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COLLABORATIVE ADAPTIVE SERVICE GOVERNANCE : THEORY INTEGRATED SERVICE GOVERNANCE PUBLIC

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Abstract

The development of increasingly complex and dynamic public problems, marked by limited institutional capacity, demands a governance approach that can explain how public services can remain effective under various conditions. However , the literature about collaborative governance , adaptive governance , institutional capacity , and public service governance Still develop in a way separated so that Not yet available framework theoretical integration fourth perspective said . Research This aim develop Collaborative Adaptive Service Governance (CASG) as theory level medium For explain governance mechanisms service effective public research use approach Theory Building Systematic Literature Review (TBSLR) of 56 articles indexed by Scopus for the period 2008–2026. Analysis done through stages open coding , axial coding , selective coding , conceptual integration , and theory synthesis . Research result identify four construct main , namely collaborative dynamics , adaptive capability , institutional capacity , and service outcomes , which form mutually beneficial governance mechanisms depends . Findings show that effectiveness service public is results interaction dynamic between collaboration , capacity adaptive , and capacity strengthened institutions through mechanism bait recursive governance mechanism . Research This conclude that CASG provides framework theoretical bridging integration various tradition literature governance as well as expand understanding about connection dynamic between governance and service public .

Keywords : adaptive capability; collaborative governance; institutional capacity; service governance; service outcomes .

Introduction

Public services in the 21st century face increasing levels of complexity as various public issues develop that are multidimensional, interconnected, and difficult to resolve through conventional administrative approaches. Climate change, digital transformation, health crises, social inequality, and increasing public expectations for the quality of public services are examples of challenges often categorized as wicked problems , namely problems that involve many actors, have multiple causes, and do not have a single, universally applicable solution (Head & Alford, 2015). In these situations, public organizations are required to be able to respond to rapid changes while maintaining the effectiveness of public services in an increasingly dynamic and uncertain environment (Peters, 2017).

These strategic environmental developments have transformed perspectives on public service governance. Various studies show that the success of public services is no longer solely determined by an organization's internal capacity, but also by the government's ability to build cross-sector collaboration, mobilize dispersed resources, and adapt to rapidly changing environments (Torfing et al., 2021; Bryson et al., 2023). These challenges are increasingly significant for local governments operating under limited institutional capacity. In many contexts, limited human resources, fiscal capacity, coordination mechanisms, and institutional infrastructure remain major obstacles to effective and sustainable public service delivery (Mumtaz & Oliveira, 2023).

The limitations of the traditional bureaucratic model in dealing with increasingly complex problems have encouraged the development of a governance paradigm that emphasizes the importance of interaction and collaboration between actors in governance. The shift from government to governance reflects a shift in perspective on public governance, from an approach oriented towards hierarchical control to one that places networks, coordination, and participation as key elements in solving public problems (Rhodes, 1996; Pierre & Peters, 2000). In this context, the effectiveness of public services is increasingly understood as the result of the interaction of various

actors working collectively to produce public value. One of the most influential perspectives in the development of governance studies is collaborative governance . This perspective developed in response to increasing interdependence between organizations, limited government capacity, and the need for resources and knowledge spread across multiple sectors. Collaborative governance explains how government, the private sector, and civil society actors can engage in joint decision-making processes to resolve complex public problems (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Recent research suggests that collaboration serves not only as a coordination mechanism but also as a means of building collective learning, innovation, and problem-solving capacity, which are increasingly important in addressing contemporary governance challenges (Berardo et al., 2020; Bryson et al., 2023).

Despite its significant contribution to the development of public administration, collaborative governance still faces several limitations. Most research focuses on factors influencing successful collaboration, such as trust, leadership, and institutional design, while attention to the governance system's ability to adapt to environmental changes and maintain long-term public service performance remains relatively limited (Maulana & Dečman, 2023; Palumbo & Manesh, 2023). Consequently, collaborative governance is able to explain how collaboration is built and maintained, but it does not fully explain how collaboration remains effective in situations characterized by uncertainty and limited institutional capacity.

