Desperately Seeking Selznick:

Cooptation and the Dark Side of Public Management in Networks

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Abstract

Most literature on public sector networks focus on how to build and management such systems and ignore the potential political problems networks can create for organizations. This paper argues that individual network nodes can work to bias the actions of the organization in ways that are likely to benefit the the organization's more advantaged clientele. The argument is then support with an analysis of performance data from 500 organizations over a five year period. Networks, while greatly benefitting the organization, have a dark side that managers ans scholars need to consider more seriously.

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Research and popular literature on networks and public management has burgeoned during the last several years. The great bulk of this attention has been grounded in what might be considered a functionalist or even technocratic perspective, that is, the developing tendency or "necessity" to use multiple linked social actors, often multiple organizational actors, to achieve collective purposes. Corollary attention, unsurprisingly, has been directed at such logically related issues as how to manage such networked arrays, how to measure and improve network performance, and how to understand their operations through empirical theory. With this attention to networks and network management, nonetheless, has come an implicit notion that network development, use, and performance are topics that carry little directly political import – aside from the obvious point that the performance of networks might itself be of interest to a broader public.

In this article, we argue that this inadvertently depoliticized analysis of networks and the network theme has resulted in a neglect of issues that should be considered as a part of the research agenda. We outline ways that networks and network management point toward significant political issues. We then focus in particular on one political dimension of networks and their performance: the likelihood that, rather than being neutral producers of collective goods while enmeshed in a broader environment, network managers respond to the stronger and more politically powerful elements of their surroundings, thus magnifying tendencies toward inequalities present already in the social setting. This dynamic, what we call the "dark side" of managing networks, has been largely unexplored by network researchers. Such patterns, however, should not be unexpected. The reasons are explicit in longstanding streams of research

that have been ignored in the work done thus far on networks. We report some empirical results

that give considerable credence to the "dark side" hypothesis. In so doing, we argue the need for

systematic work on the political aspects of networks and their management.

Networks and Network Management: The Functionalist Perspective

A major outpouring of research on networks has issued forth during the last decade or so.

Characterizing the full array of studies is almost impossible, in part because researchers have

used the term network in many different ways. By "network" we mean a pattern of

interdependence among social actors in which at least a portion of the links are framed in terms

of something other than superior-subordinate relations. Parts of a network may include

hierarchical arrays, but at least some portions of the array are linked in another fashion.[1]

Networks may include multiple organizations or parts of organizations.

During the past decade or so, many studies have proclaimed the importance of networks

for the formulation and implementation of public policy (Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Klijn

1996; Provan and Milward 1995; Rhodes 1997). If we ignore the perspective of social network

analysis (for instance Raab 2002) – an approach focused mainly on mapping the structures of

networks and the interactions within them,[2] rather than the consequences of network arrays for

results – a set of the most prominent streams of work can be found in the literatures of

governance, public policy, and public management.

Investigations of "governance," increasingly visible in Europe and the United States,

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[1]Two bases aside from authority are common interest (social actors connected because

each shares an interest in the collective endeavor) and exchange (side payments among social
actors maintain networked participation in the collective endeavor).

[2]The tendency of social network analysis to attribute causality to fairly detailed structural

attributes of networks reinforces this tendency. For an early critical analysis of the power-based
meaning of network arrangements, see Benson and Weitzel (1985).

emphasize the broadly social character of current arrangements for deciding on and generating policy-oriented action. In the phrase recently in good currency, "'governance' includes more than governments." In particular, studies developed around the governance theme have emphasized the role of a variety of nongovernmental actors, such as unions, businesses and business associations, and not-for-profit organizations, as they work – often in at least partial collaboration – with governments toward the development and achievement of public purposes (Held 1996; Pierre and Peters 2000; Weiss 1998). The European Union has stressed this theme (European Commission 2001), and analysts in the U.S. have also treated the governance idea as relevant in many policy spheres, including social policy (Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill 2001), the environment (O'Toole and Hanf 2002), and other fields (e.g., Moynihan and Roberts 2002).

Research on public policy has also emphasized the networked character of policy-relevant action. The theme is both current and venerable. Analytical treatments of the policy process in the U.S. have frequently emphasized the development of issue- or subsector-specific coalitions, as evoked by the labels "iron triangle" and "triple alliance" or the alternative notion of "issue networks" (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Freeman 1955; Heclo 1978; Long 1949; Lowi 1979; Maass 1951; Meier 2000; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Loose or tight, heterogeneous and relatively accessible or iron and restricted, the point of common agreement has been some version of a network notion for interpreting the institutional setting of policy.

In European scholarship on policy making, similar themes were developed as well – although the distinctive features of policy making in many countries drove the characterizations toward somewhat different elements. Analysts of corporatist political systems have obviously emphasized a particular version of the network theme (Bogason and Toonen 1998; Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997; Marin and Mayntz 1991). In the United Kingdom, scholars have been

particularly active in sketching "policy networks" as crucial features of the landscape (Jordan 1990; Rhodes 1997; Richardson 1996). Although not so restrictive nor so formulaic as the notion of a triple alliance, the British-style policy-network analysis has been distinctive for portraying such arrangements as fairly closed and controlling. Some critics notwithstanding (Dowding 1995; Kassim 1994), the policy-network notion continues to feature prominently in British scholarship.

