

Leadership in Regional Collaborative Governance: Evidence from the Integration of China's Yangtze River Delta

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Abstract

Regional collaborative governance is a valuable topic in current theoretical and practical research. Embedding leadership theory into the field of regional collaborative governance can provide a dynamic perspective for understanding the complex collaborative process. The existing research on leadership is not suitable to explain the process of regional horizontal collaboration. Based on the prudent reflection of Bolman et al.'s four-frame leadership theory and Huxham et al.'s cross-organizational leadership framework, and combined with the forward-looking thinking of the public value theory, this study puts forward the leadership framework of regional collaborative governance: Collaboration structure is the carrier, political management is the guarantee, operation management is the tool, participants are the main body, and creating public value is the purpose. This study takes the demonstration zone of green and integrated ecological development of the Yangtze River Delta as a case to verify the theoretical framework. This study has enriched the theoretical map of regional collaborative governance leadership, established a more general theory of public value creation, and had implications for the practice of regional collaborative governance around the world.

Keywords: regional collaborative governance, leadership, public value

1. Introduction

Under the background of globalization, regional collaborative governance is the mainstream form of economic and social development. Significantly different from the traditional closed administrative area management, regional collaborative governance is a form of governance that local governments cross administrative boundaries, which reflects the collaborative relationship between different governance subjects (Xing, H, 2014). The interaction among the participants forms a horizontal network of mutual equality and creates public value through networked collaboration (Bryson, J., Sancino. A., Benington. J., & E. Sørensen, 2017). However, since the significant differences in the background, cognition, and behavior patterns of different stakeholders in the collaboration network, the interaction between multiple stakeholders often fails to effectively realize the advantage of cross-regional collaboration due to the conflict of objectives and interests, which is easy to cause the public value failure (Connelly, D. R, 2007). Huxham et al. (Huxham, C. & S. Vangen, 2000) believe that the effective operation of the collaborative network depends on the "leadership" in the network. Based on this, scholars begin to embed the leadership theory into the current research on the field of regional collaborative governance, so as to explain the dynamic behavior process of inter-regional collaborative governance and its impact on the improvement of inter-regional collaboration performance (Armistead, C., Pettigrew, P., & S. Aves, 2007; Shu, M, 2010; Mo, S. & C. M. Wang, 2011; Beer, A., Ayres, S., Clower, T., Faller, F., Sancino, A., & M. Sotarauta, 2018).

In view of the research on leadership, scholars have made a lot of exploration from different perspectives and made a lot of contributions in the field of leadership trait theory (Argyris, C, 1953), leadership behavior theory (Stogdill, R, 1974), leadership contingency theory (Hersey, P., & K. Blanchard, 1977), leader-member exchange

theory (Phillips, A., & A. Bedeian, 1994) and other aspects. Previous studies have been based on the assumption that leadership refers to the process in which formal leaders in an organization transfer influence to members through a strict hierarchy to achieve organizational goals. But when applied to the field of regional collaboration, the traditional leadership assumption faces two basic challenges. Firstly, regional collaborative governance is characterized by decentralization. Participants are equal to each other, and the leading roles are assumed by different actors. Secondly, the interaction of multiple subjects in regional collaborative governance jointly forms a horizontally distributed network. The top-down hierarchy assumption in the leader-follower relationship does not apply to the collaborative network.

Therefore, in order to effectively manage the collaborative network and improve the performance of collaborative governance, it is necessary to introduce new leadership forms to solve the problems faced by the current regional collaborative governance. Existing researches on collaborative leadership have answered how leadership promotes the formation of collaborative relationship from the perspectives of “responsibility sharing” (Murrell, K, 1997), “power sharing” (Chrislip, D., & C. Larson, 1994), and “shared leadership” (Bryson, J., & B. C. Crosby, 1992), but there are relatively few researches on its role and dynamic mechanism in the collaborative network. Therefore, we need to form a unified analytical framework to explain the overall operating mechanism of leadership in regional collaborative governance based on the context of regional collaborative governance. As regional collaboration has become the mainstream form of today’s social and economic development, cross-regional collaboration network based on realizing public value has been formed constantly. How to effectively play the role of leadership to improve the performance of regional collaboration is becoming a key topic in the current research on regional collaboration.

