



LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE THE DYNAMICS OF POLICY AND PRACTICE: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF POLICY CAPACITY FOR INNOVATIVE GOVERNANCE THAT NURTURES SOCIO-POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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Abstract

Southern African countries increasingly recognize that long-term growth and productivity challenges are tightly related to the capacity to innovate and to introduce new products, processes, services, and organizational routines in policy practice. This research assessed policy capacity for innovative governance as practices that aim to satisfy socio-political transformations. It is based on original data collected through a comprehensive survey of 30 purposively selected senior policy managers working within the region as provincial and national policy managers. These officials were strategically situated to assess and reflect upon the capacity for innovative governance in their areas of jurisdiction. The findings appear to show that Southern African countries are affected by the government overload challenges, bureaucracy bashing, public skepticism about the role of government; deplorable state of support for public policy infrastructure, and others. The research thus concludes that innovative approaches are needed to satisfy socio-political transformations. The research recommends rethinking the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of current policy and practice models and implores countries to embrace a collective reflection on finding new sources of growth for supporting a transition towards stronger, cleaner, and fairer economies.

Keywords: *Policy capacity; policy practice; policy competency; innovative governance, and capacity for innovative governance.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Public policy and governance issues are as old as human civilizations. We learn from Farazmand (2013) that governance and public administration originated in the old continent of Asia. Ever since, the concepts related to public policy have evolved significantly. We started with government and public administration and then moved to governance and administration. Today, we preach innovative governance in the face of globalisation, digitalisation, and the knowledge economy. Michael (2005), in explaining the policy-making process, pointed out that this process is continuous. The process has many feedback loops that feed into the system. Thus, the government's social innovation (SI) is defined by Washington (2022) as practices that aim to satisfy socio-political transformations that can promote ways to strengthen their capacity to think strategically and anticipate policy challenges. Some important elements of the dynamics of policy and practice include verification and evaluation.

These are essential to the functioning of the policy-making process. On the other hand, Michael (2005) hinted that the public problems that influence public policymaking can be economic, social, or political. Because of the dynamics of policy and practice, policymakers and implementers should demonstrate an unquestioned capacity for policy capacity for innovative governance that nurtures socio-political transformations. This is because Clark (2000) argues that the twenty-first century, whatever else it will be, already promises one feature above all, that of evolutionary complexity. This evolutionary complexity calls for innovation in meeting people's demands. According to Galego, Moulaert, Brans, & Santinha (2022) in the policy process, social innovation (SI) is seen as the practice and process that aims to take care of neglected human needs. Social innovation is grounded in collective actions and tighter social relations. Thus, through social innovations, policymakers can potentially generate socio-political transformations (Galego et al., 2022).

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It is important to clarify the issue of governance and the concept of governance used in this research. According to Kalita and Mondal (2012), “governance” can be understood as the way governments govern, at both the executive and administrative levels. They explained this by saying that this is the way resources are allocated, the way decisions are made, and the way accountability mechanisms are put in place to enable policy players to be accountable to society. This view of governance is supported by Lynn and Stein (2001) who defined governance as regimes of laws, rules, judicial decisions, and administrative practices that constrain, prescribe, and enable the exercise of public authority on behalf of the public interest. A more contemporary definition of governance is given by Galego et al., (2022) who opine that governance is seen as a ‘new way of governing’. This new way of governing includes participatory and collective decision-making. They all work along with conventional forms of government. This is the concept of governance that was used in this study which critically assessed the policy capacity for innovative governance for socio-political transformations in the face of societal complexity and the demands of the 21st century on policy innovation.

