International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science
https://e-journal.citakonsultindo.or.id/index.php/IJEVSS
E-ISSN : 2963 4954
IJEVSS

When Collaboration Produces Activity Rather Than Impact: Explaining Procedural Collaboration In Drug Prevention Services

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Abstract

Collaborative governance is widely promoted as an effective approach for addressing complex public problems, yet stronger collaboration does not always produce better public service outcomes. This study examines why collaborative governance generates extensive administrative activity but limited service impact in local drug prevention services. Using a qualitative single-case study of the National Narcotics Agency in Gorontalo City, Indonesia, the study draws on interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and institutional documents to reconstruct the mechanisms linking collaborative governance and service outcomes. The findings show that collaboration remains predominantly procedural, characterized by sustained coordination, stakeholder participation, and administrative compliance without equivalent development of collective ownership, adaptive problem-solving, and integrated action. Consequently, collaboration strengthens administrative outputs but contributes only partially to long-term behavioural change and community resilience. The study extends the Collaborative Governance Regime by introducing procedural collaboration as an explanatory mechanism connecting collaborative dynamics with service impact, shifting collaborative performance evaluation from coordination intensity toward public value creation.

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Keywords: Collaborative Governance; Procedural Collaboration; Service Impact; Public Value

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary public governance increasingly operates in environments where public problems transcend organizational boundaries and cannot be resolved by individual institutions acting independently. Drug prevention exemplifies a wicked public problem because it involves interconnected social, health, educational, legal, and community dimensions characterized by uncertain causal relationships, dispersed responsibilities, and the need for adaptive rather than linear policy responses. Under these conditions, hierarchical bureaucracy alone is insufficient, as no single organization possesses the authority, information, legitimacy, or operational capacity required to address the problem comprehensively. Consequently, public administration has shifted from government-centred intervention toward collaborative governance, emphasizing sustained interaction, resource integration, and collective problem-solving among multiple organizations to address complex public challenges (Head & Alford, 2015; Bryson et al., 2015; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

Within this context, collaborative governance has become a central perspective for explaining how governments organize collective action under institutional interdependence. Rather than assigning policy implementation to a single administrative organization, collaborative governance views public problem-solving as a relational process through which governmental agencies, civil society, private actors, and communities jointly negotiate responsibilities, mobilize resources, and coordinate implementation. Foundational studies emphasize stakeholder inclusion, consensus-oriented dialogue, trust-building, and facilitative leadership, while the Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) framework further explains collaborative effectiveness through the interaction of principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action within dynamic governance systems (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Bryson et al., 2015; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Together, these perspectives conceptualize collaboration as a governance process that generates collective capacity to address complex public problems.

Despite its widespread adoption, stronger collaboration has not consistently produced stronger public service outcomes. Governments have expanded collaborative arrangements through interagency partnerships, coordination mechanisms, stakeholder forums, and increasingly sophisticated administrative systems, strengthening organizational interaction and institutional coordination. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that collaborative governance frequently remains administratively oriented and fragmented, limiting collective learning,

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adaptive capacity, policy innovation, and ultimately substantive social transformation (Bryson et al., 2015; Emerson et al., 2012; Osborne et al., 2022; Sørensen & Torfing, 2021; Voets et al., 2021). Public Service Logic similarly argues that public value emerges through interactions across broader public service ecosystems rather than organizational outputs alone, revealing a governance paradox in which collaboration increases administrative activity without generating equivalent service impact (Osborne, 2018; Osborne et al., 2022).

This paradox is reflected in Indonesia through the Prevention and Eradication of Narcotics Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (P4GN) programme. Over the past decade, regulatory support, financial investment, stakeholder participation, and interagency coordination involving the National Narcotics Agency (BNN), local governments, educational institutions, health organizations, law enforcement agencies, religious organizations, and community groups have expanded considerably, demonstrating a substantial shift toward collaborative governance. However, stronger collaborative structures have not consistently produced corresponding improvements in long-term prevention outcomes, as collaboration often remains focused on administrative coordination rather than sustained behavioural and social change (Bryson et al., 2015; Emerson et al., 2012; Osborne et al., 2022; Sørensen & Torfing, 2021). This inconsistency raises a central question: why does institutionally active collaboration frequently generate extensive administrative activity but only limited service impact?