Scholars of public management and governmental performance in several countries have emphasized the networked character of public programs as they convert policy intentions into concrete actions. In both Europe (for instance, Scharpf 1993; Kickert, Klijn and Koopenjan 1997; Rhodes 1997) and the United States (Provan and Milward 1995; Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Kettl 2000), considerable attention has been directed toward the networked patterns for program execution (Hall and O'Toole 2000; 2003). Some analysts have argued that such patterns require fundamentally different forms of management (Mandell 2001); others have sought to sketch key research questions that should be addressed by scholars interested in these issues (McGuire 2002). "Treating networks seriously" is likely to involve these and many other kinds of research questions, answers to which are only beginning to emerge (for coverage of the research agenda, see O'Toole 1997).

What has been little noted in these three literatures is that most efforts *depict these arrays as products of one or more functional imperatives, and aimed largely at optimizing output in complex circumstances*. Much of the research literature contends that the networked character of such public action is more prevalent now than in the past (Mandell 2001; Kettl 2000), even though evidence for such claims is sketchy and anecdotal – and what little systematic work that has been done indicates more constancy in networked relations over time than change (Hall and

O'Toole 2000, 2003).

The standard portrayal attributes the multiactor features of program implementation and management to demands placed on programs and their administrators. Among the causal factors frequently mentioned as drivers of networked program execution are the increasingly "wicked" (Rittel and Webber 1973) character of public problems, the realities of increasingly dense program environments, the expertise-reliant character of modern governance, the requisites of program design in multilevel systems, and the demands placed on program managers in complex settings. Although each of these arguments is implicitly heavy with political import, the functionalist frame obscures political themes with their distributional aspects, instead emphasizing the managerial requisites generated in and for such arrays.

The theoretical claims, parallels, and distinctions among these several strands of causal logic represent a complex and somewhat confusing pastiche. The point to be emphasized, however, is how the political interpretation of networks, in terms of their likely causes and consequences, seems largely lost in the analytical picture. Researchers often seem to buy into a functionalist logic of one sort or another regarding network formation and operations, and a result is a blindness toward the distributional consequences of network actions.

The point can be put another way. The bulk of research on networks and public management effectively reenacts a network version of the venerable politics-administration dichotomy. This statement holds in two respects. First, functionalist logic is used to explain extant network patterns, typically with an emphasis on program or clientele needs. This theme gives little attention to certain political drivers of network formation and use that have little to do with program needs and more to do with incentives that can operate on political leadership. Second, what networks do, how they perform, and how they can be directed toward goal

achievement are topics for which researchers also typically ignore important political issues. The modal study of networks and public management displays a recognition that program results matter for stakeholders. But those results – the dependent variables tapping performance – are treated in a rather technocratic fashion, as products of a production system, and without attention to distributional aspects or contest among stakeholders. Instead, such studies emphasize issues of management, facilitation, coordination, and related functional themes. The politics of network performance, in several relevant respects, is virtually ignored.

The issues involved in managing in and through networks are indeed important. Some of the best scholarship on networks and performance demonstrates that serious challenges confront those who try to produce results in complicated networked settings (Provan and Milward 1995), and the public management requisites in network settings may be different from, and more difficult than, the counterpart needs within standard organizations (Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Mandell 2001; O'Toole 2000). This set of issues has scarcely been examined in systematic empirical work (see Rainey 2003), and the need to do so is clear. Still, the tendency to treat public management and policy implementation in networked settings as largely matters of how to get things done (or, more carefully, how to concert action across multiple organizational actors on behalf of a policy or program) frames only a part of the picture. While the performance or execution questions are key, so too are the distributional impacts of networks versus other institutional forms, as well as the differences in outcomes associated with different network forms.

Three such political themes regarding network-associated impacts can be sketched here. One in particular admits of systematic exploration. We present this one last and probe it with some data that are particularly suited to the purpose.

Networks as Political Institutions I: Distancing the State from the Problem

One bias toward apolitical treatment of networks and network management results from ignoring a portion of the political agenda regarding the use of networks in the first place. While it has been recognized that sometimes additional actors are needed during implementation to build support for program operations (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984), researchers have not attended to the possibility that the use of networks can also be a way of distancing state actors from controversial policy efforts.[3] The choice of networks as an institutional arrangement can be a function not of increasing problem-solving capacity but rather of the tendency for authoritative actors to dodge difficult or costly responsibilities. Networks can be a symbolic-political choice when there is pressure for state action yet disincentives for the state to definitively address policy problems.[4]

An obvious instance in this regard is the set of responses by U.S. governments to the HIV/AIDS problem in the early years of the epidemic. As documented in some detail (Shilts 1987), American governments – particularly the national government – were slow to appreciate and accept the policy and political responsibility for the challenges of HIV/AIDS. The topic was contentious, the solutions not obvious, the target groups marginalized. The HIV problem challenged standard approaches favored by public health bureaucracies at all levels of government and exposed the "wicked-problem" aspects of the issue. As a consequence, for a number of years key political actors showed little interest in tackling the HIV direct-service

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[3]An extensive literature in political science contends that legislatures will seek to act and leave the specifics to bureaucrats so that the legislators can claim credit for the positive outcomes and still be free to criticize the bureaucracy if negative results occur. This also permits legislators to improve reelection chances because they can assist aggrieved constituents (see Fiorina 1976; Bawn 1995; Wohlstetter 1989)

[4]Thanks go to H. Brinton Milward for helping to focus this issue in conversation.