Southern Africa is a region that has been lagging behind other regions in terms of development. In all these drawbacks, policy capacity has been cited as the weakest link. What it means is that policy capacity should be prioritised so that it is at the forefront of governments’ decision-making processes. Thompson (2014) supports this stance. He thinks that policy capacity is integral to decision-making processes. He is of the view that policy capacity is an important topic at present because of the rapid speed of change in the policy environment and the expanding need to contextualize for decision-makers the massive volumes of information flowing into the government (Thompson, 2014). On the other hand, Christiansen and Bunt (2012) argue that today’s policy-making arena and the globalisation phenomenon coupled with the social crises demand innovation not only in public services but within the whole bureaucratic, administrative system of public governance. This is because the policy agenda is also growing to promptly respond to the needs of a more populous, diverse, better-educated, and wealthy society. This seemingly wealthy society that we are dealing with in policy making, policy formulation, and policy implementation is an informed group of people who increasingly expect to be consulted on policy issues that affect them. Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation (2023) agrees with this kind of reasoning and adds that governance takes the form of a multi-level architecture of decision-making. They add that in this case, governance is a result of a ‘networked society’ in which public and private authority is increasingly intertwined (Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, 2023).

Information for policy-making processes should be collected and shared publicly to support data-driven decision-making. Such practices are aimed at increasing public involvement in decision-making and minimising rhetoric. Beyond rhetoric, governments must demonstrate undoubted policy capacity for innovative governance that nurtures socio-political transformations. Thompson (2014) argues that policy capacity should be seen beyond rhetoric as genuine strategic knowledge infrastructure, used for scanning the environment, collecting and maintaining information, conducting analysis, staying connected with stakeholders, modeling policy options, navigating the decision-making maze, coordinating policy agendas across organizations, monitoring outcomes and evaluating results (Thompson, 2014). Where a policy is seen as a strategic knowledge infrastructure, it is difficult to outsource and has to be built into the policy-making processes. Thus, Thompson (2014) argues that while certain parts of the policy repertoire can be contracted to external experts, even the contracting and project management process with these experts needs to be aligned with internal policy development and, therefore, must be overseen by internal policy professionals. This is the reason why this research targets experiential learning. In this regard, those involved in the day-to-day issues of policy were consulted to give their side of the study and to determine capacity for policy innovation



which appears to be the weakest link in policy-making that aims to satisfy socio-political transformations.

Southern Africa should, in the face of globalisation move forward to capacitate policy formulators so that they have the skills to formulate innovative policies that address people's felt needs. Policy innovation should be geared towards solving societal challenges. The challenge to all governments is that they need to be responsive to the needs of society. They should give an ear to the electorate and come up with creative ways of delivering what the electorate wants. According to Christiansen and Bunt (2012), for responsive governments to respond effectively to a changing context of complexity and uncertainty, governments and other public service organisations need to consider innovating the processes and practices of public policy itself. The two further argue that there is a consistent need for actively bringing creative processes into policymaking and focusing more on creating valuable outcomes for citizens than only on projected and programmed outputs (Christiansen and Bunt 2012). They qualify their argument by claiming that innovation introduces a different way of knowing (or not knowing), exploring, and planning into governance which creates tensions with the status quo. Policymakers should face the reality on the ground so that they aim to satisfy socio-political transformations. This is the fact that as Clark (2000) observed, the issue for many African countries is thus even more difficult simply because they confront the situation at an economic disadvantage. Against this background, this research sought to critically assess policy capacity for innovative governance that aims to satisfy socio-political transformations in the face of societal complexity and 21st-century demands.

1.1 The statement of the problem

The missing link in a policy capacity for innovative governance that aims to satisfy socio-political transformations is a frank discussion and exposition between policymakers, researchers, and practitioners around the dilemmas and challenges involved in developing policymaking practices that can respond productively to innovative governance, state of uncertainty and wicked character of public problems. Southern African countries should recognise that long-term growth and productivity challenges are tightly related to the capacity to innovate and to introduce new products, processes, services, and organisational routines in policy practice. Some countries in Africa including Zimbabwe, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi have experienced economic recessions. The main reason is that policy inconsistencies, ideological inconsistencies, policy formulation challenges, unrealistic policy goal setting, political patronage, weak or weakened civil society, and lack of consideration of policy capacity for innovative governance that nurtures socio-political transformations become a stumbling block, obstacle, hurdle, and impediment that influenced this study.

1.2 Purpose of research

The purpose of this research was to undertake a critical assessment of policy capacity for innovative governance that nurtures socio-political transformations in Southern Africa.

