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Making performance management relevant in complex and inter-institutional contexts: using outcomes as performance attractors

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Figure 1. Two logics of performance management: control-oriented performance management and performance attraction

Formulation

Implementation

Theorised improvements

Traditional / Control-oriented Performance Management

A comprehensive set of outcomes and indicators is developed by a central authority

Measures are cascaded across performance-managed agents with accountabilities assigned to measures

Actors incentivised toward better performance

Improved managerial decision making

Performance Attraction

Outcomes framework is co-created by key stakeholders, and revised through regular consultation

Promotion and awareness raising amongst external actors

Creation of platforms for partnership, collaboration and cross-boundary learning

Improvement of data and measurement capabilities

Improved systemic alignment through external adoption of shared outcomes

Improvements through increased collaboration and collaborative innovation

Improved systemic understanding of outcomes

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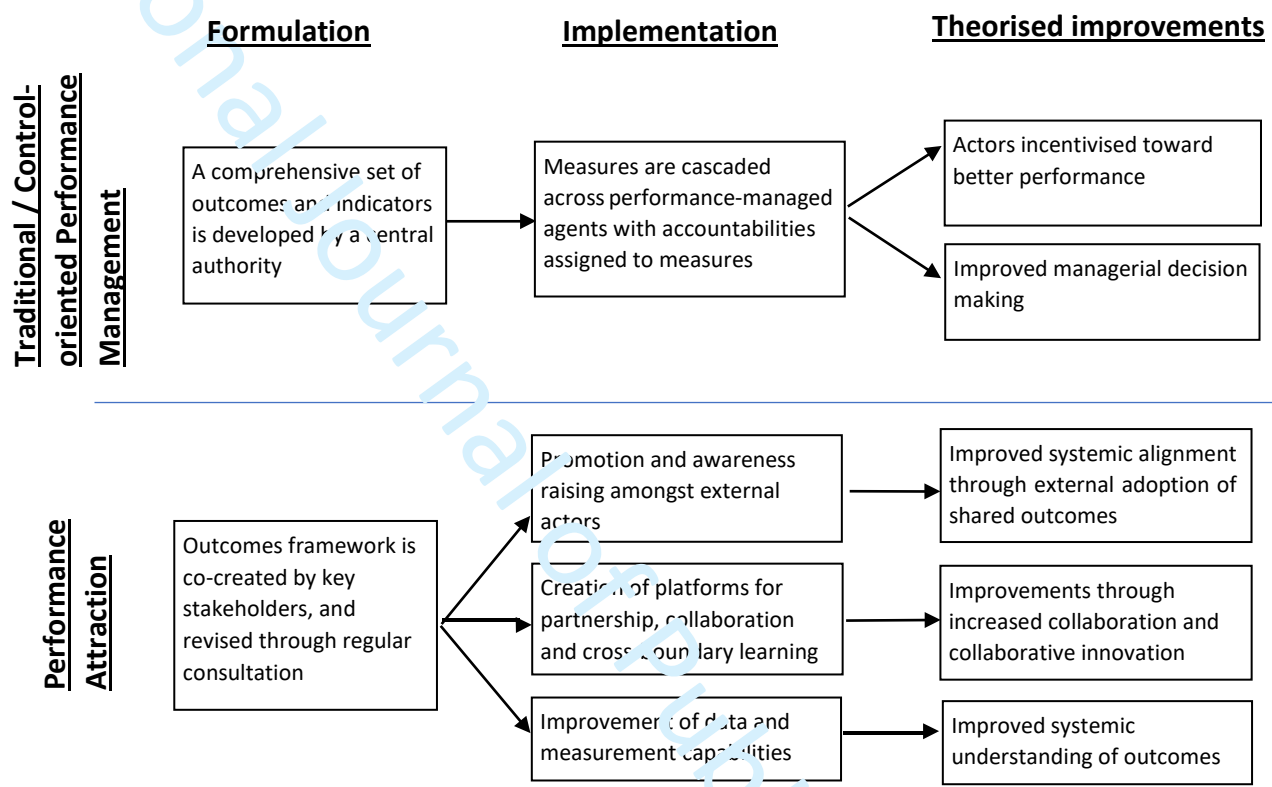# Making performance management relevant in complex and inter-institutional contexts: using outcomes as performance attractors

Keywords

Complexity, performance management, accountability, sustainable development goals

Word count: 7566

Abstract

Purpose

Modern public service systems tackle many complex issues by operating across institutional boundaries. Performance management must operate in this context without clear lines of accountability or central authority. This paper introduces and develops the theoretical mechanism of 'performance attraction' to describe how outcomes and associated performance indicators can operate as organising instruments in inter-institutional contexts by attracting, rather than directing, institutional behaviour.

Design

We explore the 'performance attractor' role played by outcomes through a multiple case study analysis of three prominent outcomes frameworks operating at the regional, national and international levels: the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness Outcomes Measurement and Evaluation Framework, and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Findings

We find support for two theorised mechanisms facilitated by the performance attractor concept: (1), that performance attractors enable coordination by creating a shared sense of responsibility for interdependent goals while also permitting autonomous navigation of individual contexts, and (2), that performance attractors support performance improvement by motivating collective learning and adaptation informed by institutional interdependencies. Cases relied primarily on voluntary adoption of outcomes frameworks, rather than utilising more coercive forms of accountability. Further studies should explore the institutional response to performance attractors to better understand the potential of this mechanism.