These limitations have led to the development of an adaptive governance perspective , which places the ability to learn, innovate, and adapt to change as critical factors in governance effectiveness. This perspective emphasizes that effective governance requires adaptive capacity, enabling organizations and actor networks to respond to change through collective learning, institutional flexibility, and continuous innovation (Folke et al., 2005). More recent studies have shown that adaptive capacity is increasingly important in the face of the complexity of public policy, technological disruption, and the dynamics of evolving societal needs (Soma et al., 2016; Torfing et al., 2021). However, the relationship between adaptive capacity and public service outcomes remains inadequately explained in the governance literature .

In addition to collaboration and adaptation, governance effectiveness is also significantly influenced by the institutional capacity of public organizations. Institutional capacity encompasses an organization's ability to manage resources, establish institutional rules, coordinate collective action, and ensure sustainable policy implementation (Ostrom, 2010). In the context of local government, institutional capacity determines the extent to which collaboration and adaptation processes can be translated into effective public service practices. Recent research shows that institutional capacity serves not only as a supporting condition but also as a mechanism influencing the success of governance in producing sustainable public service performance (Mumtaz & Oliveira, 2023).

Although literature governance has develop in a way significant , study about collaborative governance, adaptive governance, institutional capacity , and public service governance Still tend develop in room separate analyses . Recent literature indicates at least four major gaps. First, most governance models are still dominated by the experiences of developed countries, thus under-emphasizing the context of governments with limited institutional capacity. Second, institutional capacity is generally positioned as a contextual factor, rather than as a mechanism explaining governance effectiveness . Third, the adaptation dimension has not been systematically integrated into collaborative governance models . Fourth, research attention is still directed more at governance processes than at the resulting public service outcomes (Palumbo & Manesh, 2023; Maulana & Dečman, 2023; Bryson et al., 2023).

This gap indicates the need to develop a more integrative theoretical framework to explain the relationship between collaboration, adaptation, institutional capacity, and public service delivery. To date, no theoretical framework has been found that simultaneously integrates the collaborative, adaptive, institutional, and public service dimensions into a coherent governance mechanism, particularly to explain the effectiveness of public services in government contexts with diverse institutional capacities. In line with the current trend in governance literature that encourages the integration of collaboration, adaptive learning, institutional capacity, and public value creation (Torfing et al., 2021; Bryson et al., 2023), this study proposes Collaborative Adaptive Service Governance (CASG) as a mid-range theory that explains how collaborative dynamics, adaptive capability, institutional capacity , and service outcomes interact to produce effective public services. Based on these arguments, this study aims to systematically synthesize the development of the literature on collaborative governance, adaptive governance, institutional capacity, and public service governance to identify conceptual relationships among these perspectives. In addition, this study aims to develop CASG as a mid-level theory that explains how collaboration, adaptation, and institutional capacity interact in producing effective public services in the context of local government with diverse institutional capacities.

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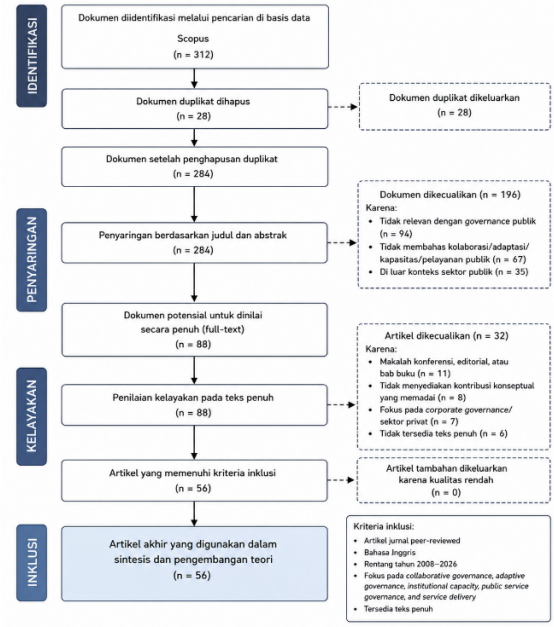
Method

