environmental feedback. The environment comprises a broad range of stakeholders, including community members, non-governmental institutions, and other governmental institutions.

Furthermore, principles of complexity, namely self-organization [40], emergence [41, 42], and co-evolution [43, 44], apply to the South African criminal justice system. The current study did not treat subsystems of the criminal justice systems independently. Instead, it acknowledged the interdependencies and interrelationships within the system and relied on dimensions identified in the literature to address wicked problems. These dimensions are:

Organizational learning and mental models: In dynamic complex environments where cause and effect do not neatly follow each other [45, 46], 'shared mental models' can challenge prevailing thoughts, leading to organizational learning and improved problem-solving capabilities [45].

Active citizenship: Public service challenges in general and wicked problems in particular affect citizens. Managers thus find themselves navigating the challenge of addressing wicked problems within a bureaucratic environment while dealing with citizens who often perceive such problems differently [46, 47]. It is, therefore, essential to ensure that any attempt at taming a wicked problem that affects citizens includes the citizens.

Leadership: To tame wicked problems, a leader must steer conversations, coordinate stakeholders, and implement systems that enable the achievement of goals [48, 49]. Leadership skills required include reflexivity, resilience, responsiveness, and revitalization. Furthermore, leaders should be able to identify blockages and stagnation and implement measures to address these [1].

Consensus building: Wicked problems lack agreement regarding the definition of the problem and the solutions to the problem [31]. However, to begin to tame a wicked problem, a consensus on the way forward needs to be established. Agreeing on the approaches to move forward without necessarily agreeing on either the problem or its solution constitutes consensus. Building consensus is a continuous and iterative process that should not be rushed, as it is cumbersome and can take significant time to complete [7, 50].

The literature review established that inter-organizational networks can be explained through several theories supported by dimensions identified to address wicked problems. However, these theories have shortcomings in that they address objectives at an organizational level. In other words, the choice to establish partnerships is driven by the advantages to the organization rather than the benefits that accumulate within the partnership itself. Furthermore, public sector organizations, primarily government entities, do not consistently conform to the mold of inter-organizational networks, mainly when relationships are formed within a government (local, provincial, or national). This lack of consistency arises because, from a governance point of view, two government units cannot strictly maintain the same level and type of independence as two private sector organizations [51]. In many cases, intragovernmental networks are mandated to carry out a legislative mandate to enforce a regulation or implement a political mandate, which differs from a voluntary collaborative initiative by participants in response to a challenge or market force [52].

In addition to acknowledging the disparity in formation and interactions within the network, researchers recognize a lack of studies of mandated networks [14, 53–55]. The current study specifically responded to calls from scholars to contribute to a better understanding of context-specific networks [8, 9, 56] and public sector networks that are both mandated and directed [54, 55].

3 Research method

The research aimed to develop a framework to establish and direct intragovernmental networks to confront wicked problems. The research was undertaken through a constructivist approach, acknowledging knowledge development through multiple realities and experiences. The research adopted a qualitative methodology in alignment with its objectives. The current study employed an instrumental case study design [57] as the research method. The primary purpose of an instrumental case study is not only to understand the intricacies and dynamics within the chosen case but also to use that understanding to contribute to broader theoretical frameworks or to inform applications in other contexts. This type of case study design is particularly valuable when researchers seek rich contextual understanding, aim to develop, or test theories, or want to address real-world problems by deriving practical insights from the specific case under investigation.

By examining the JCPS Cluster as an instrumental case, the study aimed to identify the dimensions and their inter-relationships that impact the effectiveness of the cluster's collaboration and decision-making processes through the perspectives of various governmental entities involved in the network. Data was collected in two phases: a focus group session and structured interviews.

3.1 Case description

The South African Government has established seven primary clusters to promote a cohesive approach to governance. These clusters play a crucial role in governance by ensuring alignment of government-wide priorities, overseeing the implementation of priority programs, and providing a platform for consultation on cross-cutting matters presented to the Cabinet [58]. The focus of the current research is the JCPS Cluster. This cluster is responsible for

preventing and combating crime and improving the efficiency of the criminal justice and correctional services systems through a mandated network. Led by the Minister of Police, the JCPS Cluster comprises various government agencies, subcommittees, and task teams responsible for addressing different aspects of crime. These agencies include the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, South African Police Service, National Prosecuting Authority, Department of Correctional Services, Department of Home Affairs, State Security Agency, and other relevant departments and entities involved in justice, crime prevention, and security matters. The JCPS Cluster is an important mechanism to foster collaboration and facilitate the exchange of information among government agencies, ultimately working towards a more coordinated approach in addressing crime and security challenges in South Africa. While acknowledging the challenges within the cluster, there have been notable areas of success. Joint achievements that contribute to national stability and the restoration of the country's safety and security infrastructure are, for example, reported annually by Ministers of the JCPS Clusters in response to the South African State of the Nation Address [59].

