

MOTIVATING AND STEERING WITH COMPARATIVE DATA

HOW THE BAR CHART AND “THE LIST” MIGHT HELP TO STEER SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Robert D. Behn

ABSTRACT

Several managerial strategies — particularly goal setting combined with performance feedback — can be very effective in improving an organization’s performance at output-focused tasks. But can such strategies be adapted to achieve societal outcomes that are less operational and definable, more ambiguous and ambitious, perhaps more political? Can they be adapted to help steer social integration by, for example, enhancing social justice and strengthening citizenship? Recognizing how different kinds of targets, different kinds of feedback, and different kinds of reward structures affect team and individual motivation can help public officials design not only better strategies for directly producing output results, but also better strategies for indirectly fostering broader outcome purposes of, for example, social integration.

Keywords - *Comparative feedback, learning, Motivation, performance management, positive deviants, social integration, steering*

POOR UPTAKE OF GOAL SETTING

The impact on organizational behavior of setting targets and monitoring progress has been well established (Latham, Borgogni, and Petitta 2008; Locke and Latham 1990; Latham and Pinder 2005; Duncan 1989, chap 7). Latham and Locke, perhaps the two most prominent scholars in this field, conclude that “the simplest and most direct motivational explanation of why some people perform better than others is because they have different performance goals” (1991, 213). Yet, the use of this not very complicated management strategy is underutilized. Rousseau observes that “sadly, there is poor uptake on management practices of known effectiveness”; for her example, Rousseau uses “goal setting and performance feedback” (2006, 258). And Rousseau is writing, primarily, about management in the private, not the public, sector.

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Why is this uptake so poor? I'm not sure.¹ In the public sector, however, perhaps three aspects of political and organizational judgments are important deterrents:

- a. Public executives and legislators recognize that setting performance targets can be politically controversial.²
- b. Public executives conclude that publicizing progress against such targets is professionally and personally dangerous.
- c. Public executives realize that the quasi-public display of feedback in the form of in-your-face data comparing the performance of units can be threatening to the feedbackees and thus uncomfortable for the feedbackers.

THE DISPLAY OF COMPARATIVE DATA

Yet, I have observed public executives who do set explicit performance targets. Moreover, I have seen them provide performance feedback using comparative data about the results produced by different units. (These units can be jurisdictions, departments, agencies, divisions, or other subunits.) Indeed, these public executives have delivered this comparative feedback in two deceptively simple yet very compelling ways:

The Bar Chart is very simple. It displays accomplishment data for each unit and may include a horizontal line that defines the target for all units. Regardless of whether the target line is there, everyone immediately focuses on the tallest bar (why is this unit doing so well?) and on the shortest bar (why is this unit doing so badly?)

The List is even simpler. On one piece of paper, there are two columns. The first, Column A, contains the names of the units that made their target for the previous period (year, quarter, month). The second, Column B, contains the names of the units that didn't make their targets. When "The List" is distributed at a meeting of all unit directors, behavior is very predictable. People look first for their own unit's name and then for the name of their colleagues' units (Behn 1991, 71; 2003a).

These two quite ordinary mechanisms for providing comparative feedback about results can quickly grab managers' attention. Moreover, such a display of comparative performance data can motivate at least some managers and their units to improve.

These two feedback strategies can help to steer the behavior of people and organizations both inside and outside of government. Indeed, they can steer performance in any context as long as people — both the steerers and the rowers — have agreed on:

- a. the purpose they are pursuing;
- b. the targets to be achieved by when and by whom; and
- c. the indicators that will be used to compare the results produced by different organizations.

And, if the incentives are aligned with the purposes, targets, and indicators (always a big “if”), they can foster learning from the “positive deviants” (Spreitzer and Sonenshein 2004).

THREE CRITICAL PIECES OF INFORMATION

The Bar Chart and The List are effective because they provide everyone with three critical pieces of information:

1. They tell everyone — every manager and every employee — how well his or her unit is doing.
2. They tell everyone how everyone else’s unit is doing.
3. They tell everyone that everyone else knows how well his or her unit is doing.