The governance paradox is further illustrated by the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) of Gorontalo City, the empirical setting of this study. The agency has expanded counselling programmes, community outreach, stakeholder participation, and interagency coordination involving schools, health institutions, religious organizations, local governments, and community groups. Although administrative indicators, including programme implementation, participant attendance, coordination meetings, budget realization, and institutional reporting, demonstrate increasing collaborative activity, comparable progress has not occurred in prevention literacy, sustained behavioural change, reduced community vulnerability, or stronger social resilience. From a public administration perspective, this discrepancy reflects a gap between organizational activity and public value creation, where collaboration strengthens administrative capacity but contributes only partially to substantive service impact (Osborne, 2018; Osborne et al., 2022). Rather than representing an implementation anomaly, the Gorontalo case highlights a broader challenge concerning the effectiveness of collaborative governance in translating institutional activity into meaningful public outcomes.

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Existing collaborative governance scholarship provides substantial insight into how collaborative arrangements emerge and are sustained across organizational boundaries. Foundational studies identify stakeholder inclusion, face-to-face dialogue, trust-building, shared decision-making, and facilitative leadership as essential conditions for effective collaboration, while the Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) explains collaborative performance through the interaction of principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson et al., 2015; Emerson et al., 2012; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Although these perspectives explain how actors establish common goals, coordinate resources, and maintain collaborative relationships, they devote comparatively less attention to why institutionally robust collaborative systems may still produce weak public outcomes.

A similar limitation appears in the public service performance literature. Conventional approaches primarily assess organizational performance through indicators such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility (Zeithaml et al., 1985). While these measures remain valuable for evaluating service delivery, they are less capable of capturing preventive services whose effectiveness depends on sustained behavioural change and long-term social transformation. Public Service Logic therefore argues that public value is co-created across broader public service ecosystems through interactions among governments, citizens, communities, and supporting organizations (Osborne, 2018; Osborne et al., 2022). This perspective suggests that collaborative governance should be evaluated not only by the volume of administrative activity it generates but also by its capacity to produce meaningful service impact. However, relatively few studies explicitly connect collaborative governance with service impact to explain why extensive collaboration may coexist with limited societal improvement.

Together, these theoretical developments reveal an important research gap. Collaborative governance research explains how collaboration is established, whereas public service research increasingly explains how public value is created. Far less attention has been devoted to understanding the mechanism connecting these processes, particularly where collaboration appears administratively successful but substantively ineffective. Existing explanations generally attribute collaborative limitations to insufficient resources, weak leadership, limited institutional commitment, or inadequate coordination (Bryson et al., 2015; Emerson et al., 2012; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015), while giving comparatively little attention to how limitations may emerge from the internal dynamics of collaboration itself. Addressing this gap requires shifting the analytical focus from collaborative formation toward the processes through which collaboration evolves during implementation and influences service impact.

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This study argues that the central challenge lies not in the absence of collaboration but in the way collaborative processes develop during implementation. Formal coordination, stakeholder participation, institutional agreements, and administrative reporting may operate effectively while contributing only partially to collective learning, shared ownership, and adaptive problem-solving. Under these conditions, collaboration becomes increasingly oriented toward sustaining administrative procedures rather than strengthening the relational capacities required to achieve long-term public outcomes. This study conceptualizes this condition as procedural collaboration, a form of collaboration in which institutional interaction remains centred on coordination, compliance, and organizational continuity without fully translating collaborative relationships into integrated collective action. Consequently, collaboration expands administrative activity while contributing only marginally to substantive service impact.

Building on this argument, the study develops a mechanism-based explanation linking collaborative governance to service impact in drug prevention services. As a wicked public problem, drug prevention necessitates collaborative governance because fragmented authority and dispersed responsibilities prevent individual organizations from responding independently (Head & Alford, 2015; Bryson et al., 2015). Collaborative dynamics are expected to strengthen collective action through principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action (Emerson et al., 2012). This study argues, however, that when these relational dimensions remain only partially consolidated, collaborative governance evolves into procedural collaboration, generating substantial administrative outputs while producing comparatively weak service impact. This mechanism explains why collaboration may increase organizational activity without corresponding improvements in behavioural change, prevention effectiveness, or community resilience.

Against this background, this article addresses the following research question: Why does collaboration that appears administratively active fail to generate substantive service impact in local drug prevention services? Using a qualitative single-case study of the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) of Gorontalo City, the study makes two contributions to collaborative governance scholarship. First, it introduces procedural collaboration as an explanatory mechanism showing how collaborative limitations may emerge from within collaborative processes rather than from inadequate coordination or institutional support. Second, it extends the Collaborative Governance Regime by explicitly linking collaborative dynamics to service impact, shifting the evaluation of collaborative governance beyond coordination intensity and administrative activity toward its capacity to generate sustainable public value.