The structure of this paper is as follows: The following part discusses the applicability and deficiencies of Bolman et al.’s four-frame leadership model and Huxham et al.’s cross-organizational leadership framework, and proposes a theoretical framework based on Moore’s theory of public value. The third part introduces the research methods and case background. The fourth part introduces the research results of this paper and discusses the component factors and realization mechanism of leadership in regional collaborative governance. Finally, the paper reflects on how to better play the role of leadership to coordinate the problems in the process of regional collaborative governance and promote the creation of public value.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Bolman and Deal’s Four-Frame Leadership Model

Bolman and Deal (1997) (Bolman, L. G. & T. E. Deal, 1997) proposed a four-framework leadership model based on practical research on organizational collaboration and restructuring (see Table 1). The four-framework leadership model regards the collaboration process among organizations as the restructuring and reform among organizations, and focuses on observing the changes in structure, human resources, politics, and symbolic in the process of multi-organization integration into a single organization. Through these four frameworks, the dynamic leadership process of organizational collaboration can be clearly understood. Structure focuses on the structure of an organization, including units and subunits, rules and roles, goals and system design, influence and guidance on decisions and activities, so as to match the structure with tasks, technologies and environments. Human resources emphasize the comprehensive understanding of people, pay attention to their needs, skills and relationships, so as to unify the needs of organizations and people. Politics is concerned with building an agenda and a power base. Symbolic focuses on ideology and motivation in collaboration and emphasizes the role of cultural factors in collaboration. Each leadership framework is effective and inherently consistent. Together, the leadership process can be realized from different aspects, and the collaboration and restructuring of the organization can be realized.

Table 1. Bolman and Deal’s Four-frame leadership model

Explain Dimension	Leadership Framework			
	Structure	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Central concepts	Roles, goals, strategies, policies, technology, environment	Needs, skills, relationships	Power, conflict, competition, politics	Culture, myth, meaning, metaphor, ritual, ceremony, stories, heroes
Basic leadership challenges	Attune structure to task, technology, environment	Align organizational and human needs	Develop agenda and power base	Create faith, belief, beauty, meaning

The four-frame leadership model requires a dynamic perspective to understand leadership in collaborative processes beyond a narrow and mechanical approach, providing a clear navigational map for organizational changers. However, the four-frame leadership model has obvious limitations when applied to the field of regional collaboration. On the one hand, the four-framework leadership model assumes that the collaboration of organizations is to form a larger formal organization, such as inter-enterprise reorganization, merger, etc., while regional collaborative governance is realized through the informal collaborative network formed by inter-regional multi-subject interaction. There are obvious differences between informal collaborative network and traditional formal single organization in the interaction of participants, so there are great differences in the realization of leadership. On the other hand, the four-frame leadership model is derived from the management practice of the private sector, and there are still some obstacles in its application to solve the “wicked problems” in public administration. Therefore, it is urgent to optimize the existing models to explain regional collaborative leadership.

2.2 Huxham and Vangen's Cross-Organizational Leadership Framework

As cross-organizational collaboration has become the mainstream mode of economic and social development, Huxham and Vangen further develop the cross-organizational leadership theory from the perspective of cross-organizational collaboration (Huxham, C. & S. Vangen, 2000). They realized that the vast majority of potential development opportunities exist in the interconnection network formed among organizations, which can not be completely controlled by the behavioral decisions of a single organization, but should be realized by giving full play to the advantages of cross-organization collaboration. However, collaboration is also accompanied by a series of problems. It is difficult to reach an agreement on the distribution of collaboration benefits, the definition of cross-organizational responsibility and power boundary, and the design of collaboration process and mode. As a result, collaboration often fails to achieve the expected purpose and falls into the dilemma of “collaboration inertia”. Therefore, it is necessary to exert the role of leadership to properly manage the collaborative network, so as to ensure the realization of collaborative advantages (Provan, K., & J. Sebastian, 1998).