3.2 Research participants

Typically, restrictions on access to public sector networks exist due to national security, confidentiality, privacy, and political sensitivity concerns. Additionally, government networks could be subject to legal and regulatory constraints that limit access to information. In this context, the present study gained an advantage from an insider researcher who was pivotal in securing permissions and clearances to access the network. Her involvement was furthermore instrumental in steering the purposeful sampling approach [57]. Additionally, using an insider researcher provided unique and valuable insights into the functioning of the public sector networks, which would not have been possible without this approach.

The research phenomenon explored in the case setting was the intragovernmental collaboration, and two key participant groups were identified: (i) those who have knowledge and experience regarding the phenomenon (senior managers), and (ii) those with power over it (top managers) [60]. Table 1 provides a summary of the sampling criteria used to identify eligible participants.

In total, 22 senior managers satisfied the criteria for inclusion in the study. Purposive sampling was used to invite 16 senior managers to participate. On the day of the focus group, 10 participants managed to attend, but six had to cancel at short notice due to pressing issues. Each participant completed and signed a consent form, agreeing to participate in the study and consenting to the publication of anonymized findings. The 10 participants consisted of five senior managers from the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, a senior manager from the South African Police Service, one from the National Prosecuting Authority, one from the Department of Social Development, one from the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation and one from the JCPS Strategy Task Team secretariat. During the interview phase, three senior managers from Legal Aid South Africa, the Department of Correctional Services, and the National Prosecuting Authority participated.

The JCPS Cluster has 10 top managers who met the participation criteria. Five top managers from different departments agreed to be interviewed, representing the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (2), the Department of Correctional Services (1), the National Prosecuting Authority (1), and the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (1).

Table 1 Sample criteria

Management level	Job titles	Experience within JCPS Cluster	Management band
Senior managers	Director Program Chair Chief Director Head [of specialized units]	More than 2 years	13–14
Top managers	Director General (DG)—(equivalent to Chief Executive) Chief Deputy Commissioner Deputy National Director	More than 2 years	15–16

3.3 Data collection

For data collection, a focus group, followed by individual semi-structured interviews, was used to gather participants' lived experiences. The data collection process is illustrated in Fig. 1.

For senior managers, a focus group session with ten participants was deemed appropriate, in line with the recommended number of six to 12 participants [61]. An experienced, and independent facilitator was appointed to lead the focus group discussion to avoid potential bias or influence from the insider researcher.

The facilitator initiated the focus group by introducing the research topic and providing a strategic overview of crime challenges and cluster-based approaches. The facilitator maintained a neutral stance to prevent influencing participants' thoughts. Subsequently, participants engaged in a discourse surrounding the issue statement: "Discuss factors influencing intragovernmental collaboration within the JCPS Cluster." Following this discussion, a 15-min silent brainstorming session enabled participants to independently capture their ideas on Post-It Notes, which were then collectively displayed on a wall grid.

In inductive coding (open coding), participants organized the Post-It Notes into thematical clusters, refining the arrangement until consensus was reached. After the initial clustering, participants were prompted to collaboratively adjust, expand, or subdivide clusters for a consensual arrangement. Five minutes were allocated for repositioning notes. Subsequently, participants assigned theme names to each cluster. Descriptions of the themes identified in the focus group were outlined to conclude the work undertaken through the focus group. The write-up of the recommendations was grounded in the text, and care was taken to use the words of the participants [57]. These descriptions were subsequently used to provide background during the individual interviews.

Ten senior managers partook in interviews, with three not engaged in the focus group. The interview duration ranged from 45 to 90 min and was conducted by the researcher (distinct from the facilitator). The aim was to obtain participants' comprehensive insights and personal experiences regarding the themes highlighted in the focus group discussions. Participants were also requested to consider the impact of and interrelationships between themes. In the interest of triangulation, the same semi-structured interviews were undertaken with five top managers who participate within the governance structures of the cluster.