Originality

The paper contributes to a growing body of critical literature that has explored alternatives to traditional control-oriented performance management in complex and inter-institutional settings. We describe design principles that policymakers and practitioners can adopt to construct more effective performance frameworks in these conditions.

Introduction

The public sector is confronted with many complex social policy problems which require the negotiation of interdependencies across multiple tiers of government, diverse public service organisations and a wide range of external partners (Halligan et al., 2012). New Public Management reforms such as agencification, decentralisation, and marketisation have exacerbated this problem by contributing to fragmentation and dilution of accountabilities (Christensen and Lægreid, 2007; Rajala et al., 2019). In this context, governments, public service agencies and hybrid partnerships have increasingly turned toward inter-institutional outcomes frameworks to coordinate the actions of multiple actors toward shared goals. Governments such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have developed outcomes frameworks to carry forward a whole-of-government strategic approach. Inter-institutional performance measurement and management (PMM) systems have also proliferated to support hybrid and integrated responses to tackling systemic challenges (Van Dooren et al. 2010; Mollinger-Sabha et al. 2019). This approach is typified at the international level by perhaps the best-known outcomes framework currently extant, the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) within the Agenda 2030 framework.

PMM systems operating in an inter-institutional context are known to face two significant challenges. Firstly, traditional PMM theory assumes the existence of a sufficiently powerful and centralised authority, functioning as a 'principal' in Agency Theory terms (Jensen and Meckling 1976), to enforce the cooperation and motivation of performance-managed 'agents' through results-linked extrinsic incentives. In many inter-institutional contexts however, no such authority exists to enforce accountabilities or impose incentives (Moynihan et al. 2011). 'Agents' are also likely to face internal directives for which accountability is likely more direct and immediate (Bouckaert and Halligan 2008). Secondly, the causality of social outcomes is also far more complex than organisational outputs, making causal inference difficult and further problematizing the application of results-based accountability (French et al. 2020). The imposition of linear results-based management in this context is likely to produce a range of deleterious performance paradoxes, including gaming, spiralling transaction costs, and goal displacement (Van Thiel and Leeuw 2002). A linear conception of social change also suppresses the innovation required to address entrenched, complex social problems (Mollinger-Sahba et al. 2020).

A growing volume of critical PMM literature in the public (Moynihan et al. 2011; Jakobsen et al. 2017; Rajala et al. 2019; French et al. 2020) and private sectors (Melynk et al. 2014; Bourne et al. 2018) has argued that PMM theory, which is built on the assumption of centralised authority, vertical accountability regimes and extrinsic incentive systems, must be rethought in complex and inter-institutional contexts. Recommendations from this body of literature share a number of common threads: to maximise local and professional autonomy rather than constrain it through externally-imposed performance measures, to focus on emergent learning rather than performance accountancy, to foster internal motivation rather than imposing extrinsic incentives, and to use measures in boundary-crossing dialogue rather than as technical management controls. While scholarship has provided useful theoretical avenues to extend or even transcend PMM theory, and despite growing international interest (Jakobsen et al. 2017; Lowe et al. 2020), the literature has so far offered few practical methods of reforming PMM systems to embed these characteristics.

This paper introduces and develops the theoretical concept of 'performance attraction' to describe the role and function which outcomes and associated indicators might play in a context where direct results control and accountability is impossible or counterproductive to enforce. Drawing from the construct of 'attractors' in complexity theory, this theoretical mechanism describes how outcomes and associated performance measures can attract rather than direct institutional behaviour by building interdependent values and visions, and by using performance information to facilitate collective learning and adaption in complex and dynamic contexts. We explore this role in an empirical case study analysis of three inter-institutional PMM frameworks operating at different levels of analysis (regional, national and international) to explore how performance attraction may promote coordination and improvement.

Theoretical propositions: outcomes as performance attractors

In the complexity sciences, attractors are characteristics of complex adaptive systems which determine patterns of behaviour and long-term system trajectories. Their technical definition is mathematical, referring to the spectrum of possible evolutionary paths in dynamic systems facilitated by shared attraction to a set of underpinning parameters (Holland 1995). In organisational settings, attractors have been described as the structural factors determining regularities in the behaviour of self-organising actors by generating meaning within action. Attractors have drawn attention in public management scholarship since their manipulation could provide some prediction and control of organisational behaviour in inter-institutional administrative environments characterised by self-organisation (Bovaird 2008).

In an organisational context, authors have noted the strong conceptual affinity between attractors and 'shared values', which provide common ground and cultural affinity by lowering the expectation of goal misalignment or deviant behaviour (Dolan et al. 2003; Palmberg 2009). Shared values provide a relational basis to coordinate activity on the presumption of trust and the absence of formal inspection or accountability regimes. Others have understood attractors through the related concept of 'shared visions' which provide common goals and a shared frame of reference to organise collective adaptation toward a mutually-desired future system state (Gilstrap 2005; Pedder and MacBeath 2008). The emphasis on unified shared values and visions sits somewhat uncomfortably with the diversity of perspectives found in inter-institutional settings and the goal ambiguity of complex challenges. We entertain the alternative idea that performance attractors function as mechanisms for alliance-building and collective sensemaking on the recognition of interdependent rather than unified shared visions (Weick 1995). Outcomes have a strong conceptual affinity with this conception of attractors, providing a suitably high-level focal point and steering mechanism for navigating interdependencies without compromising the validity of differentiated goals.