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METHODS

Research Design and Analytical Approach

This study employs a qualitative single-case study using a mechanism-based explanatory approach to investigate how collaborative governance is translated into service impact in local drug prevention services. Rather than examining statistical relationships among variables, the study reconstructs the causal processes through which collaborative dynamics shape the relationship between administrative activity and substantive public outcomes. This design is particularly appropriate for examining complex governance processes in which causal mechanisms emerge through interactions among institutions, actors, and contextual conditions that cannot be adequately explained through variable-centred approaches (Beach & Pedersen, 2019; Yin, 2018).

The study is informed by a constructivist–interpretive perspective, viewing collaborative governance as an evolving relational process through which participating actors develop shared understanding, coordinate collective action, and adapt to changing governance conditions. This perspective supports qualitative inquiry by explaining how collaborative processes are interpreted, enacted, and experienced within their institutional context rather than treating collaboration as a fixed organizational arrangement (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Analytically, the study applies mechanism-based explanation to reconstruct the sequence linking collaborative governance, procedural collaboration, administrative activity, and service impact. Rather than determining whether collaboration succeeds or fails, the analysis explains how collaborative processes evolve and why increasing collaborative activity may coexist with limited substantive public outcomes. This process-oriented strategy aligns the analytical approach with the study's theoretical framework and research question (Beach & Pedersen, 2019; Bennett & Checkel, 2015).

Research Setting and Case Selection

The study was conducted at the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) of Gorontalo City, Indonesia, the institution responsible for coordinating the local implementation of the Prevention and Eradication of Narcotics Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (P4GN) programme. The case was purposively selected as a critical case because it combines extensive collaborative governance, including interagency coordination, stakeholder participation, and preventive programmes involving government agencies, educational institutions, health organizations, law enforcement

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agencies, religious organizations, and community groups, with comparatively limited progress in long-term prevention outcomes. This disparity provides an analytically valuable setting for examining the mechanism through which collaborative governance generates administrative activity without proportional service impact (Beach & Pedersen, 2019; Yin, 2018).

Consistent with the mechanism-based design, the unit of analysis is the collaborative governance process rather than the organizational performance of the BNN itself. The analysis therefore focuses on interorganizational interactions and the evolution of collaborative relationships to explain how principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action shape the translation of collaborative activity into service impact. Following qualitative case study logic, the findings aim to achieve analytical rather than statistical generalization by explaining a governance mechanism that may also operate in comparable collaborative public service settings (Beach & Pedersen, 2019; Emerson et al., 2012; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Yin, 2018).

Data Collection and Sources of Evidence

Data were collected from multiple qualitative sources to capture collaborative governance from complementary institutional perspectives. Primary evidence consisted of semi-structured interviews, institutional documents, and field observations, enabling triangulation between participants' interpretations, formal governance arrangements, and collaborative practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected informants directly involved in the planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation of the P4GN programme, including representatives of the National Narcotics Agency (BNN), local government agencies, the Education Office, the Health Office, law enforcement agencies, schools, religious organizations, community organizations, and prevention volunteers. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of information-rich participants capable of explaining collaborative relationships, institutional decision-making, and cross-sector governance processes relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2018).

Documentary evidence, including national and local regulations, memoranda of understanding, annual work plans, programme reports, performance reports, and coordination meeting minutes, was analysed to verify collaborative governance arrangements and programme implementation (Bowen, 2009). Field observations of coordination meetings, community outreach, and prevention activities further examined how collaboration was enacted in practice and compared formal institutional arrangements with everyday implementation. Integrating

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interviews, documents, and observations provided complementary evidence for reconstructing the mechanism linking collaborative governance, procedural collaboration, administrative activity, and service impact (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Table 1. Sources of Evidence and Analytical Purposes

Source of evidence	Participants / Documents	Selection rationale	Analytical purpose
Semi-structured interviews	BNN officials responsible for P4GN coordination	Direct responsibility for planning, coordinating, implementing, and evaluating collaborative drug prevention programmes	To reconstruct collaborative governance processes, institutional relationships, leadership, and implementation dynamics
Semi-structured interviews	Representatives of local government agencies, Education Office, Health Office, police, and other public organizations	Formal partners within the collaborative governance system	To explain interorganizational coordination, shared responsibilities, and collaborative decision-making
Semi-structured interviews	Representatives of schools, religious organizations, community organizations, and prevention volunteers	Direct involvement in community-based prevention programmes	To examine stakeholder engagement, collaborative participation, and local implementation practices
Institutional documents	Regulations, memoranda of understanding, annual work plans, programme reports, performance reports,	Formal documentary evidence governing collaborative arrangements	To verify institutional structures, collaborative procedures, and programme implementation