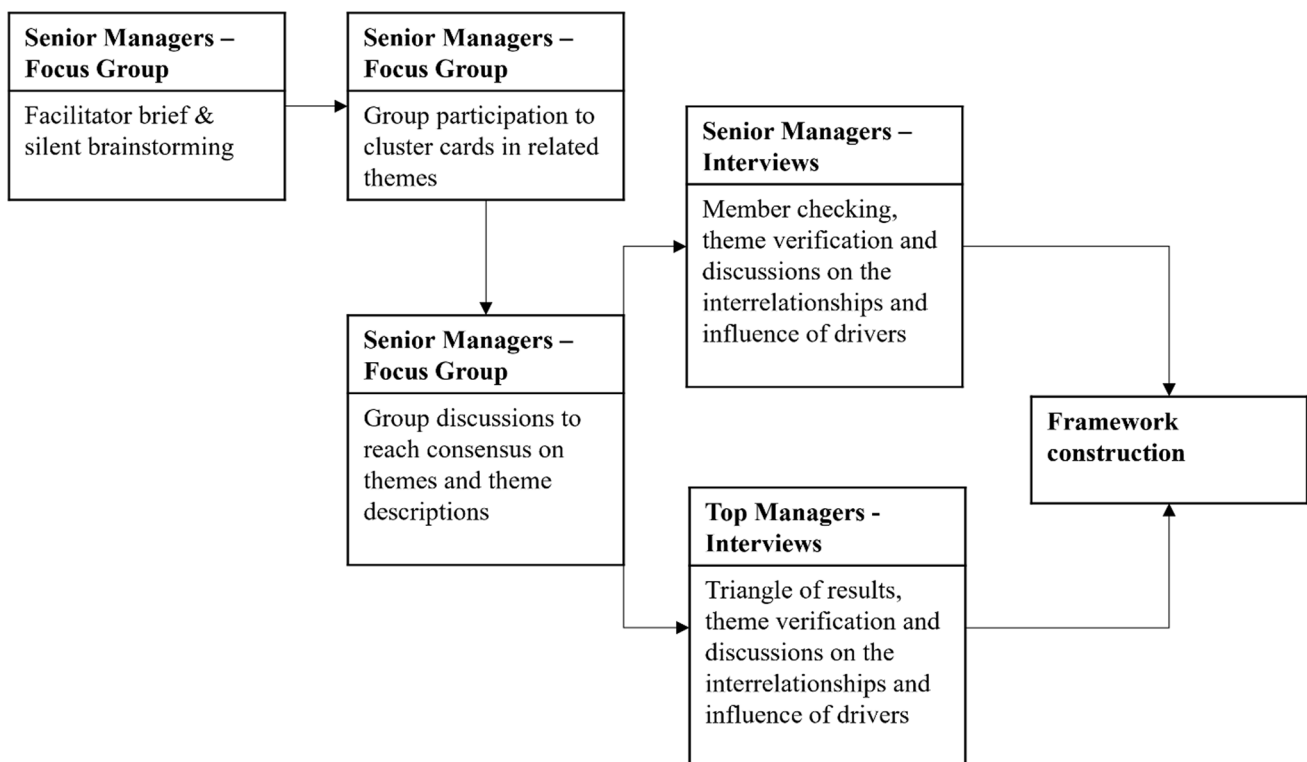


Fig. 1 Data Collection Process

4 Results

During the focus group session, eight distinct themes emerged, each bearing relevance to the effectiveness of the JCPS intragovernmental collaboration. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to delve deeper into the elucidation of these themes and to consider the interrelationships of themes. The researchers systematically employed the insights furnished by the participants to systematically explain and transmute these themes into the fundamental dimensions inherent in inter-organizational networks.

4.1 Collaborative capability

Participants named this dimension as 'silos' in the initial thematic coding, portraying an atmosphere wherein the constituent entities within the JCPS Cluster tend to prioritize their individual goals over collaborative and systematically rationalized objectives. To illustrate, law enforcement entities often emphasize the pursuit of arrest statistics rather than addressing more intricate criminal challenges that necessitate cooperation with external agencies and governmental entities.

"At the moment, everyone is just chasing their own constitutional mandates. If that mandate is policing, then they only focus on policing. If the mandate is prosecution, they focus on prosecution." (Participant 3)

Furthermore, participants underscored the entrenched nature of these silos, highlighting their formidable resistance to dissolution. They identified instances of silo mentality within their respective organizational frameworks while also elucidating that these issues extend beyond the confines of the JCPS Cluster to encompass other clusters that are expected to engage in collaborative efforts.

"I want to say that the clusters of government actually work in silos, and that is a bigger danger because we need, in actual fact, [a] collaborative approach between the various clusters, and we need bigger coordination between the various activities of the clusters ... The causes of crime have a social dimension." (Participant 7)

Evidence pointed towards specific individuals prioritizing their agendas over the interests of their organizations and the overarching JCPS Cluster. The overall efficacy of the JCPS Cluster was observed to be detrimentally affected by this behavior:

"Whatever the collective decides can be hampered by the 'my way or the highway' mentality. If I do not believe in the common agenda of the collective because there are no consequences, I either misinform the institutions about the direction to be taken at that particular time, or I disengage." (Participant 6)