We provisionally define performance attractors as *performance measures which promote coordinated learning and adaptation across institutional boundaries through building shared commitment toward interdependent values and visions.* This definition shares the traditional concern of PMM theory with enabling coordinated action amongst differentiated actors (Micheli and Neely 2010) and using performance information for goal-directed improvement (Moynihan et al. 2011), however it adopts very different processes for enacting these functions. Notably, performance attractors operate through a model of motivation which is based on the reinforcement of internally-held motivations and responsibilities toward interdependent (though not necessarily unified) values and visions, rather than external reward or sanction. In a research context, 'performance attraction' may therefore be a useful theoretical frame to analyse the forms of indirect influence attached to existing performance frameworks which have eschewed direct results-based accountability. To guide initial empirical analysis, Table 1 contrasts two key theoretical propositions of traditional PMM with an alternative 'performance attraction' logic of performance information use which pertains to these two aforementioned functional domains of performance management: coordination and improvement.

Table 1. Two models of performance information use: performance management and performance attraction

	Traditional performance management	Performance Attraction
Proposition 1: Coordination	Performance measures are cascaded through subsidiary units of organisation by a central authority and actors are held to account for measured performance	Performance measures build a collective sense of responsibility for interdependent goals while permitting autonomous navigation of individual contexts

Proposition 2: Improvement	Performance measures improve individual performance by coupling results-based accountability with managerial autonomy	Performance measures spur collective learning and adaptation based on a fluid and developing understanding of institutional interdependencies.

Our first proposition considers that performance attractors seek to coordinate institutional behaviour by generating patterns of behavioural change motivated by the shared values and interdependent visions described earlier in this section. Developing shared values and interdependent visions might help engender a sense of responsibility amongst particular communities for common outcomes (Nowell and Boyd 2014), motivating voluntaristic behaviour change in the absence of a direct controller. Performance attractors might also operate through more coercive mechanisms of peer and horizontal accountability rooted in adherence to shared values (Schillemans 2008), in which the collective upholding of visions and values is regulated by communities of peers. Performance attractors also operate in a multi-level context, where regimes of vertical and result-based accountability may well persist at organisational or individual levels.

Our second proposition considers that performance attractors motivate improved performance through an internal drive to uphold collective values and visions. This links with the significance attached to intrinsic motivation for learning and improvement noted in critical PMM literature, which may provide a basis for a learning-focussed performance regime (Jakobsen et al. 2017). In recognition that performance in complex settings is determined by the effectiveness of interdependent systems, not the efficiency of any particular actor or function (French et al. 2020), performance attractors would pursue improvement through enabling collective and dialogic learning and adaptation across traditional institutional boundaries. Inter-institutional performance dialogues may also promote the emergence of norms, values and professional standards for behaviour and so support the co-construction of horizontal accountabilities around contextually-appropriate performance standards.

Methodology

This paper explores the two theoretical propositions developed in the previous section through a cross-case analysis of three outcomes frameworks operating in an inter-institutional context at regional, national, and international levels. Through studying phenomena of interest in a naturalistic context, case study research can establish and refine theoretical relationships by recognising patterns and drawing inferences to theoretical relationships by studying phenomena of interest in a naturalistic context (Eisenhardt 1989; Ridder 2017). Multiple cases function as a distinct analytic unit through which theorised relationships and propositions can be explored, with regularities strengthening confidence in theoretical relationships (Yin 1994). Such case study designs are employed to advance theory development by testing and elaborating hypothesised concepts and relationships (Ridder 2017).

Cases were selected using theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt, 1989) to meet the research purpose of developing the concept of performance attractors. None of our three cases assigned direct accountability for outcomes, and each operated on an inter-institutional basis. All cases were of a suitably advanced stage, determined by the specification of a full suite of performance indicators to measure and track progress toward goals. Initiatives were chosen at different levels (regional, national and international), to explore theoretical validity across contexts and improve robustness (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Yin 1994). The three selected cases are described below.

The United Nations Agenda 2030

In September 2015, the UN's Agenda 2030 was launched to succeed the Millennium Development Goals as "call for action to change our world" (UN 2015), centred around 17 interconnected

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Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), or 'global goals', developed by a multi-lateral Open Working Group under the UN Secretary General. Overall political leadership for the UNSDGs was committed to a 'High Level Political Forum' (HLPF) established in 2012, with a remit for sharing practices and changing national sustainable development policy. The HLPF oversees a system of follow up and implementation, with voluntary national and thematic reviews conducted by Member States a central mechanism to review national progress toward UNSDGs. A range of other mechanisms were also established alongside the UNSDGs to expedite implementation, including technology transfer amongst partnerships, data development and implementation, and a funding mechanism to accelerate innovations (UN 2013; UN 2014; UN 2015).

An Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators was established by the UN Statistical Commission in 2015 to oversee the development of the UNSDGs' global indicator set, support national statistical capabilities, and improve data use in national development. The full list of 169 indicators and 232 tracker indicators supporting the UNSDGs were published in 2017 (UN 2017), however data gaps and methodological deficiencies were still being addressed at time of writing.

Scotland's National Performance Framework

In 2007 Scotland's incoming national government abolished departmental ministerial portfolios and embarked upon a new cross-government modality of working (Elliot 2020). Following interest in models of outcome-based working internationally (Mackie 2018; Wallace 2019) the Scottish Government developed its National Performance Framework (NPF), a whole-of-government outcomes framework seeking to establish a unified governmental purpose and monitor progress toward national social objectives. The original NPF set out a ten-year vision for the Scottish Government, underpinned by 15 National Outcomes which together represented the full and measurable expression of the Scottish Government's strategic intentions. National Outcomes were disaggregated into 45 National Indicators intended to provide a coherent direction of travel.

The NPF was enshrined in legislation through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, with a duty placed on Scottish Ministers to consult on and review National Outcomes every five years. A National Performance Unit set up within the Scottish Government in 2018 provided operational leadership for the NPF within the Scottish Government and facilitate its adoption inside the Scottish Government. The NPF was reviewed in 2011, 2016 and 2018 by the Scottish Government in response to data deficiencies and new data availability, the introduction of new policies and changing governmental priorities. A new National Outcome for older people was added in 2011, while others were revised and reworded over time. National Indicators expanded from 45 to 50 in 2011, to 55 in 2016, and to 81 in 2018 to provide a more comprehensive picture of national progress. 2011 and 2016 refreshes focussed on technical improvements in NPF datasets, however the 2018 refresh was much more significant, shifting the focus and purpose of the NPF from a whole-of-government approach to a whole-of-society approach. The NPF was so rebranded as 'Scotland's Wellbeing Framework' (rather than just the *Scottish Government's*), and the National Performance Unit and other actors began to focus on increasing its operational and use beyond national government.

The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH) is a multi-agency collaboration of individuals and organisations with a shared strategic aim of ending homelessness. In 2018 the WAAEH launched its "10-Year Strategy" which set ambitious goals including an end to all forms of chronic homelessness, a closing of the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people

experiencing homelessness, and a halving in mortality rates and hospital costs for those exiting homelessness. In 2019 the WAAEH commissioned the Centre for Social Impact, the University of Western Australia (CSI UWA) – itself a founding member of the WAAEH - to construct a results-based accountability framework for its 10-Year Strategy, intending initially to adopt Kania and Kramer's (2011) collective impact model based on centralised reporting and decision-making processes. Following consultations and a literature review, CSI UWA and WAAEH leaders developed a different understanding of social change stemming from complex adaptive systems theory. The authors of the final Framework developed a radically different approach, based on a collaborative learning approach of developmental evaluation (Mollinger-Sahba et al. 2019).

The complete WAAEH Framework spans seven interlinked domains, each composed of outcomes, broken down into targets and measures in a 'Data Dictionary' made available on the WAAEH website. 9 WAAEH Strategy Goals form the core of this model, providing the overall shared vision for the WAAEH collaboration, while the other six goals are more descriptive, seeking to provide instruction and guidance for partners to orientate their actions toward this. The multi-level dataset coupled with its proposed developmental evaluation approach intended to promote recognition and negotiation of the interdependencies amongst WAAEH partners, with the framework itself intended to evolve through this process. Shortly after the WAAEH Framework was launched in August 2019, the initial philanthropic grant under which the WAAEH was operating ended, and the WAAEH Outcomes Framework has not yet been implemented in practice. Notwithstanding, the CSI UWA has published updated compilations of some performance indicator results in a 'Dashboard' to WAAEH stakeholders and published an updated version of the Framework.

Data collection and analysis

Case study research affords the ability to structure comparative analysis and test theory using multiple sources of data (Yin 1994; Ridder 2017). In all cases a full documentary review was undertaken incorporating all publicly available datasets and grey literature accompanying each framework. Various factors prohibited a uniform approach to data collection, including the researcher role in relation to the outcomes frameworks, the availability of documentary information, and the duration of operation of each framework. While data collection methods differed, we sought to construct detailed case studies of comparable depth of analysis.

In the NPF case, five semi-structured interviews (45-75 minutes in length) were conducted with Scottish Government officials occupying key positions relating to the NPF, including senior leadership in the Scottish Government, operational leadership for the NPF, and key officers involved in implementation, data collation and analysis. Interviews covered the operation and function of the NPF inside and outwith the Scottish Government, and also probed intentions behind decisions relating the NPF to give insight into the key dimensions of the attractor concept, such as how accountability, collaboration, learning and decision making processes were arranged around it. These interviews were supplemented with a document review of Scottish Government published materials relating to the NPF since its inception (available at https://www.gov.scot/publications/), and a review of external commentary and analyses of the NPF in academic and grey literatures.

In the WAAEH case, case data draws primarily from the personal involvement of one author in the design and development of the WAAEH framework. While no explicit observation framework was used in this process, this involved intensive engagement with Alliance stakeholders and first-hand experience of key decision making processes related to the WAAEH framework. These observations were supported by supplementary research and analysis conducted by the author in the production of project reports (Mollinger-Sabha et al. 2019). Source material included community consultation documents, political engagement in planning processes, funding applications in relation to social

capacity building, reports in national and local media, and website data from the various community, statutory, and private sector organizations involved.