1.3 Research question

What is the extent of policy capacity for innovative governance that nurtures socio-political transformations in Southern Africa?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this study was qualitative. Qualitative methodology was preferred in this research because it helps in uncovering societal opinions, beliefs, trends, attitudes, and motivations (Cresswell, & Cresswell, 2018). Qualitative methodology was also used because of the methodology's capacity to examine the research problem in detail and in-depth.

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2.1 Research design

The phenomenology approach was used as the research design. Phenomenology is defined by Yin (2018) as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon. In this research, the essence of a phenomenon was explored from the perspective of those who experienced innovative governance that nurtures socio-political transformations in Southern Africa (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). In this study, phenomenology was used to better understand the meanings attached by the research participants. Phenomenology is also good for its contribution to the development of new theories Yin, 2018).

2.2 Data collection techniques

This research is based on original data collected through a comprehensive survey of 30 purposively selected senior policy managers working within the Southern African Region in various capacities such as provincial and national policy managers. These officials are strategically situated to assess and reflect upon the capacity for innovative governance in their areas of jurisdiction. Unstructured interviews with open-ended questions were used to generate data for this research. The quantitative data that was used provided the researcher with a better understanding of the research problem (Cresswell, & Cresswell, 2018). The research obtained more detailed data regarding the problem under research (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The researcher consistently questioned methods and findings to check for alternative interpretations that could emerge during data collection. This was all done to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings.

2.3 Data analysis

In analysing the data, the qualitative data was analysed using qualitative methods. The thematic analysis method was employed. This process included identifying patterns and themes within the qualitative data. The qualitative data was organised in a way that ensured the non-numeric information could easily capture themes and patterns (Amankwaa, 2016). These patterns and themes that emerged from the study were then used to answer research questions. Through thematic analysis, I managed to emphasize identifying, organising, then analyzing, and interpreting the qualitative data patterns. Data exploration was undertaken. Exploring the data enabled the researcher to understand better the data that was available. In the main, thematic analysis involved reading through the generated data set to look for patterns to derive themes. However, it should be noted that my subjective experience as a researcher also played a central role in finding meaning within the data.