Based on this, Huxham and Vangen define a leadership framework for cross-organizational collaboration that encompasses three core elements of leadership: structure, process, and participants. The structure of collaboration is defined as the structural links between the actors involved in the collaboration, and the structure of leadership is a key driver of the formation and implementation of the collaborative agenda. The process of collaboration focuses on the definition of rights and responsibilities, collaboration model and communication mode among participants. The process of leadership ensures the effective participation of all participants and the effective transmission of information in the process of collaboration. Participants in a collaboration broadly include individuals, groups and organizations participating in the collaboration. In a highly decentralized collaborative network, participants interact with each other on a relatively equal basis during the collaborative process, while in a highly centralized collaborative network, a leading organization as the network participant is required to play a leading role.

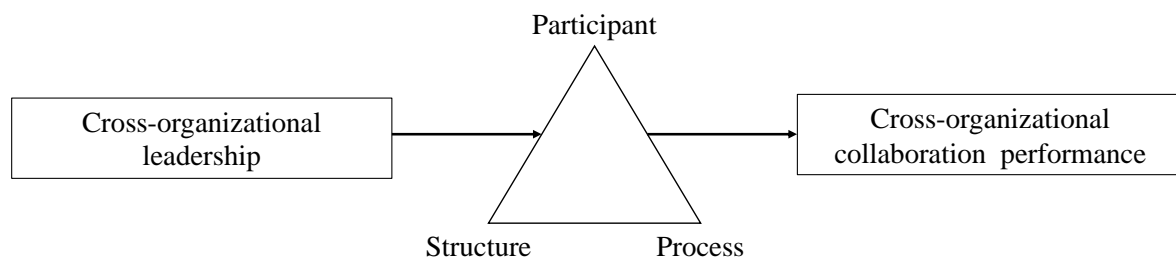


Figure 1. Huxham and Vangen's cross-organizational Leadership Framework

Huxham et al.'s cross-organizational leadership framework fits with Bolman et al.'s four-framework leadership model to some extent. Huxham et al and Bolman et al argue that structure plays an important leadership role because it determines key factors such as who has influence in setting the partnership agenda, who has the authority to act, and what resources are utilized. Meanwhile, in Huxham's cross-organizational leadership framework, the process of collaboration focuses on the definition of rights and responsibilities among participants, which is consistent with Bolman et al.'s views on politics in the four-framework leadership model. However, this framework is different from the four-framework leadership model. It explores the dynamic process of leadership from the perspective of cross-organizational interaction. Participants in Huxham's

cross-organizational leadership framework not only include individual-centered human resources mentioned in Bolman et al.'s four-frame model, but also include various groups and organizations more broadly. Huxham et al.'s conceptual framework of cross-organizational leadership provides a clearer analytical tool for the study of leadership in regional collaborative governance, but this theory lacks a perspective of public value. In the process of cross-regional collaborative governance, there exists tension brought by highly conflicted environment, which challenges the creation of public value and needs to be supplemented by the public value theory.

2.3 Mark Moore's Theory of Public Value

The concept of public value was created by Mark Moore (1995), which describes the value contribution of an organization or network to the society (Moore, M. H, 1995). Moore proposed the "strategic triangle model" of public value management, which established the core goal of government strategic management — creating public value, and the two basic elements of government strategic management — political management and operation management (see Figure 2). Focusing on the alignment of the three points in a triangular model can lead to more effective management and public value creation.