challenge directly. Nonetheless, activists and some public health experts pressed the

government for action. The upshot was a pattern involving indirect governmental support of a

network of (primarily) nonprofit community-based organizations and related groups. The

nongovernmental actors carried the work at the front lines, exposed themselves to direct local

visibility and challenge, and advocated for the cause and the partially disempowered

constituencies. Meanwhile, national and most state governments were able to maintain distance

from the service-provision effort and the controversial aspects of the public-education activities

as well. Work with gays and intravenous drug users was thus conducted at a distance, with

many governments establishing plausible deniability with regard to their own responsibility for

whatever actions were underway.[5] The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources

Emergency (CARE) Act, passed into law in 1990, formalized the arrangement by setting up a

program of grants in support of direct services to community-based HIV organizations, provided

that such organizations would establish and be advised and overseen by a broad set of other

organizations in the community – units with which HIV efforts are presumably interdependent

(hospitals, social service organizations, homeless shelters, public health units, and so forth).

The offloading of the most controversial aspects of the problem, and the problem's most

interested parties, to networks of distanced organizations accomplished several purposes

unrelated to direct program delivery. While it can be argued that community-based

organizations are sometimes effective organizational vehicles for service-related problem

solving, and while these organizations may have incentives to experiment and are not tied down

by formal regulations and red tape, the main benefit in working through such networked patterns

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[5]Some governments, especially large cities in the hardest hit areas of the country, did

choose to undertake direct education and services to combat HIV. New York and San Francisco
are obvious examples here.

– from the standpoint of the government – has been political. The use of a diffuse network of actors, in which direct involvement in controversial issues and with marginalized clientele is dominated by nongovernmental units, allows political authorities and the agencies that report to them to distance themselves from contentious efforts.

This side of the network has been absent from systematic investigation, but it is likely involved in the design of institutional arrangements for addressing other policy issues, such as family planning services and some aspects of social welfare policy (see McFarlane and Meier 2001). Networks as protection, or as insulation from controversial issues or marginalized target groups, is a topic deserving systematic exploration. The implicit assumption that network arrays are probably functional responses to the nature of today's policy problems is likely valid in some cases but not so in others. The choice or evolution of program design in many sectors needs to be explored carefully.

Networks as Political Institutions II: Tilting the Policy Table via Coproduction

Networks can have another political impact that has typically been ignored in the research literature: the involvement of additional actors in complex patterns of interdependence can incorporate additional perspectives or constraints that, in turn, can shift policy emphases during implementation. One way this result can develop is via the dynamics of coproduction.[6] The literature on networks and policy implementation frequently emphasizes that coproduction is often necessary for tackling complex policy problems. The tenor of the coverage is that adding actors increases the leverage that the policy apparatus can direct at problem solving. Often the logic is tied explicitly to the limited reach or steering capacity of central state actors, which must be supplemented by linkages to overcome control deficits, a theme especially

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[6]A second version of this pattern, apart from biasing results through coproduction, is covered in the next section.

explicit in the European literature (see Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997).

While it is generally recognized that adding actors increases constraints as well as opportunities, network research has not explored systematically the ways that coproduction can shift the goals and preferences that undergird public programs. Instead, the challenge stemming from the addition of network actors has largely been framed in terms of rendering the pattern less easily managed. The emphasis has been on the complexity of coproduced effort – a coordination problem – rather than the potential shift in the core of what public programs managed via networks actually do. "Adequate management" (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997: 9) is seen as the challenge – one best met by more energetic and more talented managerial efforts. Once again, the emphasis is on a primarily functionalist rather than fundamentally political point.

But adding actors does more than complexify, it tilts the balance of power. The core insight of Schattschneider (1960) decades ago remains valid in the world of networked public management: determining the scope of involvement shapes the definition of issues and goes a long way toward determining who wins and who loses on policy questions.

One example can clarify the point. In a comparative cross-state investigation of the institutional arrangements for allocating wastewater treatment construction funds for infrastructure development, evidence indicates that those states who involved private financing actors in the operation of their program to help produce decisions about lending tend to skew their financing choices toward local communities that are more affluent – that is, those that are better loan risks – rather than toward those who have the greatest infrastructure needs (O'Toole 1996; see also Wolman 1969). In the states involving corporate actors in crafting the financing vehicles, the private sector contributes funding to the loan corpus and, quite predictably, prefers

to put its dollars at reduced risk. The result is that the fundamental purposes of the program are compromised during implementation, as the network expands to incorporate other coproducers with different and partially competing goals.

In this fashion as well, networks operate as political arrangements rather than merely as multiactor producers who may be managed well or poorly by those charged with making programs work. The policy table can be tilted, if not overturned, by the addition of different types of actors to the network mix.

Networks as Political Actors III: Desperately Seeking Selznick

Another way by which the addition of network actors to a complex implementation setting can carry political import is through straightforward political pressure. Here the table is tilted again. In this variant, even if production is primarily through a core organization, the other network parties influence the pattern toward a skewed distribution of program results. In short, a bias in performance can derive both from coproduction as well as from the dynamics of managerial response to pressure from network actors as a core organization responds to its networked environment.

The facts of life regarding public management in a political environment are hardly new to analysts of the twenty-first century. Decades of research have validated the point that agencies and their management must develop support in their setting, and that doing so can mean sacrificing the primary agenda of policy, particularly if it involves social change, in the interests of survival. This theme is the primary contribution of Selznick, particularly in his classic study *TVA and the Grass Roots* (1949), a book in which the notion of cooptation was defined and illustrated with vivid exactitude through the TVA's struggle for institutionalization in a turbulent setting. Leadership of the TVA in effect ceded their agricultural policy goals to powerful local

interests in exchange for political support that was then used to push TVA's electrical power generation agenda.