The UN Agenda 2030 case was supported by such a wide range of documentation, analysis and commentary that a comparably detailed case account did not require additional primary data collection. A timeline of key developments was developed from the UN's publication library and other public documentation, which provided an outline of development to present. This review was supplemented firstly by a review of key grey literature compiled by UN agencies and research institutes on the UNSDGs, and secondly by a review of academic research using Google Scholar, focussing our search on the attractor concept by including 'accountability' and 'responsibility' in search parameters.

In line with the replication logic of Yin (1994) and Eisenhardt (1989), our analysis strategy explored regularities in the design and deployment of outcomes frameworks, linking these regularities to our two propositions relating to performance attractors. In analyzing these documents and how individual and institutional partners made sense of them, an abductive analytical approach allowed us to "*confront theory with empirical data in an evolving fashion*" (Dubois & Araujo 2007, pp. 131), capturing the relevant features of each case through an iterative return from our data to the literature, and adding dependability and authenticity to the findings (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

Findings

In this section we draw together findings from the three case studies to address our two propositions developed in the theoretical section.

Proposition 1: Performance measures build a collective sense of responsibility for interdependent goals while permitting autonomous navigation of individual contexts

Building partnerships

All three initiatives were partnership endeavours requiring cooperation across institutional boundaries. In line with the first proposition, outcomes played a strong coordinative function in partnership building, building a sense of identity and commonality of mission. Agenda 2030 was positioned in founding documents (UN 2015) as a multilateral partnership endeavour, with partnership itself enshrined as a distinct UNSDG. The 2017 Secretary General report to the HLPF called for the UN to use its convening power to broker the partnerships needed to tackle interlinked UNSDGs. The initiation of partnerships to tackle the UNSDGs was thus considered a significant success measure for the UN, with over 5,200 registered at time of writing. The WAAEH's founder-members were similarly jointly committed to its 9 Strategy Outcomes as the core of the framework and a shared expression of mission (Mollinger-Sabha et al. 2019, pp. 9). The NPF had initially adopted a narrower focus, with its principal concern for facilitating post-departmental working within the Scottish Government, and with only weak ties to external actors. Interviewees noted a significant redirection around 2018 in the function and scope of the NPF from a whole-of-government to a whole-of-society approach, and a concomitant repositioning of the National Outcomes as goals for all of Scotland, rather than just the Scottish Government.

Each framework depended to a significant degree on partners and other stakeholders' volitional reorientation of strategy or practice toward external objectives within outcomes frameworks. This required in all three cases an active marketing, branding and awareness raising strategy. Interviewees noted the establishment of the National Performance Unit played a key role in extending the focus of the NPF beyond government, leading a substantial promotion campaign at public events, building strategic alliances with civil society organisations, and establishing an active social media presence for the NPF. There have been several instances of adoption or substantial integration of the NPF with

several governmental directorates, civil society representative bodies and the Scottish National Health Service, while others underway at time of writing. The UNSDGs similarly featured a large social media campaign and an active approach to brokering partnerships. The focus of Agenda 2030 on branding and awareness raising had rendered them a household name with a recent survey indicating three quarters of adults globally had familiarity with the UNSDGs (Ipsos Mori 2019). With a more substantial pull factor, the UN could point to a wide range of integrations (including over 5,200 listed partnerships) with businesses, governments, civil society organisations and other civic bodies like universities.

References to 'buy-in', 'sign-up', 'harmonisation' or 'adoption' are evident in discourse surrounding the NPF and UNSDGs which implies a unilateral method of adoption, however in practice this was much more of a two-way process. All frameworks undertook a substantial consultation and engagement processes to develop outcomes and indicators expressive of a collective and co-created rather than imposed vision. The 2018 refresh of the NPF was accompanied by a much more significant public consultation process conducted under an NPF roundtable involving Scottish Ministers, civil society groups, and local authority representation with over 200 organisational responses were reviewed by Scottish Government officials. The creation of the UNSDGs was conducted under a similar body, a multi-lateral Open Working Group to ensure adequate representation by Member States. While CSI UWA was responsible for the development of the WAAEH framework, it was also developed through consultation to ensure its content and focus could be collectively signed up to by all key stakeholders' values, including those with a lived experience of homelessness.

Permitting local adaptation

We mused in the theoretical section about the tension between imposing a shared vision and maintaining existing individual and organisational goals. The coordinative potential of outcomes was practiced not by seeking merely to homogenise a strategic approach across stakeholders, but by legitimising and even promoting variation to respond to different institutional contexts. Outcome measures provided a useful focal point to arrange this loose coupling of strategy. All frameworks featured a set of high-level outcomes (NPF National Outcomes, UNSDGs and WAAEH Strategy Outcomes) which functioned as universally applicable shared goals of sufficient breadth and ambiguity to permit local and contextually-informed interpretation of their relevance. In the implemented cases this facilitated the construction of new alliances and policy alignment across tiers of government. This approach was typified by the UN's stated commitment to 'common but differentiated responsibilities' across Member States facing very different national challenges (UN 2015). In the NPF case, a 2008 concordat jointly signed by the Scottish Government and local authorities used National Outcomes as jointly agreed priorities but permitted local interpretation of outcomes and autonomy in the allocation of resources to pursue these. The coordinative power afforded by performance attractors was enacted not merely through homogenising a worldview and strategy across institutional actors, but by upholding the validity of multiple interpretations of performance goals.