Of course, to be motivational, this information must be public — or, at least, quasi-public. That is, the performance feedback must be distributed to everyone who has a role in achieving the overall, collective target as well as achieving the targets for their individual units. It doesn’t work if people are only told the height of their own organization’s bar. It doesn’t work if people are only told if their organization is in Column A or in Column B. It only works to motivate improvement and foster learning if everyone has access to all three pieces of information. Both The Bar Chart and The List can motivate people because they provide a basis for social comparison.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL COMPARISON

Both The Bar Chart and The List reward — with recognition and prestige — the high-performing units and their managers. And they both reprove — with peer embarrassment — the low-performing units and their managers. Both of these simple feedback mechanisms can effectively steer the behavior of unit managers (who value peer esteem) by motivating them to focus on the results that the organization seeks to produce.

The Bar Chart and The List create two types of comparisons. First, such feedback can create absolute comparisons. From the data, individuals and units will observe: “I am achieving my target,” or “I am not achieving my target.” Second, the feedback can also create relative comparisons — social comparisons (Festinger 1954). From the data, individuals and units will observe “I am doing better than these people” and/or “I am not doing as well as those people.” Such comparisons can be either encouraging or discouraging, motivating or demotivating. For example, in some circumstances, people who learn they are below the median produce more while those above the median produce less (Chen et al., 2010). Indeed, the research on the motivational impact of social comparisons produces conflicting conclusions and implications (Ilies and Judge 2005). Suls and his colleagues conclude that “exposure to someone who is superior to oneself can lead either to positive or negative evaluations because such exposure suggests (a) that one is relatively disadvantaged and (b) that one could improve” (Suls et al. 2002, 162). After all, a variety of circumstances surrounding the performance feedback can affect people’s response.

People in similar circumstances can be inspired by others who are performing better. Wood reports that people “tend to adopt the performance standards of others who are similar on surrounding dimensions . . . imitating others who are similar on dimensions that are related to performance.” That is, an upward social comparison can be inspiring. It can also be threatening. But which? Wood observes that “the evidence suggests that when similar others are competitors, upward comparisons are aversive, but when they are not competitors, their superior performance is inspiring” (1989, 239).

What, however, is the motivational impact of a social comparison with a super star? It depends, report Lockwood and Kunda, whether the similar success seems attainable or not: “The realization that one is currently less successful than another may lose its sting if it is accompanied by the belief that one will attain comparable success in the future” (1997, 93).

In some circumstances, such as a traditional athletic competition, not every one can be successful. Williams and his colleagues report that college track-and-field athletes who fail to achieve their initial goals tend to revise their own, personal goals downwards *if* they conclude that their failure was due to uncontrollable and stable factors (the difficulty of the goal; their own ability). In contrast, if they concluded that their failure was due to controllable or unstable factors (strategy, or effort, or luck), they will not lower their goal but seek to work harder or smarter (Williams, et al. 2000; Donovan and Williams 2003). Note, however, that one of the uncontrollable factors relating to the difficulty of the goal is the competition. Track-and-field athletes are clearly engaged in a zero-sum game, and the individual athlete’s ability to achieve his or her goals depends upon the quality of the competition. Most of these athletes will not end up in Column A.

In some circumstances, team targets work better than individual targets (Matsui, et al. 1987). Moreover, if the data are distributed for both teams and individuals within teams, the comparison fosters even better performance (Lawler and Rhode, 1976) which may be the result of intra-group competition (Stroebe et al. 1996).

INFORMATION, REWARDS, AND MOTIVATION

Two specific aspects of the organizational circumstances can significantly affect motivation and behavior that result from performance feedback — from the display of The Bar Chart or of The List. First, what is the precise nature of the performance information they receive? Second, what kind of rewards — both extrinsic and intrinsic — are available to whom for what levels of performance?

The nature of performance feedback that people are given can be important, for the specificity of the performance information can affect how people respond. Is every individual or unit given information only about his, her, or its level of performance? Or is every individual or unit given information about how his, her, or its level of performance compares with some measure of central tendency (mean, median, mode) for everyone? If so, are people only told whether their performance is above or below this central tendency, or are they given more detailed feedback about how much above or below they are? Or is every individual or unit given information about how *all* of the

other individuals or units are performing? And if so, are they given information only about the distribution of the performance of the other individuals or units? Or are they told the level at which every other individual or unit is performing? The more detailed the comparative feedback an individual or unit receives about how he, she, or it is performing, the greater the ability of that individual or unit to decide how easy or difficult it will be to improve both absolute and relative performance.

The nature of the rewards that individuals or units can receive for different levels of performance can also affect how people will respond. Do all of the rewards — both extrinsic and intrinsic — go to the single, top performer? Or are rewards also available for improvement, or for doing well on particular attributes that contributed to overall performance? Does every individual or unit have an opportunity — by achieving its own target — to receive a reward? Or does the reward system require that most units (and people) end up being labeled as losers?