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Source of evidence	Participants / Documents	Selection rationale	Analytical purpose
	and coordination meeting minutes		
Field observations	Coordination meetings, counselling activities, and collaborative prevention programmes	Direct observation of collaborative interaction	To compare formal governance arrangements with actual collaborative practices and identify patterns of procedural collaboration

Data Analysis and Mechanism Reconstruction

Data analysis was conducted iteratively using a mechanism-based explanatory approach to reconstruct how collaborative governance was translated into service impact. Rather than describing themes in isolation, the analysis examined the sequence of processes through which collaborative dynamics evolved during programme implementation (Beach & Pedersen, 2019; Bennett & Checkel, 2015). Interview transcripts, institutional documents, and field observations were analysed to identify recurring patterns of interorganizational coordination, stakeholder interaction, institutional commitment, leadership, resource mobilization, and programme implementation. These patterns were subsequently organized into analytical categories derived from the Collaborative Governance Regime, principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action, together with two outcome dimensions: administrative activity and service impact (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Emerson et al., 2012).

The analysis then traced how these analytical dimensions interacted throughout implementation to explain the divergence between collaborative activity and service impact. Particular attention was given to identifying points at which collaborative interaction became predominantly procedural, constraining collective ownership, adaptive learning, and integrated action. Through this iterative process, *procedural collaboration* emerged as the explanatory mechanism linking collaborative governance with increasing administrative activity but comparatively weak service impact (Beach & Pedersen, 2019; Bennett & Checkel, 2015; Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2018).

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Table 2. Analytical Framework for Mechanism Reconstruction

Analytical dimension	**Empirical indicators**	**Purpose of analysis**
Principled engagement	Dialogue, coordination meetings, joint planning, deliberation	To assess the quality of collaborative interaction
Shared motivation	Trust, legitimacy, commitment, shared responsibility	To examine the relational foundations of collaboration
Capacity for joint action	Leadership, institutional arrangements, resources, information sharing	To evaluate the operational capacity for collective implementation
Administrative activity	Programme implementation, coordination intensity, reporting, stakeholder participation	To identify organizational outputs generated through collaboration
Service impact	Prevention literacy, behavioural change, community resilience, prevention effectiveness	To evaluate substantive public outcomes
Mechanism reconstruction	Relationship among all analytical dimensions	To explain the emergence of **procedural collaboration** linking collaborative governance with service impact

Trustworthiness and Research Quality

The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced through strategies supporting credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through source and methodological triangulation by comparing evidence from interviews, institutional documents, and field observations across organizations participating in the collaborative governance system. Divergent evidence was treated as analytically meaningful for identifying conditions under which collaborative governance became predominantly procedural. Member checking with selected key informants further strengthened the accuracy of interpretations regarding collaborative relationships, institutional commitment, and governance practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013).

Dependability and confirmability were supported through a systematic audit trail documenting data collection, coding, categorization, and mechanism reconstruction, together

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with analytical memos that strengthened reflexivity and considered alternative explanations throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2014). Consistent with qualitative case study methodology, the findings provide analytical rather than statistical generalization by explaining how *procedural collaboration* mediates the relationship between collaborative governance and service impact in collaborative public service settings operating under comparable institutional conditions (Yin, 2018).

RESULT

Institutionalized Collaboration with Uneven Collective Ownership

The findings show that collaborative governance for drug prevention in Gorontalo City has become institutionally established through formal regulations, interagency coordination, stakeholder participation, and shared programme responsibilities within the implementation of the Prevention and Eradication of Narcotics Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (P4GN) programme. Documentary evidence identifies the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) as the central coordinating institution linking local government agencies, educational institutions, health organizations, law enforcement agencies, religious organizations, and community groups through formal agreements, annual work plans, coordination forums, routine planning, reporting, and collaborative outreach activities (Doc-01; Doc-02; Doc-03; Doc-04; Doc-05). These arrangements provide a stable institutional structure for coordinating preventive programmes across organizational boundaries.