Voluntarism and accountability in implementation

While the diffuse nature of cases clearly eschews the potential for top-down and results-based accountability to play any prominent role, our discussion of performance attractors does not exclude other modalities of accountability, such as those operating horizontally (such as peer accountability) or bottom-up (such as social accountability). Indeed, some Scottish Government interviewees considered the NPF an extension of governmental accountability, though one not reducible to particular individuals, teams or organisations. Similar sentiments regarding an aspiration for collective accountability can be found in the WAAEH (Mollinger-Sabha et al. 2019), although this group rejected Kania and Kramer's (2011) results-based model. NPF data was published on the 'Scotland Performs' web platform, aiming to function as a public report card of governmental performance,

however its website has remained little accessed, and while its data been routinely used as an accountability tool, for instance in policy scrutiny, this has remained sporadic (Mackie 2018; Wallace 2019). The international context of the UNSDGs provided perhaps a better context for realising social accountability, permitting civil society groups, the media and the polity of Member States to exert pressure on governmental performance using UNSDG data, however here too there is little evidence indicating effectiveness in this regard. Both WAAEH and Agenda 2030 also created leadership bodies which held a key coordinative function for the implementation of the framework, and which could exert some horizontal control through establishing expected standards of performance or norms of participation, however in no case was there any explicit formalisation of peer accountability regimes as considered in the discussion of this proposition.

Proposition 2: Performance measures spur collective learning and adaptation based on a fluid and developing understanding of institutional interdependencies.

A developmental approach to performance measurement

The second proposition asserts the purpose of performance information is for promoting learning rather than controlling behaviour. Each case faced an initial task in this regard to develop a performance information system detailed and expressive enough of high-level outcomes to enable effective learning and collective sensemaking. The NPF indicator set was a collation of multiple existing datasets, and interviewees noted significant work was ongoing ten years later to ensure data was routinely updated, methodologically robust and comparable. The UNSDGs were similarly intentioned as a roadmap enabling Member States to determine their place in a collective movement toward shared goals (UN 2015; UN 2017), standards and capacity for data collection and analysis varied drastically among Member States. Consequently, the Secretary General called for a 'data revolution' to support the UNSDGs, and an Inter-Agency and Expert Group established by the UN Statistical Commission in 2016 was established to oversee the development of the UNSDGs' global indicator set, develop national statistical capabilities, and improve data use in national development. The full list of 169 indicators and 232 tracker indicators were published in 2017 (UN 2017), however data gaps and methodological deficiencies were still being addressed at time of writing.

The NPF outcome and indicator set exhibited a similar dynamism over time as it interacted with a changing policy environment, emerging data availability and shifting governmental priorities. 2011 and 2016 refreshes represented technical improvements in NPF datasets, along with one additional National Outcome for older people responding to government priority. National Indicators expanded from 45 to 50 in 2011, to 55 in 2016, and to 81 in 2018 to provide a more comprehensive picture of national progress. While it was not implemented, this situation was anticipated in the WAAEH case, which positioned its developmental evaluation approach as a method to navigate data insufficiency and revise the framework itself. Indeed, while data insufficiency was an endemic and enduring problem it was not as significant a barrier to implementation as it would have been under a traditional performance management approach. Instead, the navigation of data gaps and the iterative revision of indicators, analysis procedures and data use was a dynamic and developmental process. The improvement of performance information systems was regarded in this way as an innate benefit of taking an outcomes-based approach by Scottish Government interviewees and within the UN's documentation (UN 2017).

Formalising routines of data use for learning in organisational functions

Both implemented cases worked to establish routines for learning from performance information over the course of their development. A central mechanism for collective sensemaking and learning transfer for the UNSDGs were the 'voluntary national reviews' conducted by Member States into their progress toward UNSDGs, described in guidance as a 'means to exchange experiences' (UN 2020, pp. *i*). The

NPF was slower to incorporate a learning function, and while the variety and reliability of statistical infrastructure improved through both national and local government efforts over the years of the NPF's operation, budgetary decisions made by both remained largely unlinked to NPF data (Wallace 2019). There were more recent attempts at establishing routines of use for performance information for learning and improved decision making. By embedding the NPF on a statutory basis, the Scottish Government committed to periodic consultation and inquiry into National Outcomes roughly in line with the government's political cycle. Interviewees also noted a renewed push toward using NPF data in budgetary and strategic planning processes within the Scottish Government at time of interview.