2.4 Research flow chart

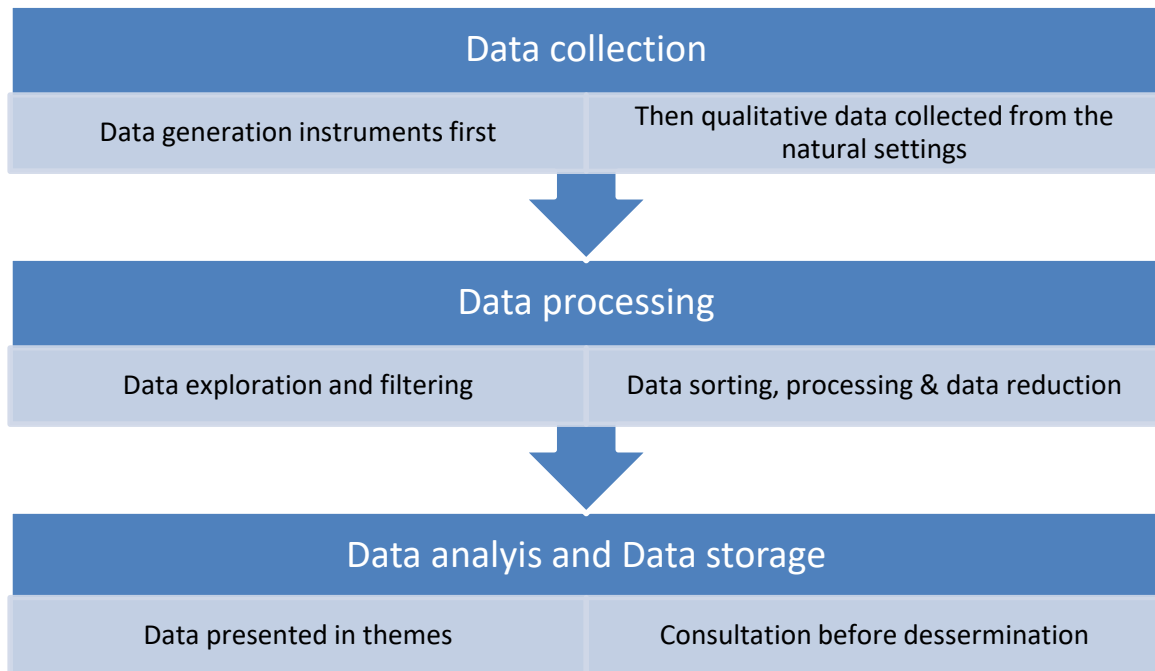


Figure 1: The Research flow chart

2.5 Data validation/trustworthiness

During data collection, data analysis, and data presentation, trustworthiness was upheld. The trustworthiness of this study was mainly to do with the Four Dimensions Criteria (FDC), (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Credibility was ensured through member-checking, peer debriefing, and reflective journaling. The transferability was upheld through a rich, detailed description of the context, location, and people studied (Amankwaa, 2016). To ensure the dependability of the data collected, I kept an audit trail of process logs. I ensured that consistency was sustained, and the study could be repeated so that confirmability was upheld.

2.6 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is “governance” as enunciated by the Centre for Innovative Governance (Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, 2023) of the University of Pretoria. According to the (Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, 2023), the concept of ‘governance’ exposes the complexity of decision-making processes in contemporary political and economic affairs. They argue that governance differs from the more traditional ‘government’. This is because the issue of governance is a term that presupposes a fragmentation and diffusion of authority (Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, 2023). The change in terminology is a result of the social, economic, and cultural dynamics that characterise the policy-making landscape. It is now a fact that there is no contemporary government that can successfully govern ‘alone’. We are in a revolution in which collective governance is now the order of the day. This is why the (Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, 2023) opines that contemporary governments are obliged to share ‘bits and pieces’ of authority with other entities. This is one reason why other organisations such as civil society organisations, private corporations, religious organisations, non-governmental organisations, and other institutions are active in the policy-making process field.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings appear to show that Southern African countries are affected by the issues in Table 1 that are affecting innovative governance and socio-political transformations in the region among other things.

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Table 1: Factors Affecting innovative governments and satisfying socio-political transformations. N-30

Issue affecting innovative governance	F	%
Government overload challenges	26	87
Bureaucracy bashing	20	67
Public skepticism about the role of government	17	57
Deplorable state of support for public policy infrastructure,	20	67
Absence of innovations in strategy building	14	47
Flawed priority setting and budgetary allocation	21	70
Cumulative negative effects of a shrink in current R&D investments on future streams of innovations	13	43
Complexity of society	15	50

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research was conducted to examine social innovation (SI) that aims to satisfy socio-political transformations. It examined policy capacity for innovative governance in this area. The results are discussed below.

4.1 Overloaded government

One major challenge that was unearthed in this study is that of overloaded government. One of the participants in this study (AG3) pointed out that:

We all want innovative governance for socio-political transformations. We are very much ceased with social innovations, but we do not have time for that because of the overloaded government. The hands of the policy players are always full.

It appears that in pursuit of innovative governance practices, institutions in this study also ceased with social innovation (SI). These social innovations are practices that aim to satisfy socio-political transformations. However, the overloaded governments are some of the obstacles that get in their way. This was confirmed by another research participant BC 2 who argued that:

There are too many demands that are placed on a very small economy. Because of globalization, people’s demands have become universal. But the cake is too small for the government. Worse still is the bureaucratic system in place. Once the system is overloaded with participants and demands, the highly bureaucratic political system is too slow to respond.

According to Bao, Chen, and Liu (2022), and Howard (1984), the concept of government overload arises in a situation in which the social challenges that the government is expected to solve have increased while its capacity to deal with them has decreased. According to Bao, Chen, and Liu (2022), the synergy of internal and external governance mechanisms is an important process, but it can hardly withstand government overload. In this case, there is a need to guide processes like innovative governance to ensure that government programs do not crumble because of government overload. This is also confirmed by Howard (1984) who posits that some good examples of social innovation (SI) are defined as practices that aim to satisfy socio-political transformations. Howard (1984) thinks that it is a “crisis of democracy”. Democratic practices will mean that the electorate is free to put their demands across to the governments. These become excessive and the government together with its slow bureaucracy is then overloaded. This was the case in this Southern African study.