Cooptation and the difficult tradeoffs it implies have been staples of the analysis of public management and bureaucratic politics for a considerable period. Curiously, however, these basic facts of life seem to have been forgotten by enthusiasts of the network perspective.

The imperative of managers, whether working in "lonely organizations" (Hjern and Porter 1982) or through complex patterns, to generate support for what they must do is a standard feature of the public-managerial setting. The complication, highlighted by Selznick many years ago, is that such support comes at a price. The more that public programs are designed to alter the existing order, the greater the threat of the program to those who benefit most from the status quo. A result is heightened emphasis on capturing benefits of the program during implementation by those who are best positioned to shape the details of program implementation. This straightforward lesson deserves attention by network analysts, who – once again – treat network forms without focusing on distributional implications.

The evidence shows that collaboration with key interdependent units facilitates policy implementation (Goggin et al. 1990; Mazmanian and Sabatier 1989). The research literature on networks and their management, however, typically frames the subject in largely managerial and technocratic terms. This omission produces an unfortunate truncation of the research agenda that needs to be explored by specialists in network management.

One way of explicating the point has to do with networks, network nodes, and the pattern of exchanges that can be so important in facilitating network action. Virtually all assessments of public-managerial patterns recognize that networks are built around exchanges between the nodes in the network – often with managers framing and brokering the exchanges (see O'Toole

12

and Montjoy 1984). An exchange implies that node A provides something to node B and vice versa in such a way that the overall aggregation is better off. This positive-sum view of networks and networking overlooks that each of the nodes enters the network with a distinct set of goals. Only a portion of these various goal sets overlap. Despite the extensive literature on cooptation, the ability of network nodes to shape the direction of public programs has not been carefully investigated. For public organizations that seek multiple goals – that is, all public organizations – the risk is that network interactions will result in the emphasis of some goals to the detriment of others. The vast literature on interest groups (Zeigler and Peak 1972; Salisbury 1984; Scholzman 1984; Golden 1998; Browne 1990) and on citizen participation (Baumgartner and Walker 1988; Verba and Nie 1972; Peterson 1988; Sharp 1982; Thomas 1982) indicates that network nodes will seek greater benefits for goals favored by more entrenched interests and downplay efforts that favor disadvantaged clientele.

This aspect of the network politics of program management is amenable to systematic analysis. The next section sketches a set of empirical settings that can provide a test. The objective is to look beyond overall managerial contributions to performance in network settings to explore how equitably the possible benefits of such efforts are distributed across parties with interests in the outcomes, as well as to elicit some hints as to what may be generating the results observed.

Shining Some Light on the Dark Side: An Empirical Test

The research question to test is whether network management has a dark side. Do networks for public program execution, in short, operate so as to produce greater benefits for goals favored by more entrenched interests and downplay efforts that favor disadvantaged clientele? Do the benefits of network management accrue disproportionately to those who

13

already have more than others? Public school systems are an ideal setting to test the notion,

since these systems display a wide variety of goals and sit within networked settings. Because

schools seek goals that benefit different races and social classes differently, and because

networks are more likely to be populated by actors and organizations that already possess

political resources, particularly at the critical loci of such networks, our working hypothesis is

that managers who expend greater efforts in working the network will improve educational

performance more relative to goals that benefit their relatively advantaged clientele than to goals

that benefit their disadvantaged clientele.

Sample and Measures

Although public education is not among the most highly networked public service

production and delivery sectors, this policy arena has developed into a significantly more

complex and interdependent setting than is recognized by many. Schools are now venues for the

delivery of a host of associated services or regulatory programs, from public health (vaccination

programs, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases), to substance abuse, to the prevention and

control of child abuse, to the achievement of nutritional objectives, to the reduction of adolescent

violence, to civil rights, and to the improvement of life chances for disabled children. The

"core" educational function has been surrounded by and insinuated into a panoply of other public

objectives, and in turn a host of other organizations have become involved in the day-to-day

functioning of school district activities. Funding and curriculum strength as well as program

innovations depend in part upon school district support from other important stakeholders in the

business community, among community groups, in other school districts. and from elsewhere.

School districts, in short, typically operate within a network of other organizations and actors

who influence their students, resources, programs, goals, and reputation.

School districts in the United States are generally independent[7] local governments with their own taxing powers; all districts in the sample are organized in this way. The state of Texas, the locus from which our sample is drawn, operates a relatively decentralized system, with most authority residing with the local school districts. Each district determines its own curriculum and makes all its own personnel decisions.

Although schools and school districts are the most common public organizations in the United States, they have some distinct characteristics. School districts are highly professionalized with elaborate certification processes for various occupations. The organizations themselves tend to be highly decentralized with a great deal of discretion vested at the street level (classroom).

Our data were collected by Meier and O'Toole (2001) from the 1000+ Texas school districts. District superintendents (the top managers) were sent a mail questionnaire on management styles, goals, and time allocations (return rate 55% with 507 useable responses).[8] Pooling five years (1995-99) of data on performance and control variables produces a total of 2535 cases for analysis. All nonsurvey data were from the Texas Education Agency.