Establishing platforms and norms for dialogic learning

Our theoretical discussion highlighted the potential for performance attractors to motivate improvements at the systemic level through prompting what Rajala et al. (2019) call boundary-crossing performance dialogues amongst institutional actors. In the Agenda 2030 case, the HLPF served as a collaborative forum for discussion of linkages and commonalities drawing from UNSDG data, particularly from voluntary national reviews. With a stronger focus on implementation and follow-up than the preceding Millennium Development Goals, the UN took an increasingly interventionist approach to motivating the transfer of learning, developing various mechanisms to fostering partnership working and knowledge transfer using UNSDG data. The most significant of these were:

- The "Technology Facilitation Mechanism", launched in 2015 providing a multi-stakeholder forum for sharing science, technology and innovations to achieve the UNSDGs.
- A Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, also launched in 2015, a network of more than 300 institutions who jointly contribute to improving data quality, availability and accessibility for the UNSDGs, and work to promote data use amongst businesses, governments, and civil society groups.
- A Joint SDG Fund launched in 2019 (succeeding the 2014 Sustainable Development Goals Fund) to enable UN agencies and Member States to undertake innovative partnership responses to the UNSDGs and leverage external public and private financing.
- An online knowledge platform steadily developed from 2015, consisting of online hubs for partnerships, e-learning, and a knowledge repository relating to UNSDGs.

The WAAEH outcomes framework was provided a holistic assessment not simply of the state of homelessness, but also drivers to homelessness entry and exit across Western Australia's diverse political, geographic and socio-economic contexts. Its purpose was to centre discussions not on organisational improvement but on creating innovation at boundary spaces between institutions and improving collective, rather than individual performance. In this context the framework was a tool for analysing the non-linear and interdependent paths of causality between the various outcomes and indicators, moving away from the assumption that the actions of the Alliance were causally responsible for these. Its developmental evaluation approach would then have enabled collective sensemaking among the continually updated results across the multi-levelled performance indicators. Through this process, learning was positioned as a reflexive and collaborative process pertaining not just to movement in indicators, but with their ongoing relevance and utility in a dynamic policy context (Mollinger-Sabha et al. 2019).
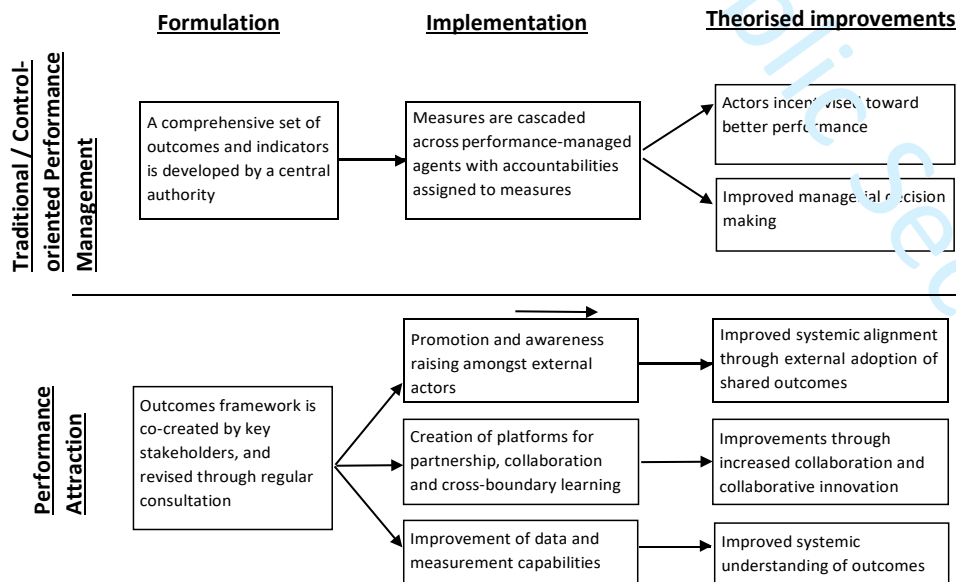
While all cases attempted to use outcomes frameworks to promote learning across institutional boundaries, there remains little evidence concerning how effective such efforts have been in practice. For example, 142 countries have to date completed a national review for Agenda 2030, however little information is available relating the effectiveness of these as a learning mechanism either within Member States, or clarity about how learning is intended to diffuse. On the other hand, with more than 5,000 partnership initiatives noted active at time of writing, there are many examples of unplanned adoptions and adaptions, suggesting learning can transfer through less formal and linear

pathways. Indeed, even in the unimplemented WAAEH case for example, the Western Australian government launched a State Homelessness Strategy in late 2019 that both explicitly references the WAAEH Framework, and offered a significant re-framing of homelessness toward alignment with the idea of homelessness as a complex system consisting of pathways of interaction. The NPF's comparative lack of leadership bodies or direct platforms for facilitating learning led to a more restricted and *ad hoc* pattern of use in cross-functional governmental operations like strategic planning, budgeting and policy analysis (Wallace 2019). This was at time of interview being redressed through an increasingly active approach to data use and learning transfer, facilitated by the National Performance Unit and senior leadership. Interviewees noted at least five other initiatives and agencies which had undertaken significant attempts to adopt or integrate the NPF into their own performance management frameworks, and efforts were underway to integrate the NPF with Scotland's leading multi-agency public sector leadership network to speed implementation.

Conclusions: performance attraction as an alternative to traditional performance management?

We have described an emerging theory of performance attraction, in which coordination and collective improvement is 'attracted' through the valency of performance measures and the implementation of performance frameworks as dialogical learning mechanisms. This alternative PMM logic diverges considerably from traditional control-oriented approaches deriving from management control theory and cybernetics, and can be distinguished as Figure 1 shows in both the formulation and implementation of PMM systems.