Study This use approach Theory Building Systematic Literature Review (TBSLR) for develop CASG as theory level mid - range theory in administration public . Unlike conventional systematic literature reviews , which are generally oriented toward mapping research trends and identifying literature gaps, TBSLR aims to generate theoretical contributions through the synthesis, integration, and reconstruction of concepts developed across various research traditions (Snyder, 2019; Jaakkola, 2020). This approach was chosen because the research not only seeks to understand the development of the literature on collaborative governance, adaptive governance, institutional capacity , and public service governance , but also to build a more comprehensive theoretical explanation of the relationships between these concepts in the context of public services. The literature search was conducted through the Scopus database because it provides a wide range of international publications and has been a primary source in various systematic literature review studies in the field of public administration and governance . Search strategy literature designed For reach various research that discusses connection between collaborative governance, adaptive governance, institutional capacity , and public service governance . Keywords main used Keywords included " collaborative governance ," " adaptive governance ," " institutional capacity ," " service delivery ," and " public service governance ." These keywords were combined using Boolean operators (AND and OR) to obtain a broad scope of literature while remaining relevant to the research focus. The search process was limited to articles published between 2008 and 2026 to ensure that the resulting theoretical synthesis represented contemporary literature developments.

Literature selection was conducted using inclusion and exclusion criteria established before the search process began. Inclusion criteria included journal articles that had undergone peer review , were written in English, were available in full text, and had a direct relevance to public governance, institutional capacity, organizational adaptation, or public services. Conversely, articles lacking substantive relevance to the research focus, non-academic publications, conference proceedings, editorials, and documents that did not provide adequate conceptual or methodological information were excluded from the analysis. The application of these criteria aimed to maintain the quality, consistency, and relevance of the literature used in the theory-building process.

Figure 1. Literature identification and selection process based on PRIMA 2020



Source: Processed by the author (2026)

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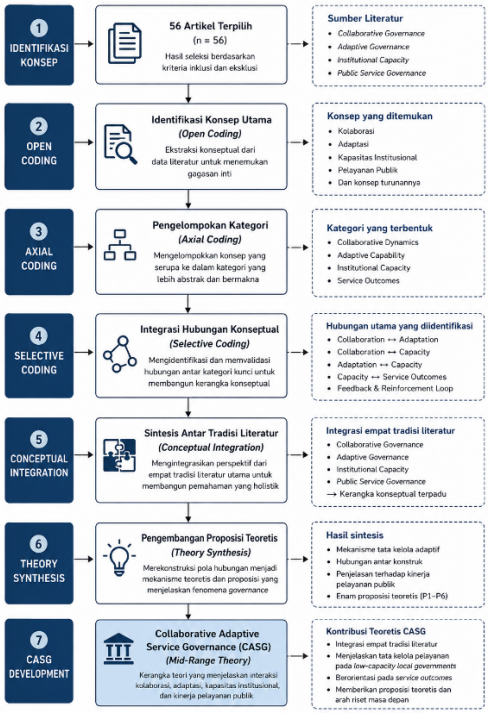
Table 1. Characteristics Analyzed Articles

Characteristics	Category	Amount Article
Main Focus	Collaborative Governance	21
	Adaptive Governance	11
	Institutional Capacity	10
	Public Service Governance	14
Period Publication	2008–2012	7
	2013–2017	12
	2018–2021	15
	2022–2026	22
Article Type	Conceptual/Theoretical	19
	Empirical	37
Total		**56**

Source: Processed by the author (2026)

The analysis was conducted in stages to identify conceptual patterns and theoretical relationships emerging within the selected literature. Unlike literature reviews that focus on mapping research themes, this approach aimed to identify conceptual relationships that explain the interrelationships between collaborative governance, adaptive governance, institutional capacity , and public service governance . Thus, the analysis process aimed not only to identify dominant themes in the literature but also to construct a more integrated theoretical explanation of public service governance (Jaakkola, 2020; Torraco, 2005).

Figure 2. Development Process Collaborative Adaptive Service Governance (CASG) Theory



Source: Processed by the author (2026)

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Development process theory done in a way gradually through open coding , axial coding , selective coding , conceptual integration , and theory synthesis . These stages were used to identify key concepts, group relationships between concepts, develop theoretical constructs, and integrate various perspectives developed in the literature. The result of this process was the development of CASG as a mid-level theory that explains the relationship between collaboration, adaptive capacity, institutional capacity, and public service performance in the context of low-capacity local government (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The CASG was developed through a conceptual integration of four key literary traditions that consistently emerged in previous syntheses. The synthesis revealed that these four literary traditions explain distinct yet complementary dimensions of public service governance. Therefore, the four perspectives were integrated to construct a theoretical framework capable of explaining the relationship between collective action, adaptive capacity, institutional capacity, and public service outcomes.