This analysis builds on the O'Toole and Meier model of public management (O'Toole and Meier 1999, 2003; Meier and O'Toole 2001). While the details of their model are not crucial to the current investigation, what is relevant is that the studies based on their model have

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[7]Independent means that the school district is not subordinate to another unit such as a city. Independent districts have their own elected board, have the ability to tax and set budgets, and acquire bonding authority by a vote of the residents.

[8]Districts responding to the survey, conducted during 2000, were no different from nonrespondents in enrollment, enrollment growth, students' race, ethnicity and poverty, or test scores. There were slight differences in a few other factors. Respondents had 0.48 more students per class, paid their teachers $200 more per year, but had annual operating budgets of about $100 per student less.

sought to estimate the performance impacts of management, in particular the networking efforts of public managers. Those investigators developed and explored a measure of network management that has been validated in a series of empirical tests linking it both to managerial choices and the performance of public organizations. The present paper takes advantage of the multiple goals of schools and the beneficiaries of these multiple goals to probe the dark side of networks: what impacts does managerial networking carry for educational performance? Do the most advantaged parties gain the most from such networking?

In the analyses reported here, we test a simplified version of the O'Toole-Meier model, one asserting a positive relationship between managerial networking and performance, when controlling for a set of resources and constraints operating on the school districts. We are particularly interested in the impacts of networking behavior of the top managers in the school districts, the superintendents. We expect to find that managerial networking improves performance, as the bulk of literature on networks and network management suggest. But we also want to explore how such positive impacts vary across performance measures that refer to, or are salient for, different school-system constituencies that provide part of the networked environment for the core educational organizations. To investigate these questions, then, we need a measure of managerial networking, as well as a set of suitable performance measures and a set of appropriate control variables.

Managerial networking. This measure is intended to get at the reported behavior of school district top managers as they interact with the important parties in the district's environment. Because school districts operate within a network of other organizations and actors who influence their students, resources, programs, goals, and reputation, the extent that a superintendent manages in the school district's network should be related to school district

16

performance (Meier and O'Toole 2001; 2003).

To measure the behavioral networking activity of school superintendents, Meier and O'Toole (2001) selected five sets of actors from the organization's environment: school board members, local business leaders, other school superintendents, state legislators, and the Texas Education Agency. In their mail survey, they asked each superintendent how often s/he interacted with each actor, on a six point scale ranging from daily to never. Assuming that superintendents with a networking management approach should interact more frequently with all five actors than should a superintendent with an approach focused on internal management, a composite network management-style scale was created via factor analysis. All five items loaded positively on the first factor, producing an eigenvalue of 2.07; no other factors were significant. Factor scores from this analysis were then used as a measure of network management, with higher scores indicating a greater network orientation.

Performance indicators. Although virtually all programs have multiple goals and thus are subject to multiple performance indicators, some objectives are defined as more important by the political environment than are others. This study incorporates ten different performance indicators in an effort to determine if network structures influence how public management affects a variety of organizational processes.

Although each performance indicator is salient to some portion of the educational environment, the most noticeable by far is the overall student pass rate on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The TAAS is a standardized, criterion-based test that all students in grades 3 through 8 and 11 must take. The grade 11 exam is a high-stakes test, and students must pass it to receive a regular diploma from the state of Texas. TAAS scores are used to rank districts, and it is without question the most visible indicator of performance used to assess the

quality of schools. Our measure is the percentage of students in a district who pass all (reading, writing, and math) sections of the TAAS.

Four other TAAS measures are also useful as performance indicators. The state accountability system assesses performance of subgroups of students, and districts must perform well on all these indicators to attain various state rankings. TAAS scores for Anglo, black, Latino and low-income students are included as measures of performance.[9]

Many parents and policymakers are also concerned with the performance of school districts regarding college-bound students. Three measures of college-bound student performance are used – average ACT score, average SAT score, and the percentage of students who score above 1100 on the SAT (or its ACT equivalent). Texas is one of a few states where both the ACT and the SAT are taken by sufficient numbers to provide reliable indicators of both. As with statewide samples where there is no correlation between these scores and the number of students taking them if the proportion of tested students is more than 30 percent of the total eligible to be tested (Smith 2003), Texas scores are uncorrelated with the percentage of students taking the exams.[10]

The final two measures of performance might be termed bottom-end indicators — attendance rates and dropout rates. High attendance rates are valued for two reasons. Students are unlikely to learn if they are not in class, and state aid is allocated to the school district based on average daily attendance. Attendance, as a result, is a good indicator of low-end performance by these organizations; the measure is simply the average percentage of students who are not

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[9]The various pass rates do not correlate as highly as one might imagine. The intercorrelations between the Anglo, black and Latino pass rates are all in the neighborhood of .6, thus suggesting the overlap is only a bit more than one-third.

[10]The relationship between the percentage of students taking the tests and the test scores in Texas is actually positive but explains less than two percent of the variance.

absent. Dropout rates, while conceded to contain a great deal of error, are frequently also used to evaluate the performance of school districts.[11] The official state measure of dropouts is the annual percentage of students who leave school from eighth grade onward.

The basic hypothesis is that network contact will contain biases that have distributional consequences for the performance of public organizations. In this case, because we know that participation and interest group action is positively correlated with socioeconomic status, superintendents who network are more likely to be exposed to portions of the network that will seek benefits for the better off or higher status students rather than for disadvantaged students. We would expect the networking measure, therefore, to be positively correlated with test scores for Anglo students, with ACT test scores, SAT test scores, and the percentage of students who exceed the college criterion on these tests (1110 on the SAT or its ACT equivalent). We would not expect significant positive relationships for those indicators that reference the performance of disadvantaged students: TAAS pass rates for black, Latino and low income students, attendance rates, and dropout rates. These dark side of network hypotheses are supported by both the participation literature cited above and a substantial literature in education policy (see Tyack 1974; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Kozol 1991; Meier and Stewart 1991).