Senior managers bear the responsibility of fulfilling multiple organizational objectives. These obligations encompass goals within their respective government departments, aligned with legislative mandates, and contributions towards collaborative cluster-wide objectives. A senior manager highlighted that their departmental mandates often take precedence. Consequently, departmental constraints can eventually relegate collaborative endeavors, even when concerted efforts are directed towards pursuing joint objectives that contribute significantly to broader aims:

"Backsliding is that we work together [in the] first quarter, [and] second quarter [but during the] third quarter, fourth quarter, you see people not attending meetings or working sessions that are critical because they are also under pressure to make sure that their APP [Annual Performance Plan] targets are reached because it's towards the end of the year." (Participant 6)

Participants unanimously conveyed that individual departments are the genesis of silos and the accompanying silo mentality, and this phenomenon is not confined solely within the boundaries of the JCPS Cluster. Furthermore, the impact of silos extends beyond the JCPS Cluster itself, encompassing other governmental clusters that require collaborative efforts. The subsequent excerpts represent a selection of quotes illustrating this experience:

"As much as government's intention is to break the silo mentality, it is so ingrained into institutions that we work for. The reason is we have hierarchies, and we have leaders and managers. Let's say the planning environment. So, the planning environment will work in isolation from the monitoring environment." (Participant 9)

“Even inter-cluster. If you can look at the Economic Cluster, there are a lot of things that they must do to solve problems that downstream create work for the Security Cluster. Things like your illicit economy, fake goods coming into the country and creating security problems downstream.” (Participant 3)

This dimension highlights the prominent role that power assumes in this collaboration. Furthermore, the current arrangement presents substantial evidence of conflicts between different domains. The pervasive issue of silo mentality poses a significant challenge to the collaborative capabilities of the JCPS Cluster and other governmental clusters. The prioritization of individual departmental goals over collective objectives inhibits effective cooperation and hinders the pursuit of holistic solutions.

4.2 Coordination

Participants agreed that numerous structures aimed at similar objectives resulted in many meetings and insufficient time for actual implementation. The absenteeism from meetings emerged as a problem with implications for continuity, frequently resulting in miscommunication of action items and unnecessary duplication of structures addressing comparable issues. A noteworthy concern was the lack of adherence to or enforcement of decisions, thereby rendering such decisions ineffective. Given these concerns, stakeholders deemed it essential to re-evaluate systems and structures to ensure the optimal functioning of the cluster:

“The problem again with red tape, even from the highest level, is that there’s no understanding of what all these structures are supposed to be doing. All these structures – what informs their existence?” (Participant 13)

“I think there is a challenge with the coordinating structures. For example, you come to the JCPS DG Forum, and then NATJOINTS [National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure] would present a report, but the report doesn’t take into consideration what happens in the other committees. ... So, it’s not necessarily bureaucracy, etc., but it’s a redefining of what the structure should be doing and making sure that they have proper terms of reference that will promote alignment and coordination and give a bigger picture in terms of the criminal justice system and the JCPS Cluster.” (Participant 7)

Four participants highlighted that the absence of coordination becomes particularly conspicuous since the cluster lacks control over budgetary and resource allocation. Consequently, even in mutually agreed upon collaborative projects, inadequate coordination leads to disparate implementation outcomes. Participants emphasized the necessity for dedicated budgets allocated to identified cluster projects to tackle issues stemming from silos and to mitigate the problem of uneven implementation:

“Because projects are allocated per department, now it becomes a problem when you have integrated projects. So, it means those budgets must still be spent in that silo approach, which discourages and defeats the rationale behind collaboration and cooperation.” (Participant 1)

“Maybe we got an increased overtime budget and [are] able to sustain and deploy more resources. Yes, we [the SAPS] have [an] additional R10 million for overtime, but do you [the DOJCD] have enough resources to deploy more prosecutors, magistrates? You don’t. So how does it impact you to be able to meet up with our expectations of us getting additional funding?” (Participant 4)

This dimension accentuated the significance of clarity of goals and the importance of well-defined structures, void of overlapping terms of reference. Addressing the coordination challenges within the JCPS Cluster necessitates a comprehensive approach aimed at streamlining structures, enhancing communication, and aligning goals.

4.3 Culture

Participants linked behaviors within the cluster to a ‘cluster culture,’ deriving from the prevailing ‘public service mentality.’ Concerns with cluster culture included non-compliance, lack of accountability, and poor consequence management.

“Once you are in there, you are in and you’ll be out at pension age. Whether you perform or not, you can’t be fired unless you do something wrong like stealing ... So, it’s a culture of not giving your best. It’s a non-performance culture ... This is a very bad culture.” (Participant 3)

They expressed regret over the recurring circumstance where colleagues, even at the highest echelons of government, are often not held accountable. Furthermore, most agreed that there is a distinct absence toward transforming into a performance-centric organization.