Are the units all competing against each other? Or is each unit competing against its own goal? The first can produce cutthroat competition. The second can produce friendly competition (Behn 2003b).

Consider several possible combinations of the availability of information and the distribution of rewards:

Situation #1: Reward: Only the top performer wins the reward (which may be either extrinsic or intrinsic). *Information:* An individual or unit is simply told it is well above, slightly above, slightly below, or well below the median. *Motivation:* In this situation, the social comparison may motivate all the individuals and units — except those told that they are well above the median — to stop working.

Situation #2: Reward: Every unit that achieves its own target wins the reward (extrinsic or intrinsic). *Information:* Every individual or unit is, at least, told how well it compares with its target. *Motivation:* In this situation, the individuals or units that conclude that they can, with a reasonable amount of effort, achieve their target are apt to work to achieve it; those individuals or units that are so far below the target that they cannot possibly achieve it are apt to decide not to bother; those individuals or units that are well above their target may conclude that they can slack off and still achieve the reward.

Situation #3: Reward: Every unit that achieves its target wins the extrinsic or, at least, most obvious and visible reward, but those who also do particularly well in particular dimensions understand that they will also win an intrinsic reward (or perhaps, depending on how well they do, several different intrinsic rewards). *Information* (the same as Situation #2): Every individual or unit at least knows how well it compares with its target. *Motivation:* Those near or well below the target are apt to behave as they did in Situation #2, but those well above the target may decide not to slack off.

Situation #4: Reward: Every individual or unit that achieves its target wins the extrinsic or most obvious and visible reward; and if all individuals or units achieve their targets everyone gets an extra reward. *Information:* Every individual or unit knows precisely how well all units are doing compared with the target. *Motiva-*

tion: In this situation, every individual or unit has an incentive to help every other individual and unit to achieve its target.

Indeed, if everyone has a chance of winning the formal, extrinsic reward (Situations 2, 3, and 4), the well performing individuals or units have no incentive to withhold their performance strategies from others. Indeed, one way to provide extra, intrinsic rewards (in terms of internal prestige) to the top performers — the “positive deviants” — is to ask them to explain their strategies in formal training sessions with others (Behn 1991, 80-81).

LEARNING FROM THE POSITIVE DEVIANTS

The Bar Chart or The List identifies for all to see not just those that are underperforming but also the positive deviants. Providing that information may not be, however, enough to improve everyone’s performance. For unless these positive deviants are willing — indeed, eager — to share their knowledge, most of the other units may not be able to figure out how to achieve their targets. To improve performance, organizations need both the motivation to improve and the operational capacity for doing so. The positive deviants (unless they are purely lucky) have learned something about how to create this necessary operational capacity.

Thus the nature of the reward system — formal and extrinsic; informal and intrinsic — is important. It influences directly, but perhaps subtly, the willingness of the positive deviants to provide the technical transfer that can help others to improve their operational capacity and thus their performance. If this is a zero-sum game, with the most positive of deviants getting all of the praise, prestige, and esteem (and almost all of any available financial rewards), they will have little incentive to help others. If, however, the rewards are unlimited — either because funding is not a constraint (a highly unlikely occurrence) or because the rewards are not (or, at least, not exclusively) financial — then they can be bestowed on every unit that meets its target. In addition, those positive deviants who help others will implicitly receive (and perhaps will be explicitly given) extra prestige.

Any effort to steer but not row — any strategy that gives people the chart and destination yet does not lay out the officially authorized course — suggests that some learning needs to be done. Those who are doing the steering have established their target but confess that they don’t know the best way to achieve it. Consequently, they are seeking to promote experimentation by the rowers while creating incentives for the most successful experimenters to share their lessons with others.

In 1987, the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare was trying to implement case management. But how? “There is no right answer,” Jolie Bain Pillsbury, the department’s associate director for field operations (who was doing a lot of steering), told local office directors (who would have to do the rowing). “You’ll be inventing unique solutions that will help each other” (Behn, 1991, 119).

Both The Bar Chart and The List, which was used extensively at the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare (Behn, 1991, 71), are mechanisms for identifying the positive deviants so that everyone else knows whom to ask for advice.

WHAT, EXACTLY, IS STEERING?