Control variables. Any assessment of public program performance must control for both task difficulty and program resources. For school districts, neither of these types of elements are under the substantial control of the districts themselves, and therefore they can be considered key parts of the vector of environmental forces. Fortunately, a well-developed literature on educational production functions (Hanushek 1996; Hedges and Greenwald 1996) can be used for

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[11]School districts often have annual student turnover of 20% or greater. School districts do not necessarily know where students have gone unless they receive a request for a transcript. In addition, school districts have few incentives to find out why any given student has not returned for a new academic year.

guidance. Eight variables, all commonly used, are included in our analysis – three measures of task difficulty and five measures of resources.

Schools and school districts clearly vary in how difficult it is to educate their students. Some districts have homogeneous student populations from upper middle-class backgrounds. Students such as these are quite likely to do well in school regardless of what the school does (see Burtless 1996). Other districts with a large number of poor students and a highly diverse student body will find it more difficult to attain high levels of performance because the schools will have to make up for a less supportive home environment and deal with more complex and more varied learning problems (Jencks and Phillips 1998). Our three measures of task difficulty are the percentages of students who are black, Latino, and poor. The last-mentioned variable is measured by the percentage who are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch. All three measures should be negatively related to performance.

While the linkage between resources and performance in schools has been controversial (see Hanushek 1996; Hedges and Greenwald 1996), a growing literature of well-designed longitudinal studies confirms that like other organizations, schools with more resources generally fare better (Wenglinsky 1997). Five measures of resources are included. The average teacher salary, percent state aid, and class size are directly tied to monetary resources. The average years of teaching experience and the percentage of teachers who are not certified are related to the human resources of the school district. Class size and noncertified teachers should be negatively related to student performance; teacher experience and teacher salaries should be positively related to performance. The appropriate sign for percent state aid is not clear.

Results

Estimations were developed via multiple regression analysis for each of the ten

performance indicators outlined above. In each case, the specification includes all control variables plus the measure of managerial networking. Dummy variables for each year were also included. These were usually jointly significant, reflecting an upward trend in the performance data during this period.[12]

Table 1 displays the results for the overall TAAS pass-rate performance. Results for all variables aside from dummies for the years are shown. The adjusted R-squared is approximately 0.59, indicating a reasonable amount of explained variance. Relationships are all in the expected directions and also significant. Of particular interest is the impact of managerial networking, which shows a positive impact on TAAS scores. The maximum effect size for this variable is more than four points on districts' overall pass rate. This figure may seem relatively modest, but such an impact – particularly from the top position in the system, one far removed from the core of the educational process – can be seen as substantial, and the impact of management can show impressive results over time.

[Table 1 about here]

For the most salient performance indicator, therefore, managerial networking contributes to positive results. This result fits with the expectations developed from the research tradition of Selznick and others. How does networking effort play out across the range of performance measures? We ran nine additional regression analyses to determine the answer; the results for those targeting performance for the relatively disadvantaged parts of the educational constituency appear in Table 2, while those measures of interest to more powerful parts of the public-school networked environment are reported in Table 3. Both tables provide summary

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[12]A few exceptions can be noted. None of the year dummies were significant for attendance. In three other cases, average SAT score, average ACT score, and percent scoring above 1110 in the SAT, the dummy for 1996 was not significant, but the succeeding years were consistent with the upward trend.

reports: they include the results for managerial networking but omit the portions of the estimations pertaining to the controls.[13]

[Tables 2 and 3 about here]

Table 2 summarizes five direct tests of the "dark side hypothesis" by showing managerial networking's impact on five performance indicia that matter most to minority constituents, the poor, and/or low-performers. The pattern is striking. For each of Latino students, black students, and low-income students,[14] managerial networking does not add to performance with any statistically significant impacts. The same can be said for attendance. All of these performance measures are of more interest to marginalized constituencies of the school-system network. Only for dropout rate does managerial networking seem to matter. This anomaly, however, may result from the poor quality of the dropout data. Data on dropout performance are the least reliable of those analyzed in this study.

Table 3 shows the contribution of managerial networking to performance for four indicators relevant to advantaged (that is, top-end and/or white) students. For all, the impact of managerial networking is clearly positive and significant. This is what one would expect if managers engaged in the network are influenced by and attentive to what those with power would prefer. More specifically, for the Anglo pass rate, average SAT, average ACT, and percent SAT above 1110 (or its ACT equivalent), managerial networking adds to performance. These are all indicators that are of considerable interest to relatively influential or privileged constituencies.

The results overall are clear: the estimations retrieve Selznick's insight with detailed

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[13]Nonetheless, the same controls listed in Table 1 were included in all nine other regression analyses.
[14]The performance measure is the TAAS pass rate for these subgroups.

findings. Those parts of a networked constituency that are influential and care about the performance results have managerial networking assisting what they do; those parts dealing with more marginal or less salient issues are less – or not – influenced by managerial networking. Selznick's argument is strongly supported by the findings.

