

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN GOVERNANCE NETWORKS— CRITICAL CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

Editor's Introduction

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At a recent address to the annual conference of the National Society for Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, Shelley Metzenbaum, the associate director of performance and personnel management of the Office of Management and Budget, spoke of the need for researchers to provide more studies of performance management systems as they exist at present—within the webs of network ties that exist in most complex governance arrangements. She noted that the U.S. federal government has become quite proficient at collecting data and that the challenge now is to devise systems that provide an opportunity for key stakeholders to utilize performance data when making strategic decisions. The ultimate test of any performance management system lies in its utility as well as its accuracy in describing and evaluating conditions, outputs, and outcomes on the ground. In a memo to executive department heads throughout the federal system, dated June 25, 2010, she stated that

the Administration is transitioning from a planning and reporting approach focused primarily on the supply of performance information to three performance improvement strategies that place greater emphasis on: *Using* performance information to lead, learn, and improve outcomes; *Communicating* performance coherently and concisely for better results and transparency; and *Strengthening* problem-solving networks, inside and outside government, to improve outcomes and performance management practices. (Metzenbaum, 2010, p. 1)

The articles in this minisymposium contribute studies that examine how performance information is used and communicated within operating governance networks.

Ascertaining the performance of any public sector or nonprofit organization is a growing concern of public administrators, policymakers, and researchers. As has been widely noted, performance management in any context is complicated

by a variety of factors, ranging from the limitations of time, knowledge, and access to information, to competing views of what effective performance looks like (De Bruijn, 2001; Frederickson, 1999; Haynes, 2003; Milward & Provan, 1998; Poister, 2003; Radin, 2006). These problems arise when the unit of analysis is the individual worker, a specific program or project, or an entire organization. The challenges associated with performance management and measurement are only accentuated and compounded when performance is considered across multijurisdictional governance networks (Frederickson & Frederickson, 2006).

In introducing a *PPMR* symposium on the responsiveness of network governance, Kaifeng Yang (2007) noted how the persistence of “wicked problems” has given rise to more networked responses that have led to more complicated dimensions of responsiveness and accountability. He asked whether it is enough to simply consider how one group of actors is responsive to another (as, for example, in the relationship between governments and citizens). Or, he continued, must we consider how networks, taken as a whole, respond to public needs? (p. 136). These observations underscore the need for performance management researchers and performance managers to understand the governance network as their unit of analysis.

Taking the governance network as the unit of analysis, the original call for articles for the present symposium posited a series of possible questions that persist for the field. These questions included:

1. How are performance management systems being employed within interorganizational governance networks?
2. How can complexity, network, and systems theories be employed in assessing performance in governance networks?
3. How are theories of governance melded with theories of network performance?
4. What are some innovative ways that performance indicators are being used to create incentives for participation in networks?
5. How are network actors holding each other accountable through the use of performance indicators, data, and other forms of evidence?
6. How are the existing performance management and measurement systems in place across governments, nonprofits, and private firms being retooled to operate within cross-sector environments?

The articles presented here provide insight on answering the first three questions, but we believe that the remaining questions are still worth noting. Studies that articulate how networks are experimenting and advancing innovation in data and knowledge management are still needed, as are more detailed studies of the relationship between performance management and accountability. Since evaluations of performance use different metrics in the public sector (achievement of policy goals), the private sector (attainment of acceptable levels of profit), and the nonprofit sector (achievement of mission), deeper examination of how to measure

the performance of cross-sector collaborations and public-private partnerships is called for.

This minisymposium presents three articles that address the promise and potential of performance management systems executed across jurisdictional and institutional lines. The unit of analysis for these articles is the multisector “governance network” (Koliba, Meek, & Zia, 2010; Sorensen & Torfing, 2008) operating within the fields of transportation, emergency management, and health-care delivery. The range of policy fields in the three articles speaks to the breadth of governance networks and the extensive policy systems and subsystems that they operate within. The articles also demonstrate the kinds of research and modeling methodologies that are at present available for research related to performance management within networked environments.

In the first article, by Christopher Koliba, Erica Campbell, and Asim Zia, comparative case study analysis is used to identify the range of performance management practices in four traffic congestion management networks. The focus of analysis centers on the systems in place that utilize performance data to inform short-term and long-range planning. The article’s major contributions to the performance management literature include the presentation of a systematic way to identify and describe performance management systems within complex, inter-jurisdictional networks; discussion of the role of federal agencies in building the capacity for such systems; and discussion of how an entire policy subsystem, congestion management, constructs mental models of traffic congestion, its causes, and its consequences.

In the second article, by Naim Kapucu and Fatih Demiroz, social network analysis is used to analyze the relationship between the kinds of network configurations subscribed to within federal national emergency management response plans as compared to the actual manifestation of networks resulting from real responses to disasters. A major contribution that this article makes to the performance management literature is the extension of social network analysis methodologies to the study of the implementation of emergency response plans. One may presume that these methodologies can be applied to study the implementation of other types of plans that presuppose the catalyzation of networked responses. The article also demonstrates how social network analysis data can in themselves be used as critical pieces of performance data that might then be used to evaluate the efficacy of existing plans or the actual disaster responses predicated on these plans.

The third article, by Yushim Kim, Erik Johnston, and H.S. Kang, discusses the potential of modeling complex adaptive systems for evaluating network performance. Drawing on a case study of the deliberative processes of healthcare delivery networks, the authors illustrate the ways in which computer simulation models can be used to assess the effectiveness of current or redesigned deliberative processes. The article also discusses the potential uses of computer simulation modeling,

from initial inception and design considerations, to the “interactive dialogue” that can be generated out of simulated scenarios and experiments. A major contribution that this article makes to the performance management literature lies in its discussion of computer simulation models as an integral component of network performance management systems.

All three articles reflect the growing use of computational power to assess performance and inform decision-making. In the first article, computational power is viewed as an integral component of a network’s performance management system. The transportation planning field, and congestion management initiatives in particular, have been at the vanguard of integrating computer modeling into their planning and project development work. The article illustrates how the field is integrating these kinds of models into its networks.

The second and third articles illustrate how the increase in computational capacity can be used by researchers to better assess network ties and the effectiveness of certain kinds of decision-making dynamics found within different deliberative bodies. Social network analysis and agent-based modeling are employed as a means to understand network centralization and interdependency. These methods prove to be particularly useful in explaining the kinds of process dynamics that unfold within complex governance networks. The article by Kim, Johnston, and Kang, in particular, discusses how the results of these models—serving as outputs of scenarios or experiments—can be integrated into the ongoing performance management systems of a network. Both of these articles illustrate the promise and potential that computer modeling brings to the study of performance management.

In presenting these three articles as a minisymposium relating to “Performance Management in Governance Networks,” it is our hope to contribute to the dialogue regarding the utilization of performance management systems within complex networked governance arrangements. Beryl Radin says of the challenges that surface as the result of such interdependencies: “Situations in which there is increased interdependency between players clearly complexifies [*sic*] the performance information collection task” (2006, p. 206). The empirical research and computer simulation modeling represented in the minisymposium articles tackles these complexities head-on. In the process, they shed new insights regarding the networked terrain of contemporary performance management practices.

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