“Also, the issue of participation. There’s that tendency of sending wrong people to these meetings. For example, the Directors General’s Cluster meeting, it is a DG’s meeting. The expectation is that you will have high-ranking officials, but instead, they would send people who cannot really take decisions. It’s not only the DG’s Cluster, it’s most of the structures within the cluster ...” (Participant 8)

The challenges associated with the prevailing cluster culture and the ‘public service mentality’ necessitate a transformative effort to cultivate a performance-driven ethos within the JCPS Cluster.

4.4 Leadership

Participants perceived leadership as pivotal in steering the cluster’s endeavors, pinpointing concerns such as deficient accountability, unsuitable leadership approaches, and a scarcity of ethical conduct and enthusiasm as predominant issues. They underscored the significance of visionary leadership within the cluster and stressed that executives struggled to ignite the cluster’s enthusiasm in confronting the formidable challenge of crime.

“A lot of people are just super managers. They don’t see a role of actually leading: bringing people together, inspiring, sharing a specific vision that people will believe in and follow. Very few people actually get inspiration from their leaders.” (Participant 3)

The interplay between political and administrative spheres, cited as a challenge, might contribute to the leadership challenges within the JCPS Cluster. Directors-General appointed by Cabinet Ministers often grapple with navigating administrative and political concerns, resulting in occasional conflicts.

“Leadership is an even bigger challenge. At levels at which you require leadership, then you get political appointments. A political appointee comes with a political agenda. So, they are not there to provide leadership just on the business of the department to move the department forward; they come with a political agenda.” (Participant 12)

Effective leadership is indispensable for navigating the complexities of the JCPS Cluster, yet challenges such as deficient accountability, incompatible leadership approaches, and the political-administrative interplay hinder its potential impact.

4.5 Goal consensus

Participants highlighted the absence of a unified perspective concerning the purpose of the cluster. Issues cited were the absence of shared values and vision, a deficit in common objectives, and ambiguous mandates. At the core of these divergent goals lies the tension arising from conflicting objectives within the entities of the JCPS Cluster and even within the community. Participants generally held the sentiment that further efforts are requisite to identify the objectives that contribute to the enhanced operation of the criminal justice system.

“But they are conflicting because Correctional Services says we are overcrowded. But on the other hand, the Police are arresting more people ... Prosecutors, they make sure that they record high conviction rates. It is conflicting priorities ...” (Participant 2)

“...and the impact of unlawful arrest and detention across the cluster has an impact on corrections. It has an impact on Justice and the Courts and now civil roles and criminal roles, and it had an impact on civil litigation against the State.” (Participant 15)

“The word common goals – Let’s remove it because we can never have common goals. But let’s have the goals that will ensure an effective functioning criminal justice within limited resources – but not common.” (Participant 14)

Achieving consensus on goals within the JCPS Cluster is essential for successful collaboration, yet challenges such as disparate mandates and conflicting priorities hinder this alignment.

4.6 Joint resourcing

The theme of 'Resources' created robust discussions. While participants acknowledged the necessity of resource sharing to attain collective goals, their experience within the JCPS Cluster reflected a climate of resource competition. Participants believed that augmenting budgets are achievable only by diverting resources from other entities within the cluster.

"When it comes to resources, it is always a question of what more can I get for my department? It is not where are the biggest collective pains in the process in the value chain. So, everyone just competes for what they can get for themselves." (Participant, 3)

Resource utilization was identified as an important consideration. Most participants emphasized an imbalance in the staffing levels across various departments within the criminal justice services, noting that requests for additional resources often go unheeded. Moreover, three participants highlighted concerns regarding allocating resources for crime prevention. They stressed the importance of dedicating substantial resources to this domain, given its crucial role in the broader effort to combat crime.

"For instance, there's a report that we commissioned with the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation looking at resources that [the] government deploys towards addressing violence against women and children. Only 9% [of the budget] is for prevention programs. We deploy more on combating violence, on SAPS, and all that. There's a lot of research, papers that have been presented by the Institute of Security Studies and other researchers, that show clearly that we need to redeploy our resources on prevention." (Participant 1)

Participants were intrigued by the potential for enhanced efficiencies offered by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the allocated resources for its implementation. However, there are signs that collaborative ICT endeavors have fallen short of anticipated benefits due to delays and suboptimal departmental cooperation. A participant eloquently conveyed the hurdles encountered in integrating processes within the cluster:

"From arrest, a person is captured on the system. We do not know how many people are repeat offenders because systems are not talking to each other. We must do rehabilitation. But you are reading a form that is handwritten, and by the time the court sentences, you do not have the form completed during arrest. The charge warrant is not there." (Participant 11)

Participants identified issues of ICT resources and poor integration as the failure of leadership to appropriately guide the identification, implementation, and use of ICT systems.