This was also the case elsewhere. For instance, in the United States, Zakaria (2013) points out that the United States is facing a new crisis of democracy. This crisis of governance and democracy stems from the fact that there is low approval of political institutions, political paralysis, and poor democratically made decisions (such as low taxes and high government spending) (Zakaria, 2013). According to Zakaria (2013: 2), this led to the need for:

“...the retooling of the country's economy, society, and government necessary for the United States to perform effectively in the twenty-first century”.

This meant there was a grave need to address what Zakaria (2013: 2) called:

“...the immediate crisis known as the fiscal cliff -- the impending end-of-year tax increases and government spending cuts mandated by earlier legislation”.

The need for policy innovation is thus critical to come up with people-centered policies that are: “capable of making the changes that will ensure continued success in a world of greater global competition and technological change” (Zakaria, 2013 p. 2). This is important for democracy to flourish. Otherwise, there will be a predicament. This means that a crisis of democracy might emerge. This may in the long run affect the institution of government. Such developments will undoubtedly undermine faith in political institutions and leaders.

4.2 Bureaucracy bashing

An important finding in this study is that of bureaucracy bashing which was cited by the research participants. Bashing is an attack on a person, and in this regard, it is an attack on the bureaucrats by the politicians. This arises when politicians undermine the institutions and authority of bureaucrats. They may even go on to downsize to cut costs. Some of the reasons put across have nothing to do with the reality on the ground. One participant (AD2) said:

The policy capacity for innovative governance for socio-political transformations is adversely affected by bureaucratic bashing. This practice affects policy implementation through poor training and low morale because it fosters an environment of distrust toward bureaucracy.

Another participant BD3 appears to agree and adds that:

I and my team are affected more by bureaucracy bashing especially during election campaigns where anti-bureaucracy criticisms are increased. The media also adds assault to injury by joining the bureaucracy-bashing bandwagon.

Caillier (2020), and Steinzor (2012), think that political scientists and other experts in policy making process have coined the term “bureaucracy bashing” to denote the desire and inclination now widespread among politicians to engage in bureaucratic battering, hammering, and thrashing for reasons that have nothing to do with reality. The challenge of bureaucratic bashing was also confirmed by Stephenson (2004) who argued that the government's attempt to deliver more efficient public services will be undermined by the creation of a demoralized workforce. This means that bureaucrat-bashing demoralizes the workers and their capacity for policy innovation is thwarted (Caillier, 2020). Stephenson (2004) went on to say that the belief that certain frontline posts are more worthy than others and that “faceless bureaucrats' jobs can be slashed” will devalue the work of key departments. Caillier (2018) agrees and adds that explanations generally accepted by experts are that bureaucracy bashing negatively affects the population's attitudes regarding performance. Thus, bureaucratic bashing adversely affects policy capacity for innovative governance because of its negative consequences which include emotional effects, motivational effects, and policy implementation through low morale. Caillier (2020) adds that this adversely affects the working environment of public workers. These poisoned environmental influences may even find their way down to the individual attitudes of employees. Once this happens, policy capacity for innovative governance suffers, and with it, the subsequent decision-making and behavior.

4.3 Public skepticism about the role of government

One of the major findings of this study is public skepticism about the role of government. One of the research participants (BE2) submitted that:

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We have faced too many ineffective policies as judged by policies' stated goals. Some of these are even costly and harmful. Worse still, whatever benefits these policies create would then flow almost exclusively to a small interest group. For these reasons, it naturally follows that the public is generally skeptical about future claims by policymakers that their new policies will accomplish what they envisage, how they envisage it, and at little or no cost to the public.

Once the public is skeptical about policy innovation, then more needs to be done to convince them and make them support the initiative. One of the participants (EC3) in this study opined that:

Policy capacity for innovative governance suffers when the politicians are not focusing on being more accountable, more transparent, and more participatory. In such a situation, the citizens become skeptical about the role of government. In any society, Southern Africa included, democracy cannot work without trust. Policy capacity for innovative governance will fail unless and until the public trusts that their governing institutions are serving their best interests.