Interview findings indicate that participating organizations broadly recognize drug prevention as a shared responsibility, with the BNN coordinating implementation while partner organizations contribute according to their institutional mandates. Educational institutions focus on prevention education, health organizations provide health promotion and rehabilitation support, local governments facilitate programme coordination, law enforcement agencies strengthen preventive supervision, and community and religious organizations extend outreach to vulnerable groups (Inter-01; Inter-02; Inter-04; Inter-05; Inter-06). However, the intensity of engagement varies across organizations. While some remain actively involved throughout planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, others participate primarily through coordination meetings, periodic programme support, or administrative compliance, resulting in uneven follow-up and long-term commitment despite clearly assigned institutional responsibilities (Inter-03; Inter-05; Doc-05; Doc-06).

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Overall, collaborative governance has strengthened the institutional architecture of local drug prevention by expanding formal coordination, stakeholder participation, and organizational involvement. Nevertheless, institutional participation has developed more consistently than collective ownership, indicating that collaboration can generate broad organizational activity while sustained interorganizational commitment remains uneven across the collaborative network.

Collaborative Interaction Remains Procedural

The findings indicate that collaborative interaction was sustained through regular coordination meetings, programme planning, information exchange, and joint implementation, enabling participating organizations to synchronize work plans, allocate responsibilities, and coordinate preventive activities across institutional boundaries (Inter-02; Inter-03; Inter-06; Doc-04; Doc-05). However, these interactions remained predominantly operational, focusing on programme scheduling, implementation reporting, task allocation, and immediate administrative issues, while deliberation on emerging drug trends, programme adaptation, collective learning, and prevention strategies occurred only sporadically (Inter-03; Inter-04; Inter-05; Inter-07; FGD-01; Doc-06; Doc-07). Consequently, collaborative interaction functioned primarily to maintain organizational coordination rather than to foster continuous collective learning.

The intensity of interaction also varied across the collaborative network. Core institutions, particularly the BNN and key government agencies, maintained regular communication throughout programme implementation, whereas engagement with schools, community organizations, and other supporting stakeholders was largely concentrated around specific programme activities (Inter-01; Inter-02; Inter-05; Inter-06). As communication declined after programme completion, opportunities for sustained feedback, shared reflection, and institutional learning became limited, reinforcing an event-driven pattern of collaboration.

Overall, the findings show that collaboration remained institutionally active through continuous coordination and routine interaction. Nevertheless, collaborative processes were primarily directed toward maintaining programme implementation, fulfilling organizational responsibilities, and ensuring administrative continuity rather than strengthening adaptive learning and collective problem-solving. This pattern represents the second empirical finding of the study and provides an important basis for explaining the emergence of *procedural collaboration*.

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Fragmented Capacity for Joint Action

The findings indicate that collaborative governance was supported by formal work plans, interagency agreements, programme guidelines, and clearly defined organizational responsibilities, enabling participating institutions to coordinate preventive activities across sectors (Doc-02; Doc-04; Doc-06). However, variations in programme continuity, follow-up activities, and organizational contributions suggest that these institutional arrangements were not consistently translated into sustained operational capacity (Doc-05; Doc-07). Interview evidence further shows that differences in human resources, organizational priorities, and planning cycles constrained collaboration beyond routine programme implementation, while the involvement of community organizations and schools remained largely dependent on initiatives coordinated by the BNN (Inter-02; Inter-04; Inter-05; Inter-06; Inter-07).

The findings also reveal that collaborative capacity remained concentrated within individual organizations rather than becoming collectively integrated across the governance network. Although information exchange and programme coordination occurred regularly, mechanisms for continuous knowledge sharing, joint evaluation, adaptive learning, and coordinated programme redesign remained limited (FGD-01; Inter-03; Inter-06). Consequently, collaboration effectively coordinated organizational contributions but developed only a fragmented capacity for sustained collective action in responding to evolving prevention challenges.

Overall, the evidence indicates that collaborative governance expanded organizational participation and coordinated implementation, yet differences in institutional resources, commitment, and implementation continuity constrained the development of integrated collective capacity. This fragmented capacity for joint action provides an important explanation for why increasing collaborative activity was not consistently accompanied by stronger service outcomes.