Osborne and Gaebler popularized the concept of government's role in "steering," contrasting it with a bureaucratic approach of "rowing":

The word government is from a Greek word, which means 'to steer.' The job of government is to steer, not to row the boat. Delivering services is rowing, and government is not very good at rowing (1992, 25).

Actually, Osborne and Gaebler's metaphor is a quote from Savas,³ who is a major advocate of government privatization.

Indeed, Savas makes the distinction between steering and rowing in many of his publications. For example:

privatization is the key to both limited and better government. . . . This view of government is in keeping with the very origins of the word *government*. Its Greek root means 'helmsman.' The role of government is to steer, not to man the oars. Privatization helps restore government to its fundamental purpose (Savas, 1987, 288, 290, emphasis in the original).

The word govern comes from a Greek root, 'kybern,' which means 'to steer.' (The same root appears in cybernetics, the science of control.) The job of government is to steer, not to row. Delivering services — whether repairing streets or operating an airline — is rowing, and government is not very good at rowing. Privatization is a pragmatic policy for restoring government to its fundamental role, steering, while relying on the private sector to do the rowing (Savas, 2000, 7).

the English word 'govern' is from the Greek word for steering. In other words, the task of government is to steer, not to row. Raising cows, running golf courses, and operating radio stations are examples of rowing, and government is not well suited for rowing (Savas, 2005, 5).⁴

The "rowing" metaphor is relatively easy to explain: Rowing is essentially "doing." In contrast, the exact meaning of the "steering" metaphor is not quite as obvious. Is steering more than *not* rowing? Or is it simply an attractive abstraction that (when paired with rowing) provides an amorphous yet comfortable rationale for the very concrete tools of privatization and contracting?

Indeed, Osborne and Gaebler never quite define "steering." Rather, they simply leave "steering" to be whatever "rowing" is not, listing "36 alternatives . . . to standard service delivery by public employees" (1992, 31, 332-342). Thus, if "rowing" is government actually doing the work, then "steering" becomes the collection of strategies, processes, tactics, and other mechanisms that government uses to get others to do whatever it is that government wants done. Rousseau would not be surprised to learn, however, that the practice of setting targets and providing performance feedback is not on Osborne

and Gaebler's inventory of 36 alternatives. It does, however, include "catalyzing non-governmental efforts," "convening nongovernmental leaders," and "voluntary associations" — approaches that could be used to steer social integration.

Savas himself highlights the word's nautical etymology (Greek, helmsman), but he, too, never defines "steering." Instead, he describes ten different "service arrangements" (1987, 62). But as the titles of many of Savas's books make clear (1982, 1987, 2000, 2005), he is an advocate of privatization. To Savas, "privatization is the New Public Management" (2000, 219).

Thus, colloquially, "steering" has become an euphemism for "contracting out."

THE CHALLENGE OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL STEERING

If steering is merely contracting, the question is: For what would who contract? Steering a boat is strictly a two-dimensional activity. There exist well researched maritime charts to provide an overall framework; they display the hazards to avoid and the buoys to mark the way. There are also books (National Ocean Service, 2009) that provide accurate information about tides and currents. Today, moreover, the electronics of GPS can provide some additional guidance; enter the destination (the target) and you can get some very precise instructions for steering. Finally, when the rowers reach their pre-designated destination, everyone (including steerers, rowers, and independent observers) knows that the rowers have crossed the finish line.

In the public sector, however, contracting is rarely a two-dimensional undertaking with a single, easily and unambiguously demarcated destination on a universally accepted chart. Specifying what is to be accomplished by government's vendors — even by vendors who are raising cows, running the golf courses, or operating the radio stations — involves multiple dimensions. What standards should we set for those who would operate the radio station? Should the station play music (if so, what style?), air public-affairs commentary (if so, what views?), or emphasize sports (if so, what type?)? And how would who decide whether such standards have been met? How will we know if the golf course is run well? Who gets a say? Just the golfers? All taxpayers? All citizens?

And what about those cows? Stipulating the quantity of cows to be raised is relatively straight forward. But what about the quality of the cows? Does it make a difference whether the cows are Guernseys, Holsteins, or Belted Galloways? What characteristics define whether an individual cow is adequate? Excellent, superior, or exceptional? Sub-standard, deficient or worthless? Are these technical decisions or political ones?