Through a conceptual integration process, this study identifies that the effectiveness of public services is not determined by a single governance dimension in isolation, but rather by the dynamic interaction between collaboration, adaptive capacity, and institutional capacity that collectively influence public service outcomes. Based on this relationship, CASG is developed as a mid-level theory that explains the mechanisms by which collaborative and adaptive governance can produce responsive, sustainable, and valuable public services in the context of local governments facing institutional capacity constraints.

Results and Discussion

1. Evolution Conceptual Governance Towards CASG

Synthesis results against 56 articles show that development literature governance No ongoing in One track a single theoretical , but rather develop through a number of tradition thinking that seeks explain different aspects from governance Public governance . Some studies emphasize the importance of collaboration between actors in addressing the complexity of public policy, while others highlight the system's ability to adapt to environmental changes, strengthen institutional capacity, or improve public service performance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Folke et al., 2005). These findings suggest that each perspective makes important contributions, but neither individually explains the full mechanisms that produce effective public service governance.

Table 2. Evolution Perspective Governance towards CASG

Perspective	Main Focus	Contribution Theoretical	Limitations
Collaborative Governance	Collaboration and collective action between actors	Explains consensus building, trust, and cross-sector coordination	Lack of explanation of adaptive capacity and dynamics of change
Adaptive Governance	Learning and adaptation to uncertainty	Explaining resilience, flexibility, and adaptability	Lack of emphasis on public service performance
Institutional Capacity	Capacity organizations and institutions	Describes implementation, coordination, and resource mobilization capabilities	Tends to view capacity separately from collaboration dynamics
Public Service Governance	Creating public value through service	Emphasizing the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of public services	Lack of explanation of governance mechanisms that produce service outcomes

Source: Author's synthesis based on Ansell and Gash (2008), Emerson et al. (2012), Folke et al. (2005), Ostrom (2010), and Osborne (2010).

Literature synthesis also shows that the development of governance theory is moving toward an increasingly integrative approach. While earlier generations of governance focused more on coordination and collaboration between organizations, subsequent developments have begun to focus on the system's ability to learn and adapt to uncertainty. At the same time, increasing attention to institutional capacity and the quality of public services has broadened the focus of governance from the process to the outcomes it produces (Osborne, 2010; Nabatchi et al., 2017). This conceptual evolution demonstrates that governance effectiveness cannot be understood through a single dimension but requires the integration of multiple, complementary perspectives. These findings indicate a need for a theoretical framework capable of linking collaboration, adaptation, institutional capacity, and public service outcomes into a coherent explanation. This need then became the basis for the development of CASG, a synthesis of various governance literature traditions that have developed over the past two decades.

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2. Identification CASG Main Constructs

Results of open coding , axial coding and selective coding against 56 articles selected identify four construct the main thing that is consistent appear in literature governance , namely collaborative dynamics , adaptive capability , institutional capacity , and service outcomes . These four constructs come from different literary traditions, but they demonstrate a strong interconnectedness in explaining the effectiveness of public service governance. These findings indicate that effective public governance depends not only on the ability to build collaboration but also on the capacity to adapt, implement collective action, and produce valuable public services.

Table 3. Key Constructs and Conceptual Definitions of CASG

Construct	Definition Synthesis	Role in CASG
Collaborative Dynamics	The ability of cross-sector actors to build interaction, coordination, trust, and collective action in solving public problems.	Integrating resources, knowledge and interests of various actors.
Adaptive Capability	The ability of the governance system to learn, innovate, and adapt to environmental changes, uncertainty, and the dynamics of public needs.	Enables flexible and sustainable responses to change.
Institutional Capacity	The ability of organizations and institutions to manage resources, coordinate actions, and implement decisions effectively.	Ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of governance implementation.
Service Outcomes	The results generated from the governance process are reflected in the quality, accessibility, responsiveness, and sustainability of public services.	To be the ultimate goal and indicator of governance effectiveness .