"The one thing that is a big gap is IT resources. But is it not because of financial resources that IT doesn't work. No. It is because of poor management that proper IT systems cannot be developed. But sometimes, when IT systems are developed, the departments can't get people to use them. You find a comprehensive IT system that has been built, and people still stick to old reporting ways ... In no time, it becomes obsolete, and then they start a new process to procure a new IT system." (Participant 12)

Participants raised doubts about the rationale behind permitting departments to allocate budgets for cluster projects, effectively subjecting cluster agreements to the discretion of individuals who might not have been involved in the decision-making process.

"Again, because projects are allocated per department, now it becomes a problem when you have integrated projects. So, it means those budgets must still be spent in that silo approach" (Participant 1)

Moreover, participants pointed out that when planning joint implementation, spending the money through the cluster may not be possible because accountability rests with Accounting Officers. However, they stressed the importance of ring-fencing the budget to enable a more cohesive and coordinated response to the crises.

"Each department gets its own funds. Justice gets its own, Police get their own, and so on. If there was some sort of integrated financing, you see. Not for everything. You would say, for instance, gender-based violence it's a big issue. You identify about ten issues, for example, issues of victims; there would be an integrated pool of funds." (Participant 2)

The 'joint resourcing' dimension highlighted the critical need for effective resource allocation and utilization within the JCPS Cluster. Despite recognizing resource sharing as essential for collective success, challenges persist in terms of resource competition, imbalances in staffing, and suboptimal utilization of technology. Furthermore, this dimension offers limited evidence to substantiate effective knowledge management practices.

4.7 Planning

Planning within the cluster is well-structured, encompassing both comprehensive five-year plans and concise one-year plans. These plans are meticulously crafted, cabinet approved, and are subject to monitoring for effective execution. Nonetheless, participants pointed out that the five-year cluster plan essentially amalgamates inputs from individual departments, indicative of a silo-oriented approach. This approach fails to capture the strategic shift necessary for a distinct approach to combating crime and achieving results. Consequently, the silo-based plan lacks the manifestation of collective endeavors aimed to address crime on a holistic level or in specific focal areas.

"It was a problem because after we had a report that we thought was a bigger cluster plan, departments aside would still send departmental inputs, which is problematic. The JCPS is a value chain. So, when we talk of the cluster plan, it must talk to all the cluster departments and not to individual departments. And that is the problem that we don't win on." (Participant 8)

The planning process within the JCPS Cluster demonstrates solid organizational structure and meticulous execution, but the current approach tends to prioritize departmental inputs, reflecting a silo-oriented strategy.

4.8 Execution

Participants identified the effective execution of cluster plans as 'crucial' to achieving desired cluster outcomes.

"I think it is a challenge in the cluster, for example, if we look at how many strategies we have in the cluster. But how many of them are implemented fully? Executed?" (Participant 8)

Additional concerns encompass a deficiency in the skills required for executing projects of a cluster nature, alongside insufficient governance measures for overseeing such projects:

"But if you do not have the right skills and the right level of performance, you have low morale, and [if] you don't have the high-performance culture, you will find that plans are just suggestions. People are not worried when plans are not executed on time. They always find excuses that 'this was not done because of 1, 2, 3.'" (Participant 3)

Effective execution can turn plans into tangible results, but only with adequate governance mechanisms for project oversight. Additionally, execution requires appropriate skill sets for handling cluster projects.

5 Discussion

The empirical study identified eight dimensions inherent in inter-organizational networks. Even though literature established that dimensions identified through principles of complexity are vital to addressing wicked problems, this was not confirmed in the current study. These dimensions were only mentioned fleetingly by the participants. However, utilizing efficient knowledge management and organizational learning to enhance practices, alongside fostering active citizenship participation in tackling crime, offers promise towards taming the crime situation. As such these dimensions were considered to develop a framework for mandated and directed intra-governmental networks. This framework is presented in Fig. 2. The framework categorizes dimensions as antecedents, endorsing those that contribute to strategic planning and ultimately result in the execution of the strategy. Continuous feedback, backed by dimensions that aid in refinement, enhances both the process and outcome. These dimensional interpretations, articulated by participants and aligned with definitions derived from the literature review, are presented in their original explications in the reported literature.