If government wants the rowers to row strictly on the basis of efficiency or effectiveness, specifying what goes in the denominator may be relatively easy. It is just funds expended (or, perhaps, some more inclusive measure of social and opportunity costs). What, however, belongs in the numerator? Even with cows, golf courses, and radio stations, this is rarely obvious — or uncontroversial. Steering isn't as simple as it sounds. Little wonder that government contracts are so long.

If the concept of steering is to be limited to privatization and contracting, it is not apt to contribute much to social integration — to enhancing social justice and strengthening citizenship. After all, there is a significant difference between raising cows and creating social integration, between running a golf course and reintegrating the unemployed into the labor market, between operating a radio station and preparing children for their future lives as citizens. The instrumental steering of vendors could renew the visible features of neighbors and the physical attributes of communities. But privatization is unlikely to have much of an impact on true social integration. What social-integration functions would we privatize?

CONTRACTING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CITIZENSHIP

When a government agency contracts with a non-governmental organization (which may have its own purposes beyond the particulars in the contract) for some very specific services designed to promote social justice or citizenship, some political actors may vehemently object — to the nature or purpose of the contract, to the vendor, or to both. In the United States, a recent example is the controversy over ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, that established the following mission:

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) aims to organize a majority constituency of low- to moderate-income people across the United States. The members of ACORN take on issues of relevance to their communities, whether those issues are discrimination, affordable housing, a quality education, or better public services. ACORN believes that low- to moderate-income people are the best advocates for their communities, and so ACORN's low- to moderate-income members act as leaders, spokespeople, and decision-makers within the organization.⁵

From its beginning in Arkansas in 1970, ACORN grew to a international organization with units in over 100 cities, creating a history of pursuing its mission aggressively on a number of fronts with a variety of services and strategies.

Politically, however, ACORN was identified with the Democratic party. Though ACORN had no formal affiliation, Republicans concluded that its activities — particularly its programs to register voters — helped its political opponents. Indeed, in 2008, the Obama presidential campaign paid ACORN to help get out the vote. Then, in September 2009, political activists released a video of ACORN staff giving two people (portraying a pimp and a prostitute) advice about how to set up a brothel. As Clark Hoyt, the “public editor” at *The New York Times*, reported:

To conservatives, Acorn is virtually a criminal organization that was guilty of extensive voter registration fraud in 2008. To its supporters, Acorn is a community service organization that has helped millions of disadvantaged Americans by organizing to confront powerful institutions like banks and developers (Hoyt 2010).

During the past decade, ACORN had contracts with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for over \$42 million, but in 2009 Congress cut off funding.

Also in 2009, the Census Bureau canceled its unpaid partnership with ACORN. In March 2010, ACORN announced that, after 40 years, it would close.

Social justice and vigorous citizenship may be widely held values in the abstract. Who is going to publicly assert that they are opposed to social justice, to wide-spread citizenship? Operationally, however, any specific effort to foster either of these values (or others that encourage social integration) quickly creates political winners and thus political losers. ACORN didn't just register any and all potential voters; it focused on registering low-income and traditionally disenfranchised voters. If ACORN was very successful, it could change the voting outcomes in close elections.

EXTENDING AND ELABORATING THE CONCEPT OF STEERING

I assign to the word “steering” more than contracting out — more than the mechanisms for getting the private and nonprofit sectors to do what government wants done (but decides not to do itself). Here's my definition:

Steering is the collection of indirect strategies (not including orders, rules, regulations, and other directives) designed to motivate people to employ their intelligence, creativity, and energy to create public value.

Three aspects of this definition are important:

First: Steering is not just about contracting out the work of government. Steering is a management and leadership strategy that can be employed inside any organization — public, nonprofit, or for-profit — and by a collaborative as well. In the public sector, executives can use steering strategies to improve the performance of their own public agencies or of independent but collaborating organizations. Indeed, it is primarily because government has relied (internally) on orders, rules, regulations, and other directives to manage public agencies that government has developed a reputation for rowing poorly. But all rowers (including subordinates, collaborators, and vendors) need a coxswain. And the cox (who is usually physically much smaller than the rowers) has to earn credibility with the rowers before they will follow his or her guidance.

Second: Steering can use more than money as a motivator (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Heath 1999). To many of the advocates of privatization and contracting, however, money is the dominant (if not the sole) motivator. To increase their effectiveness, however, the steerers need to employ a variety of creative motivators. If contracting and privatization are driven primarily by a financial motivation, the relationship will inevitably become either (a) driven not by the steerer's public purposes but by the rower's financial objectives, or (b) overburdened by rules and regulations designed to ensure that the rower does indeed pursue something close to (but, unfortunately, never identical with) the steerer's purposes.