Administrative Activity Exceeds Service Impact

The findings reveal a clear divergence between collaborative activity and service impact. Documentary evidence shows that collaborative governance generated extensive administrative outputs, including regular coordination meetings, interagency agreements, prevention campaigns, community outreach, stakeholder participation, programme reporting, and routine implementation across participating organizations (Doc-04; Doc-05; Doc-07). Interview findings likewise indicate that collaboration strengthened institutional communication, coordination, and

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the delivery of preventive programmes throughout schools, communities, and government organizations (Inter-01; Inter-02; Inter-05). These findings demonstrate that collaborative governance substantially enhanced the organizational capacity to implement local drug prevention programmes.

By contrast, evidence of longer-term service impact remained comparatively limited. Although prevention campaigns and counselling activities improved public access to information, informants consistently reported that sustained behavioural change, prevention literacy, and community resilience remained difficult to achieve because preventive engagement was rarely maintained beyond programme implementation (Inter-03; Inter-05; Inter-06; Inter-07; FGD-01). Documentary evidence similarly emphasized programme implementation, participation rates, and activity completion while providing comparatively little evidence of behavioural outcomes or long-term reductions in community vulnerability to drug abuse (Doc-06; Doc-07). Furthermore, collaborative performance was primarily assessed using operational indicators, such as programme completion, coordination frequency, stakeholder participation, reporting compliance, and implementation targets, rather than collectively achieved societal outcomes (Doc-04; Doc-05; Inter-02; Inter-04; Inter-06).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that collaborative governance successfully expanded organizational participation, institutional coordination, and the volume of preventive activities, but these administrative achievements were not matched by comparable improvements in sustained behavioural change, prevention effectiveness, community resilience, or broader public value. This divergence between administrative activity and service impact constitutes the central empirical finding of the study and provides the empirical basis for explaining the emergence of *procedural collaboration* in the subsequent discussion.

DISCUSSION

Explaining Procedural Collaboration as an Internal Governance Mechanism

The findings indicate that the principal limitation of collaborative governance in drug prevention services lies not simply in insufficient coordination, stakeholder participation, or institutional commitment, but in the way collaboration evolves during implementation. Rather than progressively strengthening collective capacities, collaborative governance became increasingly oriented toward maintaining interorganizational activity while only partially translating collaboration into substantive service impact. This interpretation departs from the dominant assumption that stronger collaboration automatically improves public outcomes

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through enhanced coordination and collective action (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Recent studies similarly suggest that collaborative arrangements often expand institutional interaction without proportionate improvements in public value because organizational processes increasingly take precedence over adaptive responses to complex public problems.

This study explains this pattern through the concept of *procedural collaboration*. Rather than representing the absence or failure of collaboration, procedural collaboration describes a governance condition in which collaborative relationships remain institutionally active but become primarily oriented toward routine coordination, programme synchronization, reporting obligations, and procedural compliance. While these processes sustain organizational continuity, they contribute less effectively to strengthening shared ownership, adaptive learning, integrated collective action, and long-term public value. The concept therefore shifts analytical attention from the existence of collaborative structures to the internal evolution of collaborative processes and the conditions under which collaboration develops into effective governance capacity.

This interpretation also refines how collaborative governance effectiveness should be understood. Stakeholder participation, institutional coordination, and expanded collaborative networks remain important achievements, but they represent intermediate governance outputs rather than evidence of successful public problem-solving. Collaborative governance becomes substantively effective only when organizational interaction is transformed into integrated collective action capable of producing behavioural change, strengthening community resilience, and improving long-term service outcomes. Accordingly, future collaborative governance research should focus more explicitly on the internal processes through which procedural coordination evolves into collaborative capacity that generates measurable service impact.

Refining the Collaborative Governance Regime Through Relational Consolidation

The findings suggest that the Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) can be refined by explaining why collaborative systems with similar institutional arrangements often produce different public outcomes. While the CGR attributes collaborative effectiveness to the interaction of principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action (Emerson et al., 2012; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015), growing evidence indicates that stakeholder participation, collaborative forums, and institutional coordination do not necessarily generate equivalent governance outcomes because collaborative relationships evolve unevenly across organizations (Sørensen & Torfing, 2021; Voets et al., 2021). These findings suggest that collaborative dynamics

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should be understood as evolving relational processes whose quality determines whether collaboration generates administrative activity or substantive public value.

This study argues that collaborative effectiveness depends not only on the presence of these relational dimensions but also on the degree of **relational consolidation** achieved during implementation. Although principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action are expected to reinforce one another, they may develop asymmetrically, allowing organizations to maintain dialogue and coordination without fully developing shared ownership, adaptive learning, or integrated collective action. Similar concerns have been raised in recent collaborative governance research emphasizing that stable collaboration does not necessarily promote innovation, adaptability, or long-term governance effectiveness (Torfing & Ansell, 2021; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2025). Collaborative effectiveness therefore depends on how these relational dimensions mature and become mutually reinforcing throughout implementation.