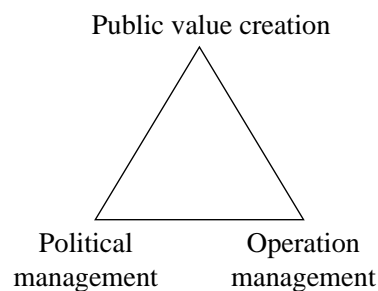


Figure 2. Triangular model of government strategic management

According to Moore, the ultimate purpose of government management is to create public value for the society. In order to create public value, public administrators should pay more attention to organizational political management and operation management. Political management, that is, the use of various means to gain political, legal and social support, needs to answer the question of what factors influence organizational strategy? What is their attitude to strategy? How influential are they? What strategies and means should be used to win over support and defuse opposition. Operation management refers to realizing the strategic goals of the organization through effective integration and utilization of internal resources. In order to achieve the goals of the organization, it is necessary to consider what changes and innovations should be made in organizational structure, organizational culture, human resources, financial resources, etc.

Nowadays, the concept of public value is no longer limited to a single leader. Multiple leaders, organizations and networks, including social organizations and the private sector, have become the creation subjects of public value. Scholars believe that the creation of public value should be achieved through networked governance and collaboration, rather than focusing only on political and bureaucratic authority in formal organizations (Stoker, G, 2006; Crosby, B., Hart, P. & J. Torfing, 2017). Bryson et al. believes that the concept of public value initially proposed by Moore in *Creating Public Value* puts the role of public manager in the core position, but fails to reflect the creation process of public value when it is "applied to the complex background of multi-agent collaborative work" (Bryson, J., Sancino. A., Benington. J., & E. Sørensen, 2017). At the same time, although the triangular model points out the factors that should be considered in the strategic thinking of the government in a more comprehensive and systematic way, it does not establish a logical and consistent strategic management process and cannot be directly applied to the practice of government management (Zhao, J.H. & H. Xing, 2010). Scholars call for the establishment of a more general public value creation theory to explore the role of different actors from different sectors in public value creation (Bryson, J., Sancino. A., Benington. J., & E. Sørensen, 2017; Hartley, J., Alford, J., Knies, E., & S. Douglas, 2017). Therefore, we need to integrate the strategic triangle model with the cross-organizational leadership framework and the four-frame leadership model, thus build a dynamic leadership analysis framework in regional collaborative governance on this basis.

2.4 Framework for Dynamic Analysis of Leadership in Regional Collaborative Governance

Based on the discussion of Huxham et al.'s cross-organizational leadership framework and Bolman et al.'s four-framework leadership model, integrating collaborative structures and participants into the public value

triangle model can provide more insight into the understanding of leadership in the process of regional collaborative governance. We call the leadership model that integrates the above factors as regional collaborative governance leadership model (see Figure 3).

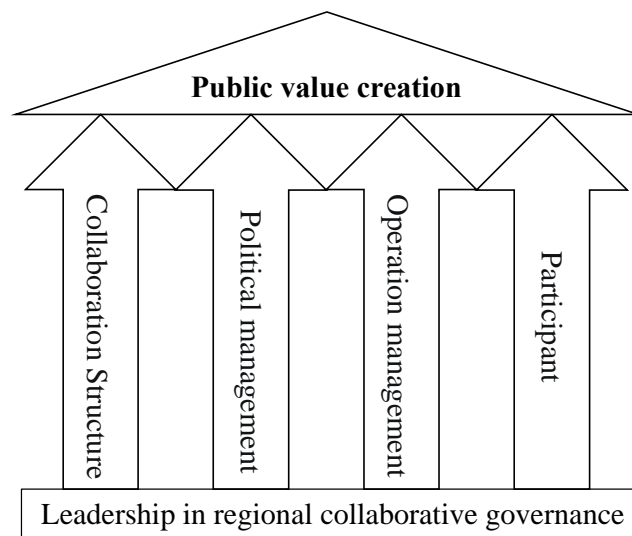


Figure 3. Leadership framework for regional collaborative governance

This model divides the leadership of regional collaborative governance into four dimensions and takes the creation of public value as the core goal of regional collaborative governance leadership. Through the effective coordination of the four dimensions of leadership, the collaborative network composed of regional collaborative governance can be effectively managed, and the collaborative performance can be maximized. Finally, the creation of public value can be realized.