Third: Steering can be used to do more than raise cows, run golf courses, or operate radio stations. Steering can be used to create true “public value” (Moore 1995).

THE SEARCH FOR DIRECTION AND DATA

Any version of the concept of steering implies a direction. It suggests some kind of decision or consensus about where we are trying to go — about what we are trying to accomplish. It suggests there exists some way of setting a course towards where we are trying to steer ourselves, or others, and maybe society. Moreover, the concept of steering also suggests that we have some idea about how we will know when we get there — or, at a minimum, provide some way of gauging how close we are to getting there. Both nautical and governmental steerers and rowers need to be able to answer the question: How much progress are we making?

If public managers are going to be able to steer us closer to social integration, they, too, need some way of setting a course towards a specific destination and measuring how close the rowers are to getting there. This requires targets and data.

Targets are the equivalent of the topographic bearings on the navigator's chart. They specify that we are attempting to reach this particular harbor — not these other possible (and alluring and beneficial) ports, anchorages, coves, islands, inlets, or bays. Targets reflect a decision about where we are trying to go, though not necessarily the course for getting there. And if these targets can activate “prosocial motivation” (Grant 2007; 2008; Grant and Berg 2012), they can be doubly effective. Moreover, even if those targets are challenging (or even impossible), they can still help to improve performance (Erez and Zidon 1984; Lock 1982).

Data are the public manager's equivalent of topographic bearings on the navigator's chart. The steerer — by comparing the boat's position with the location of established buoys, or with a GPS reading — can tell how much progress has been made and far away the final destination lies. Similarly, the public manager's data can reveal how much an organization or collaborative is accomplishing. This, however, requires some broadly accepted benchmarks of good performance — some prior targets. Otherwise, the interpretation of the data is open to dispute. (Even prior and wide agreement on the targets does not guarantee that others will not later assert that the targets were inappropriate, inadequate, or simply wrong.) Still, targets, benchmarks, and data can be dangerous; for they can reveal that no one is accomplishing very much.

Indeed, although social justice and vigorous citizenship may be widely held political values in the abstract, the specifics can quickly generate controversy. What are the next targets for creating social integration — for reintegrating the unemployed into the labor market or preparing children for their future lives as citizens. Progress will be made not by pursuing widespread social integration in the abstract but by focusing on important and definable components, establishing achievable (but interim) targets, and then using data to steer (that is, motivate, identify, recognize, and reward) people and organizations to make significant progress.

THE COLLABORATION IMPERATIVE

If the objective is social integration, who will do the steering, and who will do the rowing? The division of labor between steerers and rowers is not apt to be as clear as it is

within a governmental hierarchy or when government is contracting out the provision of specific services. Instead, any effort at social integration is apt to involve many parties who will share the responsibility for both the steering and the rowing. After all, any individual or unit's standing when it comes to affecting the steering may well depend upon how much they contribute to the rowing. Moreover, when attempting to achieve difficult public purposes — and attaining any new level of social integration is certainly a difficult public purpose! — people perform better if they accept the goal. Indeed, report Erez and Zidon “high accepters” produce “high performance even with impossible goals” (1984, 76). Harackiewicz and Elliot conclude that “target goals are most effective when congruent with higher order purpose goals” (1998, 684).

Thus, the first thing that those who aspire to achieve social integration through steering need to do is to mobilize and energize an effective collaborative of like-minded individuals and organizations to achieve some specific aspect of this macro purpose. Creating such collaborative capacity is never easy (Bardach 1998). It requires agreement about long-term macro purposes, about short-term (perhaps micro) targets, about who will contribute what resources, activities, and energy to achieve both the targets and the purposes, and about who will collect what data to determine how much progress the collaborative (and perhaps individual collaborators) are making. Moreover, the collaborative needs to generate the resources — both the funding and the authority — with which to pursue its targets and purposes. And, although it will tend to avoid this issue at the beginning, the collaborative will need to figure out who will get what recognition (that is, intrinsic rewards) for doing what or accomplishing what. The collaborative has to resolve a variety of issues about purposes and targets, roles, responsibilities, and rewards — each of which has the potential for significant conflict, and any of which can destroy fragile relationships.