Accordingly, this study extends the CGR by introducing **relational consolidation** as the condition linking collaborative dynamics to governance outcomes. Relational consolidation refers to the extent to which collaboration evolves beyond coordination into shared ownership, continuous learning, adaptive decision-making, and integrated collective responsibility. When consolidation remains incomplete, collaborative governance sustains institutional interaction but generates only limited service impact; when stronger, it is more likely to support adaptive governance, sustained collective action, and long-term public value. This refinement complements the original CGR by shifting evaluation from the existence of collaborative arrangements toward the quality of relational development as the foundation of substantive governance outcomes (Sørensen & Torfing, 2021; Torfing & Ansell, 2021).

Reframing Collaborative Performance Through Service Impact

The findings challenge the conventional assumption that collaborative governance performance can be adequately represented by the intensity of collaborative activity. Although stakeholder participation, interorganizational coordination, network expansion, and programme implementation demonstrate the operational capacity of collaborative systems, they do not necessarily indicate successful public problem-solving. Recent scholarship increasingly argues that collaborative governance should ultimately be evaluated according to its contribution to public outcomes rather than the volume of collaborative activity it generates (Osborne et al., 2022; Torfing & Ansell, 2021). Consistent with this perspective, the findings show that administrative

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productivity represents only one dimension of collaborative performance and may not accurately reflect substantive governance effectiveness.

This distinction is particularly important in preventive public services, where the primary objective is sustained behavioural and societal change. Public Service Logic argues that public value is co-created through interactions among governments, citizens, communities, and supporting organizations within broader public service ecosystems (Osborne, 2018; Osborne et al., 2022). Accordingly, collaborative governance should be understood as a mechanism for creating public value rather than simply coordinating organizational activities. Evaluating collaboration exclusively through administrative indicators therefore risks overstating governance effectiveness by equating organizational outputs with societal improvement.

Building on this perspective, the study proposes a broader conceptualization of collaborative performance that distinguishes **administrative activity** from **service impact**. Administrative activity reflects the immediate organizational outputs generated through coordination, institutional participation, programme implementation, and reporting compliance, whereas service impact captures longer-term improvements in behavioural change, community resilience, prevention effectiveness, and public value. This distinction complements recent calls for outcome- and impact-oriented governance evaluation (Bryson et al., 2015; Osborne et al., 2022). By positioning service impact as the ultimate criterion of collaborative performance, the study extends existing performance debates and argues that collaborative governance should be assessed according to its capacity to transform institutional coordination into sustained societal improvement rather than administrative activity alone.

Implications for Designing Impact-Oriented Collaborative Governance

The mechanism identified in this study has important implications for the design of collaborative governance systems. Expanding collaborative structures through additional partnerships, coordination forums, formal agreements, and stakeholder participation does not necessarily improve governance effectiveness unless these arrangements strengthen the relational processes through which organizations jointly interpret problems, integrate knowledge, and adapt implementation strategies. Consistent with network governance research, collaborative performance depends not only on structural connectivity but also on how collaborative relationships are governed and continuously adapted to changing policy conditions (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). This perspective shifts attention from the architecture of collaboration toward the quality of collaborative governance.

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The findings further suggest that collaborative governance should embed impact-oriented mechanisms throughout implementation rather than relying primarily on procedural accountability. Such mechanisms include joint reflection on programme outcomes, cross-organizational learning, adaptive planning based on emerging evidence, and shared performance indicators that evaluate collective rather than organizational achievements. Recent public management scholarship similarly argues that collaborative systems generate greater public value when participating organizations collectively interpret performance information, revise implementation strategies, and strengthen institutional learning (Bryson et al., 2017; Crosby, Hart, & Torfing, 2017). These mechanisms enable collaboration to evolve from administrative coordination into sustained collective capacity for addressing complex public problems.

Beyond drug prevention, the proposed mechanism has broader relevance for collaborative policy domains such as public health, disaster risk reduction, environmental governance, social protection, and education. Future research should therefore examine the institutional conditions that enable collaborative relationships to mature into sustained public value creation rather than assuming that collaboration naturally produces effective collective action. Such an approach strengthens both the explanatory capacity of collaborative governance theory and the design of collaborative systems capable of generating enduring service impact.