Source: Author's synthesis based on the results of the analysis of 56 selected articles

Literature synthesis shows that collaborative dynamics and adaptive capability represent process dimensions in public governance. Both constructs explain how actors build interactions, manage learning, and respond to environmental change and uncertainty (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Folke et al., 2005). On the other hand, institutional capacity serves as a connecting dimension that determines the extent to which collaborative and adaptive processes can be translated into effective organizational actions (Ostrom, 2010). Meanwhile, service outcomes represent the ultimate goals of public governance, reflected in the quality, responsiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of public services (Osborne, 2010; Bracci et al., 2019).

These findings indicate that the four constructs do not exist in isolation but rather form a system of interconnected relationships. Therefore , the next step in the theory-building process is to identify patterns of relationships between these constructs to explain the mechanisms by which collaboration, adaptation, and institutional capacity collectively produce public service outcomes. These relationships form the basis for developing the CASG theoretical framework.

3. Relationships between constructs in CASG

The synthesis results show that the four constructs that make up the CASG do not operate as stand-alone elements, but rather form an interdependent governance mechanism. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of public services is the result of a multi-layered interaction between the ability to build collective action, the capacity to adapt to change, and the ability of institutions to implement decisions sustainably. This pattern indicates a significant shift in the governance literature , from approaches that tend to emphasize a single dimension of governance to a more integrative understanding of how various capacities work simultaneously to generate public value.

A literature synthesis shows that public service effectiveness does not emerge automatically from collaboration between actors. Instead, the impact of collaboration on public service performance depends on the governance system's ability to transform interactions, knowledge exchange, and collective learning into adaptive capacity and sustainable institutional capacity. This finding aligns with recent trends in governance literature that increasingly emphasize the importance of organizational learning, collaborative innovation, and adaptive capacity as mechanisms that bridge governance processes with public service outcomes (Torfing et al., 2021; Bryson et al., 2023).

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Table 4. Relationships between constructs in CASG

Connection	Findings Synthesis	Implications Theoretical
Collaborative Dynamics → Adaptive Capability	Collaboration expands knowledge exchange, collective learning, and the ability to respond to change.	Collaboration is the foundation for building adaptive capacity
Adaptive Capability → Institutional Capacity	Adaptation drives updates to organizational rules, processes, and capacities.	Institutional capacity develops through a process of continuous learning and adjustment.
Institutional Capacity → Service Outcomes	Institutional capacity determines the ability to implement and sustain services.	Capacity is the link between governance and public service performance.
Collaborative Dynamics → Service Outcomes	The impact of collaboration on public services tends to be indirect.	The effectiveness of collaboration depends on institutional adaptation and capacity.

Source : Synthesis writer based on results analysis of 56 articles selected

4. Development Proposition CASG Theoretical

Based on the identified conceptual relationships, the literature synthesis yields six theoretical propositions that explain the key mechanisms within CASG. These propositions demonstrate that governance effectiveness does not arise from a single capacity, but rather from the ongoing interaction between collaborative, adaptive, institutional, and public service delivery dimensions. Thus, CASG views governance as a dynamic system that evolves through continuous learning, adjustment, and capacity building.

The first to third propositions describe the primary pathway connecting collaboration, adaptation, institutional capacity, and public service delivery. This pathway demonstrates that interactions between actors generate collective learning that strengthens adaptive capacity, which in turn contributes to strengthening institutional capacity and improving public service performance. This finding extends the governance literature , which has tended to view collaboration, adaptation, and institutional capacity as separate dimensions (Torfing et al., 2021; Bryson et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, the fourth to sixth propositions indicate that the relationship between constructs is not entirely linear. Adaptive capacity can directly contribute to public service delivery through an organization's ability to respond quickly and appropriately to change. Furthermore, successful public service delivery has the potential to strengthen collaborative relationships by increasing legitimacy, trust, and stakeholder commitment. These findings indicate that CASG operates as a recursive governance mechanism, whereby achieved outcomes will influence the governance processes that produced those outcomes. This perspective provides a more dynamic understanding than conventional governance approaches , which generally view relationships between variables in a one-way fashion (Palumbo & Manesh, 2023; Mumtaz & Oliveira, 2023).