2.4.1 Collaborative Structure

The collaborative structure refers to the connection and interaction between the subjects participating in the collaborative governance between regions, which is specifically represented as the collaborative network structure. The leadership of regional collaborative governance is realized by collaborative structure. In regional collaborative governance, trust and new ways of collaboration can be established by specialization and explicit division of labor among collaborative subjects, and a collaborative pattern of effective communication and mutual supervision can be formed. By combining the local interests of multiple subjects with the overall goal of the collaboration network, the smooth progress of collaborative governance can be guaranteed and the performance of collaboration can be improved.

2.4.2 Political Management

Political management is to use various means to obtain political, legal and social support in the process of regional collaborative governance in order to achieve the expected goal of collaboration. Political management has special importance in the process of regional collaborative governance, because in the process of regional collaboration must face all kinds of mutually restricted power relations, need to consider the influence of various political factors. Therefore, in the process of regional collaborative governance, we must anticipate all kinds of negotiations and bargaining, and strive for legitimate power base for regional collaborative governance, so as to create stable guarantee for smooth regional collaboration in the future.

2.4.3 Operation Management

Operation management is to realize the goal of regional collaborative governance through effective integration and utilization of inter-regional internal resources. It is an important step to transform regional collaborative planning into regional collaborative action, and plays an important role in realizing the expected goal of collaboration. Operations management is concerned with a realistic process of making decisions and coordinating resources in a context of scarce resources and diverse interests. Operation management can be achieved through formal procedures, such as setting up joint meetings, seminars, work, etc., or through informal procedures, such as telephone calls, personal meetings, etc.

2.4.4 Participants

Participants in regional collaborative governance broadly include all individuals and organizations that participate in regional collaborative governance and play a role in promoting it. Participants are the main body of leadership. Participants as individuals include not only formal leaders in regional collaboration, but also various informal leaders who participate in regional collaborative governance, such as scholars, private owners, ordinary people, etc. Participants as organizations include government departments, private enterprises, consulting organizations, etc.

2.4.5 Public Value Creation

From the perspective of result-oriented public value, public value is the result created by the collaborative network composed of citizens, public organizations and other subjects. In the field of regional collaborative governance, leadership guides all kinds of participants to interact effectively and strive to achieve established goals of collaborative performance to create public value, including high-quality economic development, effective improvement of people's well-being and sustainable ecological development of participating regions. At the same time, it establishes and maintains inter-regional trust to respond to citizens' collective preferences.

In order to further understand the above relationship, this paper will explain the realization mechanism of leadership on public value creation in regional collaborative governance through the case analysis of the demonstration zone of green and integrated ecological development of the Yangtze River Delta (hereinafter referred to as the "the demonstration zone").

3. Research Methods and Case Background

3.1 Research Methods

Content analysis, participatory observation and in-depth interview are the main research methods in this paper. In the initial stage of the study, the content analysis method is used to explore the representation and evolution of the official system from the government's official documents participating in regional collaboration, the work program of the executive committee, the summary report and other internal data. Then, through the participatory observation of the regional collaborative governance scene and in-depth interviews with the executive committee staff and front-line workers in the demonstration zone, the real process of the generation, development and formation of this leadership mechanism is reconstructed as far as possible, and then the characteristics of leadership in the process of regional collaborative governance are captured and extracted. On this basis, the leadership framework of regional collaborative governance is verified.

3.2 Case Background

The demonstration zone is located at the interprovincial junction of Shanghai, Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces, covering an area of nearly 2,300 square kilometers, including Wujiang District of Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, Jiashan County of Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, and part of Qingpu District of Shanghai. This region has good ecological and environmental resources, rich historical and cultural heritage, a good foundation for cross-border development and symbiotic conditions for collaborative governance. However, as it is located at the intersection of provincial administrative divisions, the economic development level of this region has been lagging behind the surrounding areas for a long time due to the terminal manufacturing industry and inconvenient transportation. By integrating the strength of two provinces and one city, the demonstration zone can transform ecological advantages into development advantages and realize the rise of the edge.

