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Introduction to the Symposium on Exploring the Complexities of Performance Management

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ABSTRACT

The editors of this symposium hope that this collection of articles can help advance the public administration literature stream across the multiple organizational and cultural settings in which these performance management studies were conducted. However, this symposium also focused on articles that can help advance the practice of performance management, where specific recommendations are needed to help public officials collect, analyze, and use meaningful outcome measures specifically for the benefits for making better management and policy decisions.

KEYWORDS

Leadership; performance management; financial management; outcome measures; efficiency measures

The landscape has evolved over the past 20 years regarding the performance paradigm in public organizations, where the boundaries are being expanded from how services are measured through goals, objectives, and indicators to how these performance data are transformed into meaningful information for making decisions. This extremely important shift in focus, which represents the move from performance measurement to performance management, also is expanding the boundaries of the public administration literature, where scholars continue to explore the organizational dimensions that make this performance evolution a reality (de Lancer Julnes & Holzer, 2001; Sanger, 2008; Moynihan, 2013).

Research has clearly shown that performance measurement has become a common management tool both in the United States (Poister & Streib, 1999) and abroad (Kuhlmann, 2010). The question is: How does this performance information advance the organization beyond some level of accountability? Performance management answers this question, where public officials use this information to inform decisions involving day-to-day program management and high-level policy debate (Moynihan, 2008).

There are two major parts of this paradigm shift that increases the complexity of moving from performance measurement to performance management. The first is having robust outcome measures in place to capture the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. Research has shown that public organizations are more likely to

engage in performance management when they move beyond output measures and rely upon the higher-order measures of efficiency and effectiveness (Ammons & Rivenbark, 2008). The problem is with the complexity of identifying and tracking outcome measures given the difficulty of defining quality and the availability of quality data, requiring a cultural change and the use of methodologies that enhance policy coordination and strategic learning. It also suggests that governments must embrace outcome and impact measures that traditional performance management systems often neglect (Bianchi & Rivenbark, 2014).

The second is having the correct mix of organizational dimensions in place that encourages public officials to actually use performance measures for decision-making. One organizational dimension that has been identified with regard to embracing performance management is both top-down and bottom-up leadership, where data-based, decision-making is part of the organizational culture (Rivenbark, Fasiello, & Adamo, 2016). The good news is that the public administration literature is moving forward on outcome measures and organizational dimensions in order to help public organizations increase their return on investment from performance management.

The purpose of this symposium is to advance the public administration literature stream on performance management by exploring the complexities of this topic across an array of organizational cultures, ranging from

local government in the United States to healthcare in Italy. The value of exploring these complexities across a range of organizational settings is the ability to identify commonalities and differences that transcend the paradigm shift from performance measurement to performance management. It also provides more insight on what practical strategies are being used to help public officials increase the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery through the lens of performance information emanating from quality outcome measures.

This symposium begins with three articles that build on prior performance management research. Simone Fanelli, Gianluca Lanza, and Antonello Zangrandi explore how leadership plays a decisive role in improving the quality of performance in Italian healthcare organizations, concluding that the ability to translate organizational policy into day-to-day employee behavior is a key aspect of quality improvement. Simona Alfiero, Filippo Elba, Alfredo Esposito, and Giuliano Resce contribute to the existing literature on the measurement of managerial efficiency within the context of the Italian waste management sector, suggesting that private sector involvement positively enhances service efficiency. Carmine Bianchi, Tony Bovaird, and Elke Loeffler then use a dynamic approach to performance management to improve service quality outcomes, quality of life outcomes, and public governance outcomes. In other words, the authors seek to take outcome measures to the next level.

The next three articles address external quality standards, incentives to move from output to outcome measures, and work-related determinants of high performance. Guido Capaldo, Nicola Costantino, and Roberta Pellegrino study the effects of more demanding quality standards imposed by external regulations on organizational service providers. One of their key findings is that these external quality standards require well-designed performance measurement systems, which ultimately increase the likelihood of meaningful outcome measures. Fabio Monteduro specifically explores what incentives are needed with an organization to move from output to outcome measures, which include an investment of resources and an adequate enforcement mechanism. Rick T. Borst and Christiaan J. Lako then address performance from the employee point of view, findings that pride of Dutch public servants is driven work environment and personal experience rather than the desire to become a high-performance organization. This finding has ramifications on the performance literature within the context of organizational culture.

The final two articles contained in this symposium explore the dynamics of performance management

from the perspective of financial management. William C. Rivenbark, Roberta Fasiello, Dale J. Roenigk, and Stefano Adamo study the relationship between operational outcome measures and financial outcomes measures within the functional area of water and sewer, which contains private good characteristics. The authors found practically no relationships between these two sets of measures, concluding that general management principles may not be applicable to all forms of administration. Whitney Afonso also approaches performance management from the perspective of financial management, exploring the volatility of tax revenue during the Great Recession. The author found that sales tax dependence increases volatility and reduces social service expenditure, which ultimately impacts the outcome measures within this critical area of service delivery.

The editors of this symposium hope that this collection of articles can help advance the public administration literature stream across the multiple organizational and cultural settings in which these performance management studies were conducted. However, this symposium also focused on articles that can help advance the practice of performance management, where specific recommendations are needed to help public officials collect, analyze, and use meaningful outcome measures specifically for the benefits for making better management and policy decisions.

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