Figure 1. Two logics of performance management: control-oriented performance management and performance attraction

	Formulation	**Implementation**	**Theorised improvements**
Traditional / Control-oriented Performance Management	A comprehensive set of outcomes and indicators is developed by a central authority	Measures are cascaded across performance-managed agents with accountabilities assigned to measures	Actors incentivised toward better performance / Improved managerial decision making
Performance Attraction	Outcomes framework is co-created by key stakeholders, and revised through regular consultation	Promotion and awareness raising amongst external actors / Creation of platforms for partnership, collaboration and cross-boundary learning / Improvement of data and measurement capabilities	Improved systemic alignment through external adoption of shared outcomes / Improvements through increased collaboration and collaborative innovation / Improved systemic understanding of outcomes

The formulation of PMM systems has traditionally been a technical exercise directed by a central authority with limited external consultation. Recognising that the valency of outcomes depended on their resonance with the values and visions of key stakeholders, cases pursued instead an inclusive and developmental approach to constructing and revising outcomes and performance indicators. Regarding the implementation of PMM systems, control-oriented PMM presumes the existence of a powerful central authority to impose the necessary accountabilities and incentives to control agentic behaviour. Lacking such an entity, cases adopted a much more active and collaborative approach to implementation: marketing and publicising frameworks to help external actors buy-in, sign-up or hook-on to outcomes frameworks; building alliances and brokering learning partnerships amongst key institutions; and improving collective intelligence as data gaps and interdependencies become better understood or priorities shifted. In this alterative 'performance attraction' logic, performance measures are less technical elements of PMM systems than organising instruments to navigate complex and inter-institutional performance management landscapes.

We contribute to a growing body of critical PMM theory in the public and private sectors which has explored alternatives to standard control-oriented PMM modalities (Moynihan et al. 2011; Melynk et al. 2014; Jakobsen et al. 2017; Bourne et al. 2018; Rajala et al. 2019; French et al. 2020). Specifically, performance attraction redirects focus from the technocratic elements of PMM system design to the dialogic and boundary-crossing usage of performance information called for by Rajala et al. (2019), and provides a mechanism through which architects of outcomes frameworks might cultivate the stewarding behaviours seen as necessary by French et al. (2020) to tackle complex goals in inter-institutional settings. It stands also to promote the fostering of professional autonomy and self-organisation of lower administrative units noted by authors such as Melynk et al. (2014) needed to navigate complex environments.

While recent PMM literature has placed greater focus on performance information use, there remains a lack of guidance for how effective performance management regimes may be designed (Jakobsen et al. 2017). Our findings provide practical design guidance for architects of outcomes frameworks which might contribute to their success. We argue that effective performance attraction involves co-constructing outcomes frameworks to ensure they resonate with the values and ambitions of partners, recognising and promoting local autonomy and variation, convening spaces for partners to participate meaningfully in collective learning processes, and pursuing active and mission-led marketing and awareness raising strategies. Findings therefore deepen understanding of how governments, public agencies and other institutions can retain some coordinative control as they embrace bolder and more challenging missions requiring inter-institutional integration and coordination and the navigation of complexity. Further research may explore how, by adopting a performance attraction logic, performance management may usefully connect with a range of entities where performance measures are less often adopted, such as informal alliances, strategic networks and social movements.

Findings go some way to clarifying how a performance attraction logic might be operationalised in practice, however raise additional questions, particularly concerning the potential roles for accountability and responsibility. Our discussion of both propositions noted the potential role that horizontal models of accountability might play in upholding collective visions and values, however these methods remained underdeveloped in the empirical analysis. Reliance on voluntaristic behaviour change can be accused of lacking teeth, holding weak incentives and relying too heavily on supportive and egalitarian cultures among external actors (Le Grand 2010; Hood 2012). The existence of conflicting institutional goals might also 'crowd out' goal-directed improvement (Jakobsen et al. 2017). Each case shows evidence that frameworks had prompted organisational adaptation and increased partnership working, however without detailed analysis of the behavioural response to performance attractors the significance of changes effected cannot be evaluated.

With just three cases the findings must be considered tentative, however analysis across contexts and levels of operation seems to imply the construct has a degree of generality which can support further testing to progress along the theory development pipeline (Ridder 2017). A limitation is that the study has been exploratory, aiming to describe the key dimensions of an emerging theory, rather than

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evaluative This article lays the groundwork for further studies which explore the institutional response to performance attraction.

We do not consider that performance attraction is a panacea for performance management. Indeed, lacking strong external accountabilities, performance attractors might stand accused of lacking teeth in environments characterised by strong external incentives, individualistic cultures, or diverse and competing accountabilities. In inter-institutional contexts, performance attractors are also likely to interact with standard performance targets at multiple levels (for instance individual, team, organisational and extra-organisational), and the incentives they provide may be crowded out. The

concept may also have a dark side, since the introduction of new measures might overburden actors with existing accountabilities, might sideline oppositional viewpoints, or might inspire lip service or 'window dressing' adaptation but fail ultimately to influence behaviour. Future studies should explore whether and in which contexts these negative elements materialise, and the differential opportunities and challenges offered by 'weak' (reliant on voluntarism) and 'strong' (reliant on more coercive forms of horizontal and social accountability) forms of performance attraction posited.

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