4. Leadership in the Demonstration Zone

4.1 The Components of Leadership

4.1.1 Collaborative Structure

Scientific and flexible collaborative structure design is an important guarantee for the efficient operation of the demonstration zone. The demonstration zone adopts a new cross-regional governance system with a three-level structure of "council + executive committee + company". First, two provinces and one city jointly set up the demonstration zone council, which is composed of the development and reform departments of two provinces and one municipality, natural resources, ecological environment, transportation, market regulation, finance, taxation, cultural tourism, education, medical care and other departments, as well as the Suzhou, Jiaxing and Shanghai governments, highlighting the role of governments and territorial responsibilities. The council discusses major issues in the development of the demonstration zones by holding regular meetings for coordination of work. Second, the Executive Committee for the construction of the demonstration zone is set up under the Council as the administrative body for the development and construction of the demonstration zone. The executive committee is responsible for the specific implementation of development planning, system innovation, reform matters, major projects and supporting policies of the demonstration zone, and is the specific executive body of the council's decision-making. Third, the New Development and Construction Co., Ltd. of the Demonstration Zone was established to undertake the specific construction work of the demonstration zone

through the market-oriented operation mechanism. Through the establishment of a new cross-domain governance model of “institutional legal, industry co-governance and market operation”, the demonstration zone defines the work functions and collaboration processes of each participant, effectively ensuring the realization of the collaboration objectives.

4.1.2 Political Management

The prerequisite of regional collaborative governance is legitimacy. The integration demonstration zone spans different provinces and cities, and its coordinated development process will certainly be restricted by different regional legal systems and policy objectives. In September 2020, the Standing committees of the People’s congresses of Zhejiang Province, Jiangsu Province and Shanghai Municipality jointly proposed to move from regional project coordination to institutional innovation of regional integration. Two provinces and one municipality obtained the authorization of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress in the form of “legal inquiry and reply”, and on this basis carried out regional collaborative legislation that was drafted, passed and implemented simultaneously, clearly stipulated the organizational structure and administrative power of the demonstration zones, and authorized the executive committee of the demonstration zones to exercise the authority of provincial project management. Through the full collaboration of the standing committees of the two provincial and one municipal People’s congresses, the legitimacy of power realization in the demonstration zone is ensured in the political system. On the basis of clarifying the legitimacy of the coordination power, functional departments of the two provinces and one municipality jointly carried out coordination in standards, supervision and law enforcement with the executive committee, laying the cornerstone of the co-governance system.

4.1.3 Operation Management

The demonstration zone achieves the expected goal of collaboration by innovating the human resource system between regions and exploiting the advantages of regional culture. Cadre flow is the most important element flow in trans-regional collaboration. By building an open, flexible and interconnected cadre collaboration platform and mechanism, the demonstration zone can break the barriers of administrative division, improve policy coordination, strengthen policy diffusion, and break route dependence (Yi, H., L. Suo, R. Shen, J. Zhang, A. Ramaswami, & R. C. Feiock, 2018). As the executive committee of the demonstration zone is the executive organ of the council, all the staff members are selected by two provinces and one city through extensive selection and competition. Officials from two provinces and one municipality were all dispersed in the executive committee and regrouped into 15 special task groups based on key areas of integration collaboration, such as ecology, transportation, scientific innovation, environmental protection and finance, to coordinate and promote major issues in regional collaboration. The demonstration zone also innovates the integrated cadre exchange system of the Yangtze River Delta to realize the cross-regional employment of cadres. In January 2021, Qingpu District of Shanghai and Wujiang District of Jiangsu will first carry out a pilot program of cadre exchange, focusing on important areas of collaborative governance, through the way of “two-way synchronization, cross-selection and appointment”. In terms of form, there are exchanges and appointments between cadres from Qingpu and Wujiang at the district level, and between cadres from Shanghai and Suzhou at the municipal level. In terms of posts, both Suzhou and Jiaxing have selected very key and core posts. Suzhou provides the deputy director of Market Supervision Administration and Transportation Bureau, while Jiaxing provides the director of Commerce Bureau and deputy director of local financial Supervision Bureau, which constantly stimulates the vitality of the cadre team in the integration process.