Table 5. Propositions CASG Theoretical

Code	Proposition Theoretical
P1	Collaborative dynamics influential positive to adaptive capability through exchange knowledge , learning collective , and solution problem together .
P2	Adaptive capability influential positive to institutional capacity through learning organization , innovation , and governance flexibility .
P3	Institutional capacity influential positive to service outcomes through improvement ability implementation , coordination , and mobilization source Power .
P4	Adaptive capability influential direct to service outcomes with increase ability organization respond changes and needs dynamic public .
P5	Collaborative dynamics influential No direct to service outcomes through adaptive capability and institutional capacity .
P6	Positive service outcomes strengthen collaborative dynamics through improvement trust , legitimacy , and commitment stakeholders interest .

Source: Author's synthesis based on the results of the analysis of 56 selected articles

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5. **Collaborative Adaptive Service Governance as Mid-Range Theory**

Synthesis results show that governance effectiveness service public No can explained in a way adequate through One perspective established governance itself . Collaborative governance literature explain mechanism action collective , adaptive governance emphasize ability respond change , institutional capacity explain ability implementation , whereas public service governance focused on creation public value . However, a synthesis of 56 articles shows that these four dimensions operate interdependently in producing effective public services (Torfing et al., 2021; Bryson et al., 2023). This finding indicates the need for a theoretical framework capable of integrating these various capacities into a coherent explanatory mechanism.

Based on findings said , CASG was developed as mid-range theory which explains How collaborative dynamics , adaptive capability , and institutional capacity interact For produce service outcomes . Different with approach governance previously tended to centralize attention to one dimensions In particular , CASG views service public as results from governance mechanisms that are dynamic , layered , and interconnected strengthen . In framework this , collaboration functioning as trigger learning and innovation , capacity adaptive allows organization respond complexity and uncertainty , whereas capacity institutional ensure that the process can translated to in action effective and sustainable organizations (Mumtaz & Oliveira, 2023; Palumbo & Manesh, 2023) .

Table 6. Comparison of CASG with Perspective Governance Previously

Dimensions	Collaborative Governance	Adaptive Governance	Public Service Governance	CASG
Focus main	Collaboration inter-actor	Adaptation to change	Creation mark public	Integration of collaboration, adaptation, institutional capacity, and public services
Unit of analysis	Network actor	Governance system	Service public	Public service governance system
Capacity adaptive	Limited	Tall	Limited	Tall
Capacity institutional	No explained in a way explicit	Limited	Limited	Become core components
Service outcomes	No become focus main	No become focus main	Become focus main	Become objective main
Connection between dimensions	Partial	Partial	Partial	Integrative
Relevance for low capacity governments	Limited	Moderate	Moderate	Tall

Source : Synthesis writer based on results analysis literature .

Contribution CASG's main focus lies in integration four tradition governance literature to in One service - oriented governance mechanisms public , as well as introduction recursive governance mechanism that places service outcomes No only as results end , but also as source bait come back for governance processes next . Through mechanism this , service successful public will strengthen trust , legitimacy , and commitment stakeholders interests which in turn increase capacity collaborative and adaptive governance system . Thus, CASG offers a more comprehensive explanation of how public organizations can maintain service effectiveness in a complex, dynamic environment characterized by limited institutional capacity .

Conclusion

This research develops Collaborative Adaptive Service Governance (CASG) as a mid-range theory to explain how public service governance can remain effective in complex, dynamic environments with limited institutional capacity . approach Theory Building Systematic Literature Review (TBSLR) of 56 articles selected , research This identify four construct main , namely collaborative dynamics , adaptive capability , institutional capacity , and service outcomes . Synthesis results show that effectiveness service public is results from interaction sustainable between third governance capacity said , not from existence One dimensions governance in a way separated .The main contribution of this research lies in the integration of various governance literature traditions into a single, coherent, service-oriented explanatory mechanism. CASG broadens the understanding of governance by positioning service outcomes as both a primary objective and a source of feedback through a recursive governance mechanism , where

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positive public service outcomes strengthen stakeholder trust, legitimacy, and commitment to support subsequent governance processes. Thus, CASG offers a more dynamic perspective than governance approaches that tend to view relationships between dimensions linearly. Practically, these findings suggest that improving the quality of public services requires simultaneously strengthening collaboration, adaptive capacity, and institutional capacity. However, this research is still conceptual in nature, requiring further empirical testing to validate the proposed propositions and develop CASG measurement instruments across various public and government organizational contexts.

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