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Source: *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Dec., 2006), pp. 593-601

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#)

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## **SERVING THE PUBLIC INTEREST ACROSS SECTORS: ASSERTING THE PRIMACY OF NETWORK GOVERNANCE**

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The evidence is clear: the percentage of public services provided exclusively by government bureaucracies is steadily shrinking (Salamon, 2002). Non-profit and for profit organizations are increasingly taking on functions once reserved to the state sphere. Statistical accounts of this shift, however, only tell part of the story. Public accountability and the governance issues necessitated by such shifts do not evaporate once the decision to privatize or contract out has been made (Cooper, 2003). Complex networks of actors influence the creation, implementation and monitoring of public policies. These arrangements have resulted in the development of issue networks (Heclo, 1978), policy networks (Kikert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997), public-private partnerships (Linder & Rose-nau, 2000), and strategic alliances (Wohlstetter, Smith & Malloy, 2005) that involve a diverse array of actors that not only span sectors, but international, national, regional, state, local and individual levels as well.

The matrix below articulates how each of the three sectors is intersected by levels of scope, beginning at the international level and progressing down to the individual within the context of the United States. These levels may be even further delineated by region (situated between international and national, or national and state) or country or district (situated between state and local). These layers will also differ greatly across countries. Ethiopia for instance, possesses at least six layers of government excluding the individual, while a country that is a member of the European Union will have the European Union as its own layer.

**Figure 1.**  
**Policy Actors (United States Context)**

Level	Sector		
	Private Sector / “Market Sphere”	Public Sector / “State Sphere”	Voluntary Sector / “Civil Society Sphere”
<b>International Level</b>	Multi-National Corporations	United Nations; International Regulatory Entities	International Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>National Level</b>	Corporations	Federal Government	National Non-Profit Organization
<b>State/Regional Level</b>	Corporations/ Businesses	State Government	State-wide/Regional Non-Profit Organizations
<b>Local Level</b>	Local Businesses	Local Government	Local Non-Profit Organizations; Community groups
<b>Individual Level</b>	Consumer; Client; Patient	Citizen; Voter; Recipient of Services; Advocate; Consumer; Client	Volunteer; Advocate; Consumer; Client

For any given policy program that is either in the process of being created, refined or implemented, a certain combination of network actors are implicated. Combinations of actors working in networked contexts are presented within the public administration literature as intergovernmental relations (networks concentrated between public sector actors), coproduction (networks usually involving local and individual level actors), public-private partnerships (networks of laterally accountable actors spanning the public and some combination of private and voluntary sectors), and special interest coalitions (networks involving some combination of private and voluntary sector actors working to influence the actions of the public sector). Efforts to privatize services previously offered by governments usually involve the mobilization of networks involving public sector “principals” and private or voluntary sector “agents.”

The implications of these arrangements for democracy and the good governance functions that must accompany them are profound. At stake is the very nature of how we define, defend, and advance the public interest. The role of the public administration field in these ever evolving systems of networked relationships is critical. Any discussion of “next generation” studies in public administration must take these issues into account.

Writing about the shift from a government focus to a “governance” focus, George Frederickson has noted that:

In the public administration literature, the term “governance” is often used to describe a wide range of organization types that are linked together and engaged in public activities, enlarging (and changing) the domain of government. Governance connotes that more than public agencies are involved in the formulation and implementation of policy, which suggests the declining relationship between jurisdiction and public management. (Frederickson, 1999, p. 702, in Agranoff & McGuire, 2003, p. 21)

The resultant networks tend to “resist government steering, develop their own policies and mould their environment” (Kirkert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997, p. xii). O’Toole and Meier conclude that, “it is generally recognized that adding actors increases constraints as well as opportunities, network research has not systematically explored the ways that coproduction can shift the goals and preferences of public programs” (2004, p. 684). However, the implications for the public accountability of network governance are not entirely clear.

Gone are the days of viewing the public bureaucracy as *the* unit of analysis. Construed both as an academic discipline grounded in an interdisciplinary research agenda and relatively clear set of educational objectives, and as a profession encompassing a host of practitioners operating mostly in government and non-profit organizations, the public administration field needs to be the space where questions concerning the implications of network governance are drawn to the surface.