At the same time, as part of the demonstration zone, Jiaxing City is the birthplace of the Chinese revolutionary Red Ship spirit. “Red Ship Spirit” is the source of the spirit of the Chinese revolution. demonstration zone, by giving full play to the power of spiritual symbols, has continuously unified the thoughts and beliefs of all participants in the demonstration zone, activated the subjective initiative of various subjects, and made them take the initiative to participate in the collaborative construction of the demonstration zone.

4.1.4 Participants

By innovating the leadership form of equal authorization of individual leaders and orderly interaction and participation among organizations, the demonstration zone effectively stimulates the collaborative vitality of various participants and realizes the collaborative leadership process. As a regional decision-making body embedded in the regional collaboration network, the decision-making procedure of the demonstration zone council is different from the executive head responsibility system implemented by the general administrative organs, but should be reflected in the consensus of the representatives of each administrative region accredited to the body. The operation of the council of the Demonstration zone adopts the authorization mechanism of three regions rotating and unified decision-making. The chairman of the council is the executive deputy of two provinces and one city in turn, so as to ensure the neutrality of the decision-making made by the Council and effectively safeguard the common interests of all participants in the region.

The demonstration zone has also set up a developer alliance. The developer alliance is an alliance organization jointly initiated by market and social professional organizations under the overall guidance of the demonstration zone Executive committee. The Developer Alliance is committed to a form of industry governance and currently has 53 members. Members of the alliance are divided into five fixed groups according to industry categories: green development, green infrastructure, green investment, universities and professional institutions, digital economy and entrepreneurial industry, focusing on the connectivity of the demonstration zone, ecological environmental protection, innovation and entrepreneurship, common services and think tank research, etc., to introduce high-quality resources to the demonstration zone, build high-quality factories, provide high-quality consulting, and deepen the collaboration potential of the alliance.

4.1.5 Public Value Creation

The demonstration zone undertakes the arduous task of realizing regional coordinated development under the constraint of ecological civilization. Since its establishment in November 2019, the demonstration zone has taken the lead in exploring institutional innovation from regional project coordination to regional integration, focusing on seven aspects: planning management, ecological protection, land management, factor flow, fiscal and tax sharing, public services, and public credit. It has introduced a total of 112 institutional innovations, 38 of which are replicated and promoted nationwide. The demonstration zone explored new paths to jointly promote horizontal integration and coordination and implement coordinated regional governance.

4.2 The Mechanism of Leadership

Collaborative structure, political management, operational management and participants are the four basic elements of leadership in regional collaborative governance. They interact and influence each other with the ultimate goal of creating public value. The successful realization of the collaboration goal needs the support and collaboration of four elements. The failure of any element will affect the achievement of the collaboration performance and lead to the failure of the public value. Collaboration structure is the carrier of regional collaboration leadership. The establishment of a sound and orderly collaboration structure can enable the political authority system to confirm the legitimacy of collaboration, so as to improve the efficiency of collaboration in the operation system. Participants will also be confident about the prospect of collaboration and choose further collaboration efforts, thus improving the resources and capabilities of collaboration. Political management is the foundation of regional collaborative leadership. Successful political management can make the collaboration obtain more external support, ensure the legitimate development of the collaboration, and then obtain resources for the collaboration to achieve the mission of collaboration. Operation management is an important tool of collaborative leadership. Efficient operation management can maximize the mobilization of internal resources among collaborative regions, improve the overall ability of collaboration, realize the mission of public value creation promised to citizens, and further enhance the ability of political management. Participants are the implementation subjects of regional collaborative leadership. Effectively motivating the enthusiasm of participants can gather the strong synergy of regional collaborative governance, achieve the goal of regional collaborative governance and create public value. In the process of regional collaborative governance, it is necessary to comprehensively and systematically analyze the four elements of leadership, so as to avoid the failure of the whole regional collaboration caused by neglecting one aspect of leadership.