Further insight as to what is likely occurring in these settings can be gained by taking a more thorough glimpse inside the managerial networking activity reported by the district superintendents. To do so, we replace the overall networking factor scores with the reported degree of networking, respectively, with each node. We enter each node or networking partner into separate regression analyses that are otherwise specified identically to those performed for the overall networking measure. We explore the impact of interaction with each node on each of the ten performance measures already reported. These additional analyses amount to 50 estimations – ten each for each of the nodes (school board members, local business leaders, and so forth). The results of these analyses are reported in Tables 4 and 5. The tables omit the findings for the controls in favor of reporting only on the impacts of each of the networking contacts of the school-district top managers. Table 4 summarizes findings for the all-pass rate (the most highly salient performance measure) and the advantaged student indicators, while Table 5 provides a parallel set of results for the disadvantaged student indicators.

[Tables 4 and 5 about here]

Although we do not have measures of the goals of each of the nodes, in a few cases clear expectations can be inferred. Local business leaders are likely to push for improvements on the elite end of the educational spectrum since their own children are likely to be relatively advantaged in the education system. The Texas Education Agency is most associated with its exam, the TAAS, and it sets standards for students by race and ethnicity. Other superintendents

23

are likely to reflect professional interests, and professional educators in the U.S. are likely to

push education benefits or have ideas for new programs that affect both haves and have nots.

The exact preferences of the political actors, that is, school boards and state legislators, will

depend on the composition of their constituencies, and systematic data on the "electoral"

constituencies, that is who voted for the office holder, are not available.

The analyses provide some hints as to what may be going on as top managers of the

school districts interact with their environment. While not definitive, the results suggest possible

causal links and thereby plausible production processes. For business leaders the pattern is

especially clear: such contacts help on every measure of advantaged-student performance tested

and hurt on four out of five measures of disadvantaged student performance.[15] In this case,

cooptation is a likely explanation. More contact with business leaders probably exposes top

school-district managers to the complaints, concerns, and preoccupations of the local business

elite, from whom some support (for instance, for the district's revenue-raising agenda) may be

crucial. To the extent that superintendents use their discretion to direct or redirect attention to

these matters, some sacrifice to the more marginalized clientele may follow.

Superintendents' interacting with their counterparts in other districts contributes to

performance on seven of the 10 measures, including on all five measures tapping disadvantaged

students' results. What is likely happening here is information sharing and professional

assistance to colleagues, thus suggesting that collegial professional interaction can be a route for

diffusion of innovations and relatively equitable performance boosts across organizations and

governments. Interaction with the Texas Education Agency is also helpful to several measures

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[15]This summary includes relationships significant at $p < .10$. If one restricts the criterion to only those significant at .05, the number of significant findings drops to one.

24

of performance, three each for the advantaged and disadvantaged groups.[16] Most of these have

to do with performance on the TAAS, a subject of obvious concern at the state level. This

pattern is consistent with what one might expect from interaction with a regulatory agency --

which is, in effect, how the TEA operates.

The more intriguing results are those for the other two external links for the

superintendents. Contacts with school board members do not help performance, and for half of

the measures more networking with school board members impedes performance. The negative

impacts are spread across both advantaged and disadvantaged students. Whatever is going on in

these contacts, the results do not seem to be aspects of cooptation in the usual sense. For

instance, TAAS results for both Anglo and poor students are negatively associated with more

contact with the school board. Somewhat surprisingly, contacts with state legislators show some

impacts; these are all positive with regard to performance, and three of the four significant

impacts show up on measures tapping advantaged-student or –generally salient measures.[17]

These findings do not fully demonstrate what is happening as managers engage in

networking activity with an array of external parties. They show, however, that the benefits of

this activity are unevenly distributed, and also that these consequences might be traced to

contacts with particular actors. Networking with the external world can offer perils as well as

prospects, and understanding the political and distributional dimensions of such settings can help

to explain what is likely to be produced via networked public action.

Implications

Network researchers have appropriately emphasized the complex and interdependent

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[16]If one restricts the criterion to only those performance indicators for which the impact is significant at $p < .05$, the TEA shows results on four of the ten, all four related to the TAAS.
[17]The fourth impact is on dropouts.

nature of many of today's public programs and pointed to the challenges faced by public

managers who are responsible for "making a mesh of things," in Appleby's well-known phrase

(1949). In implicitly (or otherwise) suggesting that the issues are those of coordination and

management alone, however, much of the recent exploration of networks and policy

implementation ignores potentially crucial political dimensions of network creation,

coproduction, and cooptation. This article indicates that these omissions are important and that

systematic research on the political aspects of networks and their performance impacts is needed.

The last portion of the analysis in particular makes a strong case that networks and their

management are not likely to produce leveraged performance without distributional implications.

As Philip Selznick argued decades ago, administrative units situated in an interdependent

political environment must find ways to build support – particularly among those elements of

their setting which have the clout and resources to matter to the agency's future prospects. This

political dynamic does not disappear when agencies operate in networked contexts; it is likely

exacerbated. Treating network management as a cognitive or technical challenge misses the

mark, for it obscures the likely tilting of the policy table toward well-established and influential

interests. Managerial networking does not eliminate this bias, if anything, it can accentuate it.