In a less complex set of arrangements characterized within the classical public administration framework, the work of public administrators and the academic discipline associated with their work was centered on the role of public bureaucracies and their effective and accountable management. With the increasing recognition of the limitations of bureaucracies, the public administration field, to some extent following the lead of political leaders looking to shrink the size and power of government, has advocated for the privatization of government functions. Calls to make “government perform more like a business” are characterized by the new public management movement (NPM). Emphasis is placed on improving efficiencies through competition and better “customer service.” Arguably, the NPM movement places too much importance on market-oriented mechanisms to bring about improved efficiencies. As Deborah Stone has so artfully laid out in *The Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision-Making* (1997), efficiency is just one among several goals inherent to political discourses surrounding

public policy. Other goals, such as security, equity and liberty also play a role in defining the public goals, problems and solutions. Making government act more like business, or even one step further, turning government functions over to private markets gives too much credence to the miraculous power of the hidden hand of the market. It also oversimplifies and dare we say glosses over some of the most pressing questions facing the field of public administration.

Amidst concerns with serving “customers” rather than “citizens,” critiques of NPM have only recently begun to take into account the fact that the public’s business is performed within the context of increasingly networked relationships (Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004; Salamon, 2002). Government, business and non-profit organizations enter into complex arrangements to define public problems, determine policy solutions, and utilize policy tools. These arrangements may be mediated by contractual arrangements, foundation grants or awards, legislative mandate and a host of other policy tools.

With the splintering of the traditional command and control systems of accountability most often associated with public bureaucracies, a new generation of accountability mechanisms is being devised. However, these mechanisms, the most common of which is the contract, have evolved somewhat removed from the scrutiny of researchers and academicians (Cooper, 2003, p. 16).

In order to place more scrutiny and light on these situations, four assertions are drawn below concerning: our unit of analysis; our theoretical frameworks; our expectations of non-governmental organizations; and the place of the public administration field in leading and monitoring the activities of network governance issues.

### **1. Reconfigure our unit of analysis to extend beyond the public bureaucracy to encompass the network.**

Observations regarding the utility of the public bureaucracy as *the* unit of analysis for the field have begun to gain more prominence. In a recent issue of *Public Administration Review*, Charles Goodsell, author of *The Case for Bureaucracy*, discusses the need to “shift paradigms” in light of network governance structures (2006). Goodsell echoes an observation made by Agranoff and McGuire when they asserted that, “Focusing empirical research nearly exclusively on the single-organization and bureaucratic dimension of public management will ultimately provide little guidance to practitioners operating in a collaborative managerial environment” (2003, p. 8). Yet, one notes the dearth of new publications arising from public administration scholars regarding the

implications of network governance. Researchers and scholars in the field need to explore why this is so and speculate as to whether this shortage arises from a simple lack of attention to networks, skepticism regarding the importance and impact of these networks, or methodological and theoretical limitations constraining the field's capacity to systematically analyze them.

## **2. Draw on different theoretical frameworks to help guide our analysis, including social capital, network, community of practice, and complexity theories.**

Defining the network as a unit of analysis appears to be more allusive than what may appear on the surface. Writing in a recent edition of *ATP*, Sorensen and Torfing recognize that:

Governance networks can take many different forms. They can either be self-grown or initiated from above. They might be dominated by loose and informal contacts or take the form of tight and formalized networks. They can be intra- or interorganizational, short-lived or permanent, and have a sector-specific or society-wide scope. The multiple forms of governance networks attest to the broad relevance of the concept for describing contemporary forms of societal governance. (2005, p. 197)

The capacity of networks to take many forms makes them difficult to empirically examine. Conversations at the 2006 Annual ASPA Conference during a panel discussion on the implications of network to the field surfaced the problem of operationalizing the network as an empirical construct. There was some debate among the panel of experts as to whether networks could be formally structured or not.