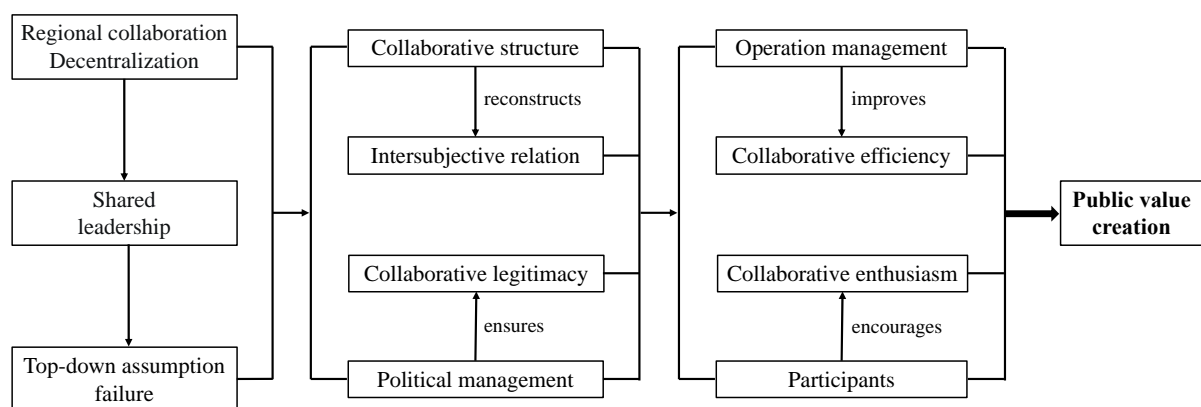


Figure 4. Leadership mechanism in regional collaborative governance

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Regional collaborative governance is a valuable topic in current theoretical research. However, few studies

systematically analyze the leadership mechanism in the process of regional collaboration, especially put efforts on the role of leadership in the process of horizontal inter-regional collaboration. This is in sharp contrast to the global practice of regional collaborative governance.

Based on the prudent reflection of Bolman et al.'s four-frame leadership theory and Huxham et al.'s cross-organization leadership framework, and combined with the forward-looking thinking of the public value theory, this paper proposes a dynamic leadership analysis framework for China's regional collaborative governance. This paper presents a dynamic picture of leadership process in regional collaborative governance. The research conclusion of this paper is that the leadership of regional collaborative governance consists of collaborative structure, political management, operation management and participants, and the ultimate goal is to create public value. Among them, the collaborative structure is the carrier of leadership, the political management is the guarantee of leadership, the operation management is the tool of leadership, and the participants are the main body of leadership. The four elements cooperate and influence each other, constructing the dynamic framework of leadership in regional collaborative governance.

This paper establishes the leadership framework of regional collaborative governance with the following theoretical innovations: Firstly, it enriches the theoretical map of regional collaborative governance leadership. The leadership theory is embedded into the field of regional collaborative governance, and the leadership theory model of regional collaborative governance is constructed by improving the four-frame leadership theory and the cross-organization leadership framework. Bringing leadership elements into the dynamic sequence of regional collaborative governance breaks the unitary defects of regional collaborative governance on resource dependence and institutional demand under static conditions, and expands the theoretical space of regional collaborative governance. Secondly, it establishes a more general public value creation theory. The leadership model of regional collaborative governance considers multiple leaders, organizations and networks as the subjects of public value creation, aiming to observe the process of public value creation under the complex background of multi-subject collaborative work. The model explores the role of different participants from different departments in public value creation, and enriches the theoretical connotation of public value creation.

As an exploratory study, although this paper tries to be representative and typical in the selection of cases, it also has certain particularities, which may affect the universality of the overall conclusion. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out further comparative research from the perspective of multiple cases and further develop the leadership theory of regional collaborative governance.

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