CONCLUSION

This study examined why collaborative governance that appears institutionally active does not necessarily produce substantive service impact in local drug prevention services. The findings demonstrate that collaboration alone is insufficient to explain governance effectiveness because collaborative arrangements may successfully sustain interorganizational coordination without generating equivalent improvements in long-term public outcomes. Rather than identifying a lack of collaboration, the study shows that the effectiveness of collaborative governance depends on how collaborative relationships evolve during implementation. The research therefore answers the central question by demonstrating that the relationship between collaborative governance and service impact is mediated by the quality of relational development rather than by the existence or intensity of collaborative activity alone.

The principal contribution of this study is the development of **procedural collaboration** as an explanatory mechanism linking collaborative dynamics with governance outcomes. Building on the Collaborative Governance Regime, the study argues that collaboration produces different outcomes depending on the extent to which collaborative relationships become consolidated into

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shared ownership, adaptive learning, and integrated collective action. When this relational consolidation remains incomplete, collaborative governance continues to generate organizational coordination while contributing only partially to sustained public value. This perspective extends collaborative governance scholarship by shifting analytical attention from collaborative formation toward the internal processes through which collaboration is translated into meaningful service impact.

The findings also suggest that evaluating collaborative governance primarily through coordination intensity, stakeholder participation, or programme implementation provides only a partial understanding of collaborative performance. These indicators remain important for assessing organizational activity, but they should be complemented by measures that capture longer-term service impact, including behavioural change, community resilience, and collective public value. This broader perspective encourages public organizations to strengthen collaborative learning, shared accountability, and adaptive implementation alongside administrative coordination, thereby improving the capacity of collaborative governance to address complex public problems.

This study is based on a single qualitative case and is intended to provide **analytical rather than statistical generalization**. Future research should examine the proposed mechanism across different collaborative governance settings to assess its applicability under varying institutional and policy conditions. Comparative and longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for identifying the organizational and contextual factors that enable collaborative relationships to evolve from procedural coordination into sustained collective capacity capable of generating enduring public value.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study has explained how collaborative governance in local drug prevention services may generate extensive administrative activity without producing proportional service impact. Future research should move beyond examining whether collaboration exists and focus more critically on how collaboration develops, how it is sustained, and under what conditions it produces meaningful public value. In particular, the concept of procedural collaboration requires further empirical testing across different institutional and policy contexts.

Future studies could adopt comparative research designs by examining collaborative drug prevention programmes in several regions or municipalities. Such comparisons would help identify whether procedural collaboration is a context-specific phenomenon or a broader pattern

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in collaborative public service delivery. Comparing areas with different levels of institutional capacity, leadership commitment, community participation, and prevention outcomes would provide a stronger explanation of the conditions that enable collaboration to move from administrative coordination toward substantive collective action.

Longitudinal research is also important. Because drug prevention outcomes such as behavioural change, prevention literacy, and community resilience develop over time, future studies should examine collaborative governance processes across longer periods. This would make it possible to observe whether coordination meetings, stakeholder participation, and programme implementation gradually evolve into shared ownership, adaptive learning, and integrated action, or whether they remain limited to procedural compliance.

In addition, future research should develop clearer indicators for distinguishing procedural collaboration from substantive collaboration. Existing evaluations often emphasize the number of meetings, activities, reports, and participating institutions. While these indicators remain useful, they should be complemented by measures that capture the quality of collaboration, including shared accountability, trust, joint decision-making, resource integration, community involvement, and the capacity to adapt programmes based on local needs.

Mixed-method approaches would also be valuable. Qualitative methods can explain the mechanisms through which collaboration operates, while quantitative data can help assess changes in prevention outcomes more systematically. Combining interviews, observations, institutional documents, community surveys, and programme outcome data would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how collaborative governance contributes to public value in drug prevention services.

Future studies should also pay closer attention to the role of community actors, schools, religious organizations, families, and prevention volunteers. These actors are often involved in implementation, yet their influence on behavioural change and community resilience may not be fully captured through administrative reports. A stronger focus on local experiences would help explain whether collaborative programmes are truly meaningful for the communities they are intended to serve.

Finally, future research should examine institutional reforms that can reduce procedural collaboration and strengthen substantive collaboration. This includes studying mechanisms such as joint monitoring and evaluation, shared performance indicators, collaborative learning forums, integrated budgeting, and stronger feedback systems from communities. By focusing on these areas, future studies can contribute not only to collaborative governance theory but also to the

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practical improvement of drug prevention services.

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