Successful implementation of the framework requires decision-makers to consider several policy changes. Findings suggest gaps between current leadership attributes and those identified in the literature as relevant for addressing wicked problems. Decision-makers must, therefore, identify network leaders with appropriate attributes, attitudes, and behaviors [1, 48, 49], ahead of political and other considerations. The recognition of culture as a prominent dimension

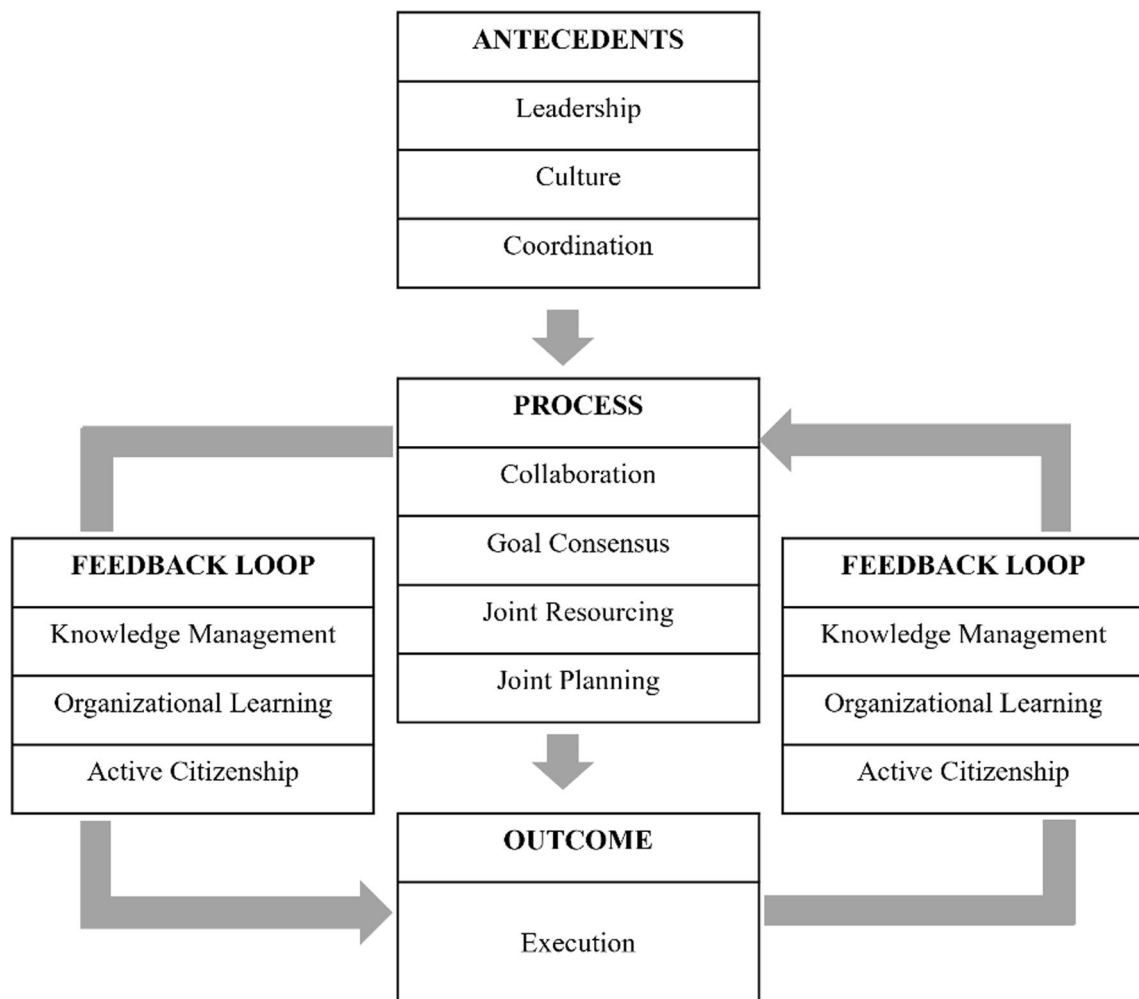


Fig. 2 A Framework for Mandated and Directed Intragovernmental Networks

holds two noteworthy implications. First, it underscores the importance for the JCPS Cluster and intragovernmental networks to purposefully cultivate a robust collaborative culture rooted in performance and accountability. Proactive measures are required to instill such a culture, including targeted training programs emphasizing accountability, result-oriented decision-making, and consequence management. Second, it calls for further research into culture within mandated and directed networks, which are notoriously challenging in functionality and effectiveness.

A salient observation from the study is that mandated and directed networks demand more robust directives across all levels of involvement. Despite being mandated, the JCPS Cluster was noted to employ mild persuasion when it came to pivotal matters like participation, coordination, budgeting, and planning. More precise and assertive mandates are required, especially in environments where lack of discipline is recognized as a concern. Establishing a clear hierarchy of coordinating structures with well-defined roles and responsibilities is imperative to improve coordination. Regular reviewing and refining these structures and establishing effective communication channels can minimize redundancy and miscommunication. Furthermore, data revealed extensive gaps between current leadership attributes and those identified in the literature as relevant for addressing wicked problems. Fostering a leadership culture that prioritizes shared vision, ethical conduct, and proactive engagement is paramount. Encouraging collaboration between political appointees and administrative leaders while clearly defining their roles can help alleviate conflicts and promote coherent decision-making [1, 48]. Future research could employ network theory to examine the influence of weak and strong connections, and particular hierarchical elements that impact intra and inter-group dynamics.

