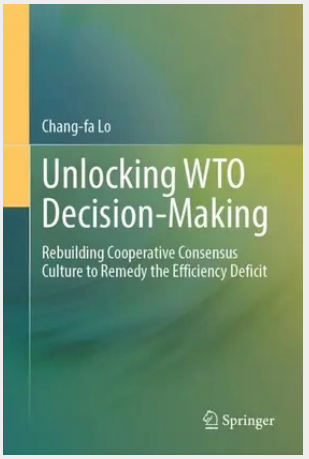
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Unlocking WTO Decision-Making

Rebuilding Cooperative Consensus Culture to Remedy the Efficiency Deficit



This book examines one of the most pressing governance challenges facing the WTO: its growing difficulty in producing timely, effective and collectively acceptable decisions. While the WTO remains formally committed to consensus-based decision-making, this foundational principle has increasingly generated what the book conceptualizes as an “efficiency deficit”—a widening gap between Members’ expectations of institutional delivery and the Organization’s actual decision-making capacity.

Rather than attributing this paralysis to the heterogeneity of its membership or to individual Members’ exercise of “de facto veto power”, the book identifies both internal and external drivers of institutional strain. It shows how negotiation processes, institutional design and Member interactions collectively shape decision-making outcomes, contributing to persistent deadlock across key negotiating areas.

The book further argues that overcoming these constraints does not require abandoning consensus, but rebuilding the conditions under which it can function effectively. Central to this effort is the reconstruction of cooperative culture, sustained by trust, sequencing strategies and a member-driven approach that enables incremental progress. It also highlights the enabling role of institutional actors—such as the Secretariat, the Director-General and negotiation chairs—in facilitating dialogue, structuring negotiations and fostering convergence. Through this integrated framework, the book offers a pathway for restoring functionality to WTO decision-making while preserving its core principles of inclusiveness and legitimacy.

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