A host of theoretical and empirical advances are taking place that might help to shed more light on the network as an empirically valid unit of analysis. Social capital theory, rooted in assumptions regarding the relative value of social relations and the levels of trust, reciprocity and norms developed within them is useful in assessing the qualities of networks (Baron, Field, & Schuller, 2000; Putnam, 1993). Network theory, originating out of the field of sociology, has focused on the nature of exchanges that take place between actors involved in a network and has advanced statistical tools designed to map these connections (Marsden & Laumann, 1984).

Community of practice theory, emerging from the organizational learning and knowledge management fields (Snyder, Wenger, & de Sousa Briggs, 2003) is useful in describing and assessing inter and intra organizational relationships between actors and is being used to assess

the quality of collaboration occurring within a network (Gajda & Koliba, in press). Complexity theory builds upon a systems analysis framework, underscores the self-organizing capacities of groups and can be utilized in describing complicated networks activities and patterns (Koppenjan, 2004).

Space precludes a deeper assessment of the role of these theories in advancing the network as a unit of analysis. These theories have largely evolved outside of the sphere of public administration. However, there have emerged a host of empirical studies around network governance, perhaps the most prominent of which has been Agranoff and McGuire's study of network governance from the perspective of local community development initiatives (2003). Out of their empirical studies of collaboration between local governments, non-profits and area businesses, they have advanced the concept of "collaborative management." Recognizing the place of both vertical and horizontal ties, Agranoff and McGuire lay out a framework for assessing complex networks that can take into account the existence of lateral, horizontal relations as well as principal-agent, vertically arranged relations common to more vertically arranged relationships. Their findings stand to not only advance the notion of collaborative management within the public administration field, but also to make an important contribution to collaboration theory in general.

**3. Critically examine the role that public accountability can or must play within for profit and non-profit organizations; in essence, raising the prospects of "making businesses and non-profit organizations act more like government," particularly in regard to public accountability.**

Barry Bozeman's (1987) edict that "all organizations are public" deserves greater consideration. While, the corporate social responsibility movement and its attempts to promote a pluralistic view of corporate interests suggest the desire within some facets of the business community to consider the ways in which for profit firms are accountable to public interests. The place of "corporate social responsibility" and the extent to which government agencies and the policy tools at their disposal should promote it, is a topic worth exploring (Koliba & Bromberg, 2006). Skepticism persists regarding the extent to which private firms can self-regulate and voluntarily comply with socially responsible practices. It would be naïve to believe otherwise. This is why the role of the policy tool as a means for mobilizing and monitoring networks is so crucial (Salamon, 2002). In the voluntary sector, non-profit accountabil-

ity is being coupled with the needs for greater professionalization of management functions (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). Non-profits do have different accountability structures, relying on the integrity of their boards to monitor their behavior. Obligations to multiple funders complicate matters.

**4. Assert, rather boldly, that the public administration field, and public administration leaders within the public and voluntary sectors, can and must serve as an arbiter of network governance relationships.**

As we contemplate the next generation of public administration research, theory and practice, we must give due consideration to the ever evolving landscape that, to some extent, has already taken form under our noses. If the academic component of the public administration field is to stay relevant, we, as a field, need to focus more attention on the implications of network governance. This includes reasserting the normative basis from which the likes of Dwight Waldo, Robert Dahl and many others have stressed over the years. This normative basis needs to be combined with social capital, network, community of practice, and complexity theories to provide practitioners with the theoretical and empirical tools to define, defend and advance the public interest.

Does this final assertion call for the advancement of a “new paradigm” in public administration? Should a new network governance framework take its place along side of classical public administration, new public administration, new public management, and the new public service? The extent to which these schools of thought represent complete paradigm shifts is debatable. The unit of analysis across all of these schools of thought has remained the public bureaucracy. With the advancement of new public management, the boundaries between sectors begin to fracture. Yet, the lack of greater attention from the field to the implications of network governance for administrative practice and theory suggests that this fracture has not opened the flood gates toward a new paradigm. Major cost overruns in Iraq involving the issuance of contracts to private businesses or the outsourcing of prisoner interrogation underscore the very tangible implications of such questions. Goal incompatibilities can lead to inefficiencies, if not outright malfeasants. Dare we suggest that the integrity of our democratic form of governance is at stake here?

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