Accountability Keywords

From participation to accountable governance

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What are keywords?

• Keywords capture big ideas, phenomena or explanations
• Not “merely academic” – because…
• Shared vocabulary enables collaboration across sectors, cultures & disciplines
• The term “keywords” was in widespread use before it became a digital search term (Williams 1976)
• The meanings of “keywords” are constructed & contested
• The “keywords” approach has now been applied widely across disciplines & sectors
“Participation” and “accountability share conceptual challenges…”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Widespread assumptions</th>
<th>Problematic implications</th>
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<td>“You know it when you see it”</td>
<td>No need to define it with precision</td>
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<td>“It means all things to all people”</td>
<td>Interpreted differently by different actors, in diff contexts</td>
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<td>“Conceptual stretching”</td>
<td>Concept applied broadly to include apples, oranges &amp; pears</td>
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<td>“Magic bullet”</td>
<td>High expectations as solution to many governance challenges</td>
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<td>“What counts?”</td>
<td>Low bar enables watering down &amp; simulation</td>
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<td>“Fuzzy proxies”</td>
<td>Measured very indirectly, without degrees of scope or intensity</td>
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Related concepts *overlap* with accountability - but are not *synonyms*:

- **Good governance** – Technocratic authoritarianism can produce versions of “good governance” without accountability - while checks and balances can lead to gridlock.
- **Democracy** – Theorists assume democracy *necessarily* involves accountability, but effective answerability + checks and balances may be lacking in practice.
- **Responsive governance** – Authorities can respond to voice or pressure – but at their discretion, without having to answer for their actions.
- **Responsibility** – Accountability requires clear identification of who is responsible for decisions, yet they may deny that responsibility (“passing the buck”).
- **Transparency** – Necessary but not sufficient for (public) accountability.
- **Justice** – The punishment may not fit the crime.
Visualizing overlapping concepts

The key overlap between responsive & accountable governance involves public answerability

**Public Responsiveness**
- Discretionary partial concessions
- Policy change
- Better services

**Accountability**
- Public answerability processes
- Delivery of commitments
- Rule by law
- Sanctions from above
- Rule of law
“What counts” as accountability?

- Accountability involves two key processes:
  - “Answerability” – Process or forum in which duty-bearers (decision-makers) must explain & justify their actions. This requires relevant info & involves taking responsibility.

- Consequences – Involves tangible responses, either sanctions or rewards (enforcement of standards)

- Note: The dominant approach to accountability is retrospective. In contrast, preventative approaches involve measures to reduce the likelihood of accountability failures.
Accountability with adjectives

Governance analysts use spatial metaphors:

> **Vertical** *(upwards - as w/ principal-agent – to donors & governments - or from authorities downwards to citizens)*

> **Horizontal** *(mutual/checks & balances – as with CPR institutions)*

> **Diagonal** *(state-society power-sharing – as with multi-stakeholder forums that exercise authority)*
Researchers’ favorite theory of change

Models of causal chains driving accountability follow linear sequences

"TA"
Transparency → Accountability → Improved Governance

"TAP"
Transparency → Accountability → Participation → Improved Governance

"TPA"
Transparency → Participation → Accountability → Improved Governance
What if the drivers of accountable governance is iterative/reciprocal rather than linear?
What concepts can help to identify the missing links between participation & accountable governance?

Work in progress unpacks concepts relevant to connecting the dots - such as:

• Social accountability
• Strategy & tactics
• Transparency & right to know
• Checks & balances
• Countervailing power
• Advocacy
• Whistleblower
What is social accountability (SAcc)?

• SAcc initiatives encourage stakeholder voice & action to promote responsive governance.

• This evolving umbrella category includes:
  o Citizen monitoring & oversight of public and/or private sector performance (e.g., scorecards)
  o User-centered public information access/dissemination
  o Complaint & grievance redress mechanisms
  o Participation in resource allocation decision-making (e.g., social funds)
  o Deliberative multi-stakeholder forums
Research on SAcc shows its limits

- Transparency may not lead to accountability (info is often *not* power)
- Focus on organizing autonomous constituencies often missing
- Induced participation, limited to ‘invited spaces,’ is often captured or ignored
- Bottom-up monitoring of governance – by itself - often lacks bite
- Yet sometimes SAcc initiatives *do* matter
- What makes the difference?
Unpack SAcc initiatives for accountable governance

- **Tactics vs. strategies** - What’s the difference?
  - In the social accountability field, these terms are often confused
  - **Strategies** define goals and the pathway to reach them
  - **Tactics** are the specific actions for carrying out such plans (tools)
  - Therefore: *Strategies should drive tactics* (not so obvious…)
Tactical approaches to SAcc:

• Tool-led interventions (often external)
• Main driver is information provision (assumed to inspire collective action that can influence public sector performance)
• Limited to citizen voice efforts (within existing institutions)
• Scale is limited to “local” arenas, voice does not reach upstream
• No investment in countervailing power for under-represented
Strategic approaches to SAcc:

• Multiple, coordinated tactics
  • Can the whole be > sum of parts?
• Tangible actions to enable collective action
• Reforms that tangibly bolster institutional capacity to respond to voice
  • Voice plus “teeth” (defined as institutional capacity to respond)
• Multi-level approach (take scale into account)
• More campaign than intervention
• Build countervailing power for under-represented
Example of a SAcc strategy:

Vertical integration…

• Monitoring of authorities informs stakeholder advocacy
• Advocacy informs monitoring
• Multi-level approach – action at each level informs action at other levels
• Key to address the “squeezing the balloon” problem

….combines multiple tactics
‘Voice’ and ‘teeth’ are shorthand...

- ‘Voice’ refers here to both the *aggregation* and *representation* of underrepresented stakeholders – including capacity for collective action
- ‘Teeth’ refers here to authorities’ capacity to *respond* to voice
- In other words: What can authorities (or allies) *deliver*?
- Challenge: How to trigger *virtuous circles*, in which tangible actions enable informed voice & action, which in turn trigger and empower reforms, which can then encourage more voice?
Connecting the dots between participation and accountability: voice *plus* teeth

Diverse pathways out of low accountability traps:
Voice and teeth can combine in different ways

- **Teeth:** Accessible, responsive accountability institutions
- **Improved public sector performance**
- **Low accountability traps**
- **Voice:** Citizen capacity for collective action
Sum up:

*What works in the SAcc field?*

Voice needs teeth to have bite…

…. but teeth may not bite without voice