Moreover, the collaborative will need a cause-and-effect theory. For rarely will it directly produce its desired outcomes. Like most public and nonprofit organizations, it will produce outputs.⁶ Consequently, the members of a collaborative will need a theory that connects the outputs they produce to the outcomes they wish to achieve. For unless there is a general agreement about a cause-and-effect theory linking outputs that they will produce to the outcomes that they seek to achieve, the members of the collaborative will constantly debate what outputs they should produce and what targets to achieve (as a surrogate debate among competing cause-and-effect theories).

Finally, to be effective, a collaborative needs, as Bardach has emphasized (1998, 252-268), to develop trust. After all, every serious member of the collaborative is vulnerable — vulnerable to having his or her good will, effort, and resources exploited; vulnerable to losing credit to less diligent but more media-savvy collaborators; vulnerable to being tainted by the misdeeds of a less than ethical if only-fringe participant in the collaborative.

As is usual in any endeavor that possesses inherent uncertainty (and thus the potential for disagreement) about both purposes and strategy, it makes sense to start small and learn. In such circumstances, Weick's “strategy of small wins” has much to recommend it (1984).

STEERING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

If steering for social integration requires collaboration, who is accountable to whom for what (Behn, 2001, 62-66)?

What *results* are to be achieved? What are the specific targets for improved social integration?

Who are the accountability *holdees*? Who is responsible for achieving these targeted results?

Who are the accountability *holders*? To whom will the accountability holdees be accountable?

One answer is through mutual collective responsibility (Behn, 2001, chap 7). In a collaborative, accountability cannot be strictly hierarchical. Different members of the collaborative have responsibilities for contributing different inputs and producing specific outputs that help to create the total integrative outcome.

Fostering such accountability within the collaborative (whose members joined because they share a common purpose) may be relatively easy. Yet, there are plenty of people and organizations outside of the collaborative that do not share its core purpose. Thus, accountability within the collaborative will be complicated by accountability to the outside world. After all, the members of the collaborative may have agreed upon the general purposes they wish to pursue and the specific targets that they wish to achieve by when. But others may have different views about the broad public value or the specific personal consequences of pursuing these purposes. And even if others accept the broad public value, they still may wish to achieve different specific targets.

Consequently, for the politically charged collection of issues that fall under the general heading of “social integration,” it may not be easy — or even possible — to shift from adversarial accountability to mutual, collective responsibility.

STEERING SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Producing output results in any large organization — public, nonprofit, or for-profit — is difficult enough. Yet, the leadership team of the organization does have access to a variety of proven (if underemployed) managerial strategies that can motivate people to produce such well specified outputs.

Societal outcomes, however, are more complex, ambiguous, and controversial. They are less amenable to direct, operational management. They require more than formal contracts. They need subtle steering.

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Thus, those who wish to use a steering strategy to improve social integration need not only to figure out how to steer themselves towards this objective. They also need to figure out how to steer society — individual citizens and organized interests — in the same direction.

NOTES

1. Perhaps this is because there is no template — no easily replicated model — either for setting targets or for providing performance feedback. Figuring out, in any specific, organizational circumstance, what targets to set, let alone how to provide the feedback, isn't obvious. Neither of these tasks is a technical one. Both are leadership responsibilities.
2. I use the word “target” rather than “goal.” In most of the goal-setting literature, the word “goal” is used for something that is quite specific — something that, when it is achieved, is obvious to all. Too frequently, however, the word “goal” (as used both by scholars and practitioners) ranges from a broad aspirational objective such as “eliminate world hunger” to something that is very specific and very measurable such as to improve one million people’s food consumption to 1,800 calories per day. For example, Tubbs and Ekeberg define a goal as “the desired outcome of action” (1991, 181), while to Bolman and Deal “goals are the conceptions of desired end states. They are projections of what the organization wants to produce or reach” (1991, 73). To be sure that my vocabulary is unambiguous, I avoid the word “goal” and, instead, employ the word “target.”
3. The quote that Osborne and Gaebler attribute to Savas comes with no citation, and I cannot find these exact words in any of Savas’s writing prior to the publication of Osborne and Gaebler’s book in 1992. Indeed, in one case where Savas uses similar words (2000, 7), he cites himself through the Osborne and Gaebler quote.
4. Savas also uses these same sentences in Andrisani et al. (2002, 3).
5. <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=12378> (Accessed May 30, 2010).
6. For-profit organizations have an advantage: Their outputs *are* their outcomes.

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