While scholars frequently pinpoint strategic planning as a primary contributor to the systematic breakdown of government-led networks, this study highlights that efficient coordination and collaborative capability are essential considerations. A two-fold approach is proposed to establish a more robust collaborative capability. First, fostering a culture

of shared purpose and inter-departmental understanding is essential. By addressing the root causes of silo mentality and nurturing a collaborative mindset, the JCPS Cluster and other clusters can better address complex challenges and work towards achieving broader societal objectives. Second, embracing robust knowledge management practices and fostering shared mental models can facilitate smoother ICT integration, better resource distribution, and enhanced collaborative efforts. By synergizing effective resource management with improved knowledge sharing, the JCPS Cluster can drive more impactful and coordinated actions toward its objectives. Resource allocation practices should also be reviewed. Conventional budgeting methods, for example, employed within the public service, were discovered to hinder the implementation of joint operations and projects within the JCPS Cluster. The existing procedures granted individual entities unrestricted organizational autonomy in budget expenditure, consequently impacting the direction and speed of executing joint programs. A distinct cluster-centric budgeting approach can be instituted to address this, necessitating a novel governance mechanism. Given the intricate interconnections and interdependencies, the National Treasury could orchestrate a cluster-oriented budgeting process.

A significant outcome of this study underscored the oversight regarding the significance of key stakeholders. Effectively addressing complex issues demands a broader engagement of active citizenship to collaboratively devise a more resilient action plan against these challenges. This involvement is essential to facilitate ongoing refinement and revitalization. Entities such as civil societies, research institutions, academic establishments, and data analysts, which had only been marginally engaged within the JCPS Cluster, should assume a more prominent role. These entities should provide pertinent input, guidance, and support to the government's initiatives to tackle complex problems while offering essential enhancement feedback. Although the notions of active citizenship and its associated dimensions are not novel, this study explicitly situates them within the broader network context due to their importance.

6 Conclusion

This paper contributes to the field of inter-organizational networks by furnishing insights into government-led collaborations, specifically those mandated and directed, within the context of a developing country. This research addresses the need for comprehensive investigations into inter-organizational collaborations [9, 10]. Doing so contributes to the broader understanding of various dimensions of intra-governmental collaboration and networks, enriching the existing knowledge base in this domain.

What started as a complex set of dimensions and relationships has been defensibly and systematically simplified into a parsimonious model. When comparing theory with practice, seven dimensions widely discussed in the literature were confirmed as dimensions of the JCPS Cluster network and relevant to explaining the intragovernmental collaboration. These are 'Collaborative Capability,' 'Coordination,' 'Leadership,' 'Goal Consensus,' 'Joint Resourcing,' 'Joint Planning,' and 'Execution.' On the contrary, two dimensions identified through the Resource Dependency Theory, namely 'Trust' and 'Power,' which were prominent in inter-organizational literature, did not prominently feature in the JCPS Cluster network. Instead, 'Culture' was established as an additional dimension. A plausible explanation could be that intragovernmental collaborations are mandated and that behaviors that impede the functionality and effectiveness of the cluster have taken root. In this case, participants dismissed trust and instead questioned the agendas of representatives. Power was imposed through political mandates and hence not questioned. However, culture offered an alternative to create a commitment to accountability and responsibility. Even though literature established that dimensions identified through principles of complexity are vital to addressing wicked problems, this was not confirmed in the current study.

While the current research successfully met its objectives, there are opportunities for further investigation that could expand upon the undertaken work. One such avenue involves delving into additional research to examine how culture affects mandated and directed collaborations. Another area worth exploring is the influence of leadership styles on success within various research contexts. Additionally, incorporating network theory could provide insights into the dynamics of weak and strong ties, as well as specific hierarchical factors influencing intra and inter-group interactions.

The research was limited to JCPS Cluster entities operating at central government (national) and excluded provincial (federal) and local (municipalities) entities. Further research involving middle and junior managers could be undertaken.

Author contributions The article is an output from a doctoral study conducted by L.M-N under the supervision of M.J.V.R. L.M-N. prepared the initial draft while M.J.V.R. reviewed, revised and prepared the manuscript.

Data availability The data is not publicly accessible. Research data and documentation have been securely stored following procedures established during the ethical clearance conditions issued by the educational institution and gatekeeper. However, the data can be made available from the authors upon reasonable request and with the approval of the South African Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster.

Declarations

Competing interests The authors reported no potential conflict of interest.

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