Skepticism appears to be a worldwide concern in the policy-making process. To quote Fagin (1997:1):

As skeptics, we are accustomed to deliberation, evaluation of evidence, and the insistence upon extraordinary evidence in support of extraordinary claims. These traits are not important to the political process, which instead rewards appeal to emotion and the successful manipulation of human passion. It is no wonder we are uncomfortable in the political world. It represents everything we reject in our search for understanding.

To contain public skepticism means that the sorts of institutions that in the past provided the intellectual underpinnings of growth will themselves also have to change simply because they will no longer be able to operate efficiently in the new context (Clark, 2000). Such institutions that need to change include universities, technical colleges, polytechnics, and research institutions. They should demonstrate a capacity for innovation. They should also produce graduates who are creative and innovative in the face of the complexities of the 21st century. Cleary and Stokes (2023) think that democracy works best when people trust one another. It even works better when society has confidence that politicians will look after citizens' interests. Once this trust is not there, it is the capacity for innovative governance that is weakened. Thus, Cleary and Stokes (2023) believe that the healthiest democracies thrive when politicians act in their constituents' best interest. Governments are most efficient and responsive when they know that their actions are being scrutinized. In the same vein, the capacity for innovative governance thrives when institutions such as the press or an independent judiciary hold public officers accountable for their actions (Caillier, 2018). According to Galego et. al. (2022), to suppress public skepticism, there is a need for both social innovation and governance to involve collaborative practices that foster transparency and accountability. This is done through a form of partnership between social actors and civil society organisations. This partnership will be tasked with policy innovations so that they can develop alternative solutions to meet social needs. This will greatly reduce socio-political challenges and enhance public trust in governance institutions.

4.4 The deplorable state of public policy infrastructure

The deplorable state of policy infrastructure was mentioned as an area that weakens the policy capacity for innovative governance. The research participants saw deplorable infrastructure as heavily affecting policy innovation in the region. One of the research participants (BE4) pointed out that:

There is a need for good systems for policy and decision-making that are important for policy capacity for innovative governance. This is because an effective policy system depends on robust policy capability. Yet our policy infrastructure is in a deplorable state. Thus, policy capability infrastructures are needed. These should be based on the practical experience of policy practitioners from various jurisdictions. I think that the key components of policy



capability for innovative governance are mutually reinforcing parts of a policy capability infrastructure.

These views were also collaborated by EB1 who opined that:

The extent of policy capacity for innovative governance that nurtures socio-political transformations in Southern Africa depends heavily on the need for good systems for policy and decision-making that are robust, inclusive and current. What this means for Southern Africa is that there is a need for an effective policy system that is nurtured by a robust policy capability and policy infrastructure.

From these findings, policy infrastructure is taken to mean all the enablers for policymaking, policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy adoption (Cleary and Stokes, 2023). They also include enablers for issue search and issue adoption. The importance of policy infrastructures was ably articulated well by Huang, Yi, and Shen (2021) who opined that in the context of agricultural policies, research, and development innovation activities are characterized by high risk, long cycles, and irreversibility, where the agricultural enterprises in their study had to bear the high governance costs caused by deplorable policy infrastructures.