In school districts in Texas, at a minimum, managerial networking does boost

educational performance, but the most improvements accrue to the more privileged portions of

the constituency and not to the marginalized ones. Network activity and management matter,

but these elements are not ways of overcoming inequities in service delivery. Exposing

managers to the pressures and demands of their surroundings, particularly to influential actors

with a distributionally-related agenda, appears to push them to respond to the strongest and most

influential portions of the network. On the other hand, networking in other directions or with

other types of actors may produce benefits – or even costs -- without catalyzing further inequities as a result. Positive, mixed, negative, and zero-sum games are all plausible. The details matter. Managerial networking is not a substitute for politics, nor is it a more sanitized and thereby acceptable form of political activity. It produces the kinds of patterns and dilemmas that social scientists have been documenting for years.

Although the empirical findings presented here are limited to Texas school districts, two reasons suggest that similar patterns would be found in other managerial networks. First, school districts are relatively common public organizations with relatively common problems involving the incorporation and management of networks. These findings are most likely to apply to organizations that share the characteristics of school districts: highly professionalized and decentralized organizations with a great deal of managerial discretion. Second, the story told by the data fit long standing theories about organizations and their environments; in effect, the moral is that we need to think of public management networks in the broader context of organization theory.

The findings in this article thus reintroduce issues of distribution and politics to the subject of public management, here in the networked settings that are the focus of substantial recent interest. Network researchers should be desperately seeking Selznick, and the insights gained in decades of work on bureaucratic politics, if they are to understand fully the network phenomenon and its implications for public management.

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31

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Table 1. The Impact of Managerial Networking on Organizational Performance

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Dependent Variable = Student Exam Pass Rates

Independent Variables	Slope	t	p
Managerial Networking	.7035	(4.60)	.0001
Control Variables			
Teacher's Salaries (000s)	.4665	(4.31)	.0001
Class Size	-.3117	(4.72)	.0001
Teacher Experience	.1943	(1.90)	.0575
Non Certified Teachers	-.1873	(5.30)	.0001
Percent State Aid	-.0173	(2.09)	.0366
Percent Black Students	-.2167	(13.49)	.0001
Percent Latino Students	-.1091	(10.39)	.0001
Low Income Students	-.1670	(11.16)	.0001

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R-squared	.59
Standard Error	7.62
F	276.07
N of Cases	2534

Dummy variables for individual years not reported

Table 2. Impact of Network Interaction on Disadvantaged Students Indicators

Performance Measure	Network Slope	t	R2	N
Latino Pass Rate	.4081	1.56	.36	2310
Black Pass Rate	.2437	.64	.37	1568
Low Income Pass Rate	.1168	.61	.51	2518
Dropout Rate	-.0424	2.04*	.16	2514
Class Attendance	-.0028	.18	.24	2534

All equations control for teacher's salaries, percent state aid, class size, teacher experience, percent of teachers not certified, percentage of black, Latino and low income students and yearly dummy variables.

*significant $p < .05$, two tailed test

Table 3. Impact of Network Interaction on Advantaged Students Indicators

Performance Measure	Network Slope	t	R2	N
White Pass Rate	.8097	5.31*	.42	2506
Average ACT Score	.0670	2.50*	.38	2220
Average SAT Score	5.0762	3.49*	.50	1836
Percent Above Criterion	.5512	2.80*	.30	2416

All equations control for teacher's salaries, percent state aid, class size, teacher experience, percent of teachers not certified, percentage of black, Latino and low income students and yearly dummy variables.

*significant p < .05, two tailed test

Table 4. Impact of Network Interaction on Advantaged Students Indicators

Interactions With	TAAS	Anglo Tests	ACT	SAT	1110 Criterion
School Board Members	-.589 (3.39)*	-.572 (3.33)*	-.011 (0.37)	-.87 (0.52)	-.200 (0.89)
Local Business Leaders	.268 (1.72)#	.450 (2.92)*	.104 (3.71)*	8.18 (5.48)*	1.093 (5.49)*
Other Superintendents	1.011 (5.77)*	.974 (5.62)*	-.013 (0.42)	1.20 (0.71)	.037 (0.16)
State Legislators	1.504 (4.21)*	1.170 (4.73)*	.056 (1.29)	6.33 (2.70)*	.398 (1.24)
Texas Education Agency	.631 (3.15)*	.569 (2.88)*	.061 (1.72)#	-1.97 (1.05)	-.256 (0.98)

All equations control for teacher's salaries, percent state aid, class size, teacher experience, percent of teachers not certified, percentage of black, Latino and low income students and yearly dummy variables.

*significant $p < .05$

#significant $p < .10$

Table 5. Impact of Individual Network Nodes on Disadvantaged Students Indicators

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Performance Measures

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Interactions With	TAAS Tests For				
	Blacks	Latinos	Poor	Attend	Dropout
School Board Members	-.184	.059	-.746	-.117	.049
	(0.44)	(0.20)	(3.43)*	(6.97)*	(2.15)*
Local Business Leaders	-.768	-.500	-.535	-.025	-.016
	(1.95)#	(1.91)#	(2.75)*	(1.66)#	(0.80)
Other Superintendents	1.180	.850	.837	.078	-.057
	(2.82)*	(2.91)*	(3.80)*	(4.51)*	(2.49)*
State Legislators	.975	.419	.307	-.009	-.060
	(1.59)	(1.01)	(0.98)	(0.38)	(1.81)*
Texas Education Agency	.556	1.040	.733	.038	-.027
	(1.14)	(3.11)*	(2.94)*	(1.93)#	(1.03)

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All equations control for teacher's salaries, percent state aid, class size, teacher experience, percent of teachers not certified, percentage of black, Latino and low income students and yearly dummy variables.

*significant p < .05, two tailed test

#significant p < .10, two tailed test