

**WORKING BOTH SIDES OF THE STREET: BRINGING TOGETHER POLICY AND  
ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC SERVICE PERFORMANCE**

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## **Abstract**

Increased emphasis has been placed on improving public service performance in recent years. This point is apparent in New Public Management reforms that have swept the world, and many localized reforms being implemented in individual countries. Scholars have also taken up the performance mantle and begun producing a steady stream of theoretical and empirical research on the topic. Two groups in particular – public management and public policy scholars – are making significant contributions. Yet few scholars in either camp work on both sides of the street. The purpose of this paper is to explore how public service performance has been defined and measured in the two domains, review relevant theoretical and empirical work in each, and offer some thoughts on building bridges across them. The implications for research and practice are then discussed.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, increased emphasis has been placed on improving public service performance (Peters and Savoie, 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). This emphasis is apparent in New Public Management reforms that are sweeping the world, and many localized reforms being implemented in various countries (Kettl, 2000; Brewer, 2000; Organisation for Economic Co-ordination and Development, 1997; Bouckaert and Halligan, 2007). A few academics have also taken up the performance mantle and begun producing a steady stream of theoretical and empirical research on the topic (Ingraham and Lynn, 2004; Boyne et al., 2006; Walker, Boyne and Brewer, forthcoming). In particular, two relatively small groups – policy studies scholars who investigate policy-related performance and public management researchers who investigate organization-related performance – are making significant contributions to this important and rapidly growing body of literature.

Yet few policy studies or public management scholars work both sides of the street simultaneously, so unfortunately, the two camps are somewhat balkanized and moving ahead on different trajectories. It is our contention that each group of studies has a unique and highly useful perspective on public service performance, which could be enhanced further if connections between the two were made.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how public service performance has been conceived, defined and measured in the two domains (policy and organization studies), and to review a selection of relevant theoretical and empirical work in each. Policy studies scholars typically focus on public policies or programs as their unit of analysis. They recognize that delivery systems often span multiple organizations, both in vertical and horizontal configurations. Organizational scholars, in contrast, typically focus on separate organizations or individuals as their unit of analysis, and they tend to think of single organizations as self-contained delivery systems. Analysts of public policy often take the policy stages heuristic as point of departure and derive a set of assumptions about the nature of performance, which is seen as evolving seamlessly over time. Organizational scholars also allow that performance changes, but in their empirical work, often begin with more time-bound referents and measure performance as a single snapshot or cascading set of frames.

After discussing these and other differences, we consider the possibility of making connections between the two literatures on the hope that each can add something useful to a ‘synthesizing perspective’. We then attempt to advance a more clearly defined research agenda with propositions and advice on how the two domains might better synchronize their efforts to advance research on describing, explaining and improving public service performance. One key factor in bringing the two camps together is an increased focus on the dependent variable – public service performance.

We believe this integrative theoretical essay will prove useful to policy studies and public management scholars alike, and it will hopefully help push their respective research

fronts forward by providing a more synthesized perspective on public service performance. Other implications for research and practice are discussed.

In the following sections, we introduce a theoretical framework to guide this study, explore how public service performance has been defined and measured in the two domains (policy studies and organization studies), and selectively review some relevant theoretical and empirical work from each.

## **2. Dimensions of Governance**

Currently the study of government is being undertaken under three major institutional headings. First there is the oldest one – the scholarly field of Public Administration (Wilson, 1887). Since the Second World War, the public policy orientation has gained considerable ground (Lasswell, 1951). Relatively younger is the heading of public management which is currently in vogue (Perry and Kraemer, 1983; Bozeman, 1993). One may argue that the differences between these headings and the specific type of studies they are begetting do not have a principal nature – after all, the object of study for all three scholarly fields is fundamentally the same. Of course there are differences, but many of them may be explained primarily by the historically grown variety in institutional settings (Lynn, 2006).

Within the realm of government studies the concept of governance recently and in a widespread way became adopted. The concept offers the opportunity of bringing the differences created by institutional differentiation under a common umbrella or theoretical superstructure. That is to say, this opportunity is provided if governance is conceived in a specific way. It means that the term is not taken as referring historically to a certain stage in government appearance – the contemporarily prevalent use (for instance Richards and Smith, 2002), nor when the term is seen as analytically referring to a ‘third way’ of coordination in and via networks (cf. Stoker, 1991; O’Toole, 1997). Instead, governance can be conceived as a multi-dimensional concept, referring to government-in-action or how policy is translated into results. Lynn and his associates (2000) use the term like that, while developing their ‘logic of governance’ framework aimed at what they call *governance research* (also see Frederickson, 2003).

Elaborating the notion of the ‘three worlds of action’ developed by Kiser and Ostrom (1982), Hill and Hupe (2002; Hupe and Hill 2006) make a distinction between structure, contents and process as labels denoting the three general dimensions of governance. Each label refers to one of the three clusters of activities involved in governance broadly conceived: creating frameworks, giving direction and realizing objectives agreed upon. In a nested configuration these activities can be observed on varying scales of aggregation, specifically that of individuals, organizations and systems as a whole. Hill and Hupe’s conceptualization of governance provides a multi-dimensional framework for the study of government-in-action at the meta-level of research. As such the framework makes it possible to identify differences in the way performance thus far has been looked at in public policy studies, and respectively public management ones. While we acknowledge

the limitations of this and other meta-theoretical frameworks, they seem helpful for our present purposes. The way performance is looked at from a public policy perspective can be characterized as a combination of the contents and system dimensions. This means that in public policy the point of departure is the *what*: in particular the goals and means of a specific public policy as laid down in a law or other official document. Different from the focus, the locus is secondary. It is a presupposed hierarchy implied by the notion of the staged policy process. This may relate to the supposition that the text of the law or policy directive is self-evident. Because of its preeminent legitimate status, that text is expected to be implemented accordingly, in what actually is seen as a vertical chain. The stage of policy formulation-plus-legitimate-decision-making prevails to the stage of implementation. Once the goals and means legitimately have been decided upon on the scale of the system as a whole, as an answer to what was identified as a problem in society, the rest is left to implementation.

Table 1. Positioning Public Policy and Public Management Perspectives

Action level	Structure	Contents	Process
Action scale			
System		<i>P u b l i c</i>	
Organization		<i>P o l i c y</i>	
	<b>P u b l i c</b>	<b>b l i c</b>	<b>l i c</b>
Individual		<i>P r o c e s s</i>	
	<b>M a n a g e m e n t</b>	<b>a g e m e n t</b>	<b>m e n t</b>

Application of the Multiple Governance Framework (Hupe and Hill 2006).

In contrast, the way performance is looked at from a public management perspective, the point of departure is a certain scale of action (locus), that is to say a single public organization, public manager or individual. Rather than emphasizing policy contents, the primary focus is on process: getting things done, once the goals have been set.

Looking across different dimensions of governance, the points of departure of the public policy and public management perspectives apparently vary. A public policy process has a multi-layered and multi-scale character. Such a policy process is also conceived as multi-level, although entailing a hierarchy between particularly the action levels of direction (contents) and operation (process). For the scales, the same can be said: their nested configuration actually implies that individuals are supposed to comply completely with what has been legitimately decided upon at the scale of the system; that is by the institutions of democracy and the rule of law. On the other hand, the primary public management focus is on the process action level: *getting things done*, with the action scales of the organization and the individual as locus. One similarity with the public

policy perspective is that public management is observed on more than one administrative layer (i.e., it is multi-layered).

So while academics from both perspectives look at government-in-action, we detect a difference. From the public policy perspective, the point of departure is a focus (contents, with process expected to follow), with a multiple locus presupposed. In the public management perspective, however, the start is from the locus (organization). The focus is multiple, with process as leading action. The individual manager is primarily considered to be an agent fulfilling the requisites functional to the activities (or process) involved.

In the next two sections, we focus on public service performance and probe a bit deeper into the respective perspectives.

### **3. Performance from a Public Management Perspective**

Governments everywhere have long been concerned about improving the performance and effectiveness of their administrative institutions. This concern has been an important goal in public administration practice, and it can be traced to the beginnings of public administration as a self-aware discipline. In addition, concern about improving public service performance has clearly increased in recent years. This greater interest has been triggered in part by New Public Management and related reforms that have swept the world. These reforms strongly emphasize linking inputs to outputs, measuring performance, and producing results. In other words, the spotlight has been on performance improvement.

Over the past few years, a small but growing number of public management scholars have been studying governmental and organizational performance empirically. The effort is both highly focused and international in nature, as evidenced by a series of research gatherings in places like College Station, Texas (2002), Cardiff, Wales (2004) and Hong Kong (2006). As mentioned above, concern about performance improvement is not new in public administration. This recent surge of interest is however more rigorous and sustained than any previous effort, for there is a nucleus of about thirty researchers at the heart of it. As a result, empirical research on governmental and organizational performance is still relatively new, but it is surging and starting to take a comparative track.

Several other developments have probably contributed to this increased empirical output. Funding for this type of research has typically been scarce (Stallings and Ferris, 1988; Kraemer and Perry, 1989), but several projects focusing on performance have had better luck. They include English and Welsh local government studies, which have benefitted from multi-year funding commitments from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, studies of Texas public school districts which have benefitted from similar university and governmental support, and cross-country studies of 'governance indicators' funded by international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations. In addition, several relatively

new methodological tools such as structural equation and hierarchical linear modeling have become available, or at least more widely used. These tools make it possible to study the complexity of governance more easily and effectively than in the past. Finally, many public administration scholars have long sought to adopt a more scientific approach (Simon, 1946). Empirical research on government performance seems to help satisfy this desire.

Several important data sources have been compiled in the public management community, and several others have been located elsewhere and mined for organizational performance studies. Such studies can thus be characterized as data-driven and somewhat opportunistic in terms of mining the few available data sets and studying available variables within those data sets. Thus far, there are only five or six sustained pockets of empirical research on governmental/bureaucratic performance in the public management community and closely related disciplines (see Table 2).<sup>1</sup> These studies are run by small teams of researchers, centered on available data sources, and involve 'deep drilling' – that is, they tap a single data source and focus intently on a limited number of management variables, such as red tape, networking behavior or management strategy (see Table 3). Cross-fertilization across these several clusters of studies, both in research personnel and topics studied, is just beginning (for example, see Andrews et al., 2005; Boyne, Brewer and Walker, 2006).

[insert Tables 2 and 3 about here]

Next we will focus on several topics related to performance research that help elucidate the similarities and differences in the two kinds of approaches. These topics include: how performance is defined and measured, what structures (or units of analysis) are relevant, the drivers of performance (or important variables), management's role, and mechanisms for democratic accountability. These topics are addressed in turn and the discussion of them continues in a more expanded and detailed way in subsequent sections of the paper.

*Defining and Measuring Performance.* Public management scholars tend to think of performance as an organizational output – that is, a smoothly running organization is largely seen as a highly performing one. As Kim (2005, 251) writes: 'The concept of organizational performance refers to whether the agency does well in discharging the administrative and operational functions pursuant to the mission and whether the agency actually produces the actions and outputs pursuant to the mission or the institutional mandate.'

This is in contrast to public policy scholars, who start from a systems approach while tending to view performance from a policy process, output, or impact perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> We acknowledge that empirical performance studies are being carried out in Leuven, Belgium, Copenhagen, Denmark, and several other settings of late. It can be expected that in the foreseeable future these efforts, having become as intensive and long-term oriented as the ones mentioned, should be included in a review like this.

An example of how public management measures performance in practice comes from the Bush administration's President's Management Agenda (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 2001). The White House identified five management priorities (strategic management of human capital, competitive sourcing, improved financial performance, expanded electronic government, and budget and performance integration) and began ranking U.S. federal agencies on these criteria quarterly. The resulting management scorecards issued by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget consist of green, yellow, or red lights signifying how well individual agencies are embracing and implementing the President's management priorities.

Scholars have generally tried to be more comprehensive and exacting in their efforts to define and measure performance. At least two sets of empirical studies use performance measures from the world of practice. These studies in fact use the same measures that are used by overhead political authorities to fund and manage the agencies in question. The studies include Texas School Districts (Meier and O'Toole, 2006) and English local government authorities (Enticott et al., 2002). The performance measures used in these studies are far more comprehensive and closely related to actual performance than the scorecards referred to above. Another limitation of the scorecard approach is that Congress and other relevant stakeholders – including many of the agencies themselves – do not agree on its validity.

Other studies have tried to construct theoretically sound performance measures, but they too have been somewhat opportunistic, in part because they have used survey responses that were not specifically designed to measure performance. For instance, in a series of U.S. Federal agency studies, Brewer and colleagues (e.g., Brewer and Selden, 2000; Brewer, 2005; also see Kim, 2005) have used large scale employee surveys to construct multi-dimensional measures of performance. The technique involves combining multiple items into an index. Yet this method introduces some potential problems with measurement validity and common source bias (Brewer, 2006; Walker and Boyne, 2006).

While we have argued that the public management perspective on performance is somewhat time-bound and tethered to public organizations, managers, and employees, we hasten to add that it is also quite broad and encompassing in terms of the dimensions and values represented. Several examples illustrate this point. For example, Brewer and Selden (2000, also see Brewer, 2005; Kim, 2005 etc.) identify three important administrative values (efficiency, effectiveness, and fairness) and two important dimensions of performance (internal or 'inside the organization' and external of 'outside the organization'), thus deriving six distinct elements of public service performance. These dimensions include internal and external efficiency, internal and external effectiveness, and internal and external fairness.

Similarly, Boyne (2003) lists the following 'headline dimensions' of public service performance which are considered important in the UK:

- Quantity of outputs (e.g., number of operations performed in hospitals, hours of teaching delivered in schools, number of houses built)
- Quality of outputs (speed and reliability of service, courtesy of staff)

- Efficiency (ratio of outputs to financial inputs)
- Equity (fairness of the distribution of service costs and benefits between different groups)
- Outcomes (e.g., percentage of pupils passing exams, percent of hospital patients treated successfully)
- Value for money (cost per unit of outcome)
- Consumer satisfaction (which may be a proxy for some or all of the above, depending on the question posed to service users)

Another example comes from an international or cross-country perspective. One United Nations (2003) report contends that the important dimensions of improving public sector performance and effectiveness include:

- Responsiveness to public needs
- Equity - e.g., ensuring greater equity in the distribution of services
- Quantity - ensuring that the proper quantity of services is provided
- Quality - enhancing the quality of services
- Efficiency - enhancing the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the provision of services
- Provision - enhancing the equity, accessibility, speed and reliability of services
- Reducing economic impediments - reducing the extent to which costs, procedures and processes impede economic and social progress
- Transparency - providing timely, relevant and complete information
- Integrity - ensuring ethical behaviour

It is important to note that these expansive definitions of performance often move beyond the organization and link to system wide concerns such as ethics, accountability, and citizen satisfaction, but they do not necessarily incorporate policy-related perspectives of performance.

*Relevant Structures and Units of Analysis.* Public management scholars tend to depart from separate organizations, work groups, and individuals as the relevant units of analysis. In contrast, public policy scholars usually think in more policy-substance related ways, typically singling out specific policies, coalitions, or implementation structures and other networks as configurations linking separate actors under a certain programmatic heading.

While the various clusters of public management studies seem to agree that organizations are important, and organizations are often the chosen unit of analysis, they do not necessarily agree on how to define the term 'organization'. For instance, cross-country studies tend to view central governments as organizations, U.S. federal agency studies tend to view large federal departments as organizations, state government studies either tend to view state governments as a whole or large state agencies as organizations, English and Welsh local government studies tend to view multi-purpose local government authorities as organizations, and Texas school district studies consider the school district itself as the relevant organization. Obviously, these definitions are not consistent and they strain the meaning of the term 'organization'. If scaling is important

as was argued in the second section of this paper, their differing views on what an organization is may limit generalizability across the respective studies.

*Drivers of Performance – Important Variables.* Another difference is in important variables. These sometimes coincide but more