According to Washington (2023), policy infrastructure encompasses policy-making capabilities and organizational capabilities. The key constituencies, components, and elements of policy capability should be mutually reinforcing parts of a policy capability infrastructure. Washington (2023) is of the view that the “supply side” components include policy quality systems, good leadership, capacities, and competencies of the people, and effective internal and external engagements among other components. In terms of the “demand side” components, the main infrastructure is that of the political-administrative interface that shapes and is shaped by policy capability in the public service. This means that this framing of policy capability as an infrastructure broadens the definition of policy capability from a narrow focus on people and skills to a systemic approach (Washington, 2023). Thus, policy capacity for innovative governance is nurtured by a range of systems and processes that enable and support good governance and people-centered decision-making. According to UNDP (2014), during times of economic crisis, the resilience of nations is manifest in their ability to anticipate and prepare for shocks and effectively manage crises as they unfold. This assertion means to say the ability of governments to design and implement the right combination of short- and long-term policy measures is thus critical for sustaining progress and building greater resilience over time (UNDP, 2014). This was also confirmed by Chu (2022) who pointed out that it is also important to build supervision and incentive mechanisms that can nurture resilience. To him, societal resilience can be promoted by influencing the elements of agricultural green technology innovation to achieve the innovation objectives (Chu, 2022). They saw this in their study as eventually promoting the green innovation behaviors of agricultural enterprises (Chu, 2022). According to the Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation (2023), the issue of governance is a contested concept. This is because the issue of governance attracts varied actors that will then exert different types and levels of influence. This means there is a need for policy infrastructures that resonate with the popular concept of governance innovation. Such infrastructure nurtures new ideas, experiments, and practices that can help achieve better coordination (Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, 2023). Policy infrastructures help ensure commonly shared results in the ways that public affairs are managed in our societies.

4.5 Complexity of society

An important finding in this study is the complexity of society. Society is moving fast to satisfy socio-political transformations and embrace the changes of the 21st century. This calls for innovative thinking in all those concerned with policy formulation. One of the participants (ED4) pointed out that:

Innovative practices in the policy-making process are affected by the complexity of society. For example, we have societal complexity, communication complexity, religious complexity, political complexity, and others that prevent societal consensus from being reached amicably.

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The issue of the complexity of society and its effects on the policy capacity for innovative governance that nurtures socio-political transformations in Southern Africa was supported by another research participant (AD2) who pointed out that:

Two complexities in society have affected the capacity for innovative governance in our country. The first one is that of religious, cultural & social issues that make coherence difficult in policy making and policy implementation. Religion that coherently resides within those complexities hinders the policy-making process and makes it a complicated process. The second to me is that the policy processes that involve sequential stages from agenda setting through decision-making to implementation become a complicated process.

The complexities in society were alluded to by Dean (2023) who opined that policy issues are commonly characterized as ‘wicked problems’ (Rittel & Webber, cited in Dean, 2023). They saw policy problems as wicked problems that are multifaceted. To them, this is because of the lack of agreement on the nature of the problem. There are also disagreements to do with what constitutes a good solution. Clark (2000) agrees with this stance and adds that if the world in a socio-economic sense is changing rapidly, there is not enough time to reflect gently on what is. He went on to add that what should be transformative policies are highly contestable issues. Dean (2023) also brought into the debate on complexities of society the issue of digitalization, globalization, and the accelerated technology development that have increased this complexity further. For example, the world economy is becoming ever larger, and increasingly interconnected. This may even lead to income disparity and inequality between countries, regions, and the global society. This may be true in Southern Africa where the impact of globalization on income, employment, social protection, and working conditions, has been felt over the years. Bao, Chen, and Liu (2022) also added their voices by pointing out that effective implementation of the socio-political transformation policies is a practice that is directly related to the internal governance mechanism of enterprises. Thus, they prescribe innovative governance structures that may require plenty of policy support, capital investments, and effective allocation of capital. To them, innovative governance that is supported by the internal incentive and supervision mechanisms of enterprise promotes internal governance, innovations, and social solutions that will play an important role in the success of policy implementation processes (Du and Ma, 2022). To Clark (2000), the crucial issue will be to devise ways of keeping on top of situations that are changing at rates that have become much faster than anything we have known before. *What is very quickly becomes what was* (Clark, 2000).

4.6 Stonewalling issues of public concern

A grave challenge that Southern Africa faces is that of stonewalling public affairs. Critical issues are not brought up in public debate. This leads to a lot of speculation about politics taking place in the corridors of power. A participant in this research (BD4) had this to say:

Politicians sometimes derail policy capacity for innovative governance for socio-political transformations. This is evident in institutions where they fail to confront issues of public concern by being unresponsive. In some instances, they make evasive maneuvers such as tuning away, acting busy, or engaging in obsessive behaviours. This kind of negativity created by politicians is detrimental to policy capacity for innovative governance for socio-political transformations. To them, stonewalling becomes a habit.

The issue of stonewalling issues of public concern was supported by another research participant (CE3) who opined that:



Innovative governance is the way to go. It is the future of addressing issues of public concern. However, many issues affect socio-political transformations like the government covering up malfeasance. In some instances, they just default on many of their financial obligations to the public like the availability of devolution funds. This may lead to the triggering of the tortuous restructuring of government debts, yet the public may want to be in the picture.

What stonewalling means for these institutions is that the absence of clarity has the likely effect of feeding into the politics of speculation. Sometimes this is done as a deliberate attempt to deflect the policy institution's incompetence in the face of societal demands. However, this greatly affects policy capacity for innovative governance for socio-political transformations.

According to the Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation (2023), stonewalling issues of public concern does not resonate with the intentions of governance innovation that seeks to promote the continuous search for new paradigms to resolve social conflicts and strengthen cooperation across different sectors and among people (Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, 2023). Thus, they point out that to achieve better policy decisions in an era characterized by complexity and a holistic understanding of well-being, issues of public concern should be shared by all policy actors. In the words of Bao, Chen, and Lin (2022), there is a need for a synergistic matching effect among the policy process elements.

4.7 Focus on short-term demands to the detriment of longer-term policy needs

A major finding of this study focuses on short-term demands at the detriment of longer-term policy needs. One of the participants (CD5) pointed out that:

Sometimes, we prioritize meeting short-term demands at the expense of addressing long-term policy needs. For example, on the policy capability front, most organizations and jurisdictions focus mainly on mere piecemeal approaches, that is on a piece of the policy problem. Policy capacity for innovative governance is nurtured by taking a system view of how the bits of the policy puzzle fit together.

According to Washington (2023), focusing on short-term demands to the detriment of longer-term policy needs means that the policy-making process should focus on a holistic menu. This should include the critical success factors for good policy or “policy successes” (Luetjens, Mintrom, and Hart cited in Washington, 2023), thrusting deep into certain types of the policy skills repertoire, and political nous required to give effective policy advice (Rhodes in Washington, 2023), policy labs and new policy methods, among others. Alford and O’Flynn (2021) added their voices to the debate on focusing on long-term policies by indicating that conceptualized capability should be a process that incorporates three different levels. To them, the three different levels include the competencies of individual public servants. They also include the structures and processes in public sector organizations. The third is that of the wider enabling public sector environment that is made up of budgets, rules, and risk appetites, among others.

5. Conclusions

This research concluded that policy capacity for innovative governance for socio-political transformations is a concern and requires attention. This is because innovative governance for socio-political transformations is an emerging paradigm in the dynamics of policy, practice, and public governance. It is interacting uncomfortably with existing flawed systems of policymaking. The research highlights the focus areas considered by policy practitioners to be most important for building policy capacity for innovative governance for socio-political transformations. This is because innovative governance has been seen to be suffering from the effects of government overload challenges, bureaucracy bashing, public skepticism about the role of government; deplorable state of support for public policy infrastructure, absence of innovations in strategy building, priority setting, and budgetary allocation; cumulative negative effects of a shrink in current R&D investments on future streams of innovations, the challenges that emerging technologies create for traditional policy practices, lack of public engagement, and the issue of effective coordination between governance players since policy units in line departments spend an excessive amount of time-fighting the

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interdepartmental game and are often preoccupied with protecting the operational side of their malfunctioning departments.

6 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions reached, this study recommended that there is a need for an urgent and decisive rethinking of the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of current policy and practice models. This study thus implores Southern African countries to embrace a collective reflection on finding new sources of growth for supporting a transition towards stronger, cleaner, and fairer economies. This means that since society has become complex, strategy building, priority setting, and budgetary allocation should respond accordingly. Because what is very quickly becomes what was, policy capacity for innovative governance for socio-political transformation systems should be supported by strong and empowered institutions. There is therefore a strong need for capacity building in policy capacity for innovative governance for socio-political transformations so that policy actors have the skills and attitudes necessary to think strategically and to anticipate policy challenges. There is a need for growing pressure on governments to act differently in addressing public problems, enabling sustainable economic growth, and thinking of ways to strengthen their policy capacity for innovative governance for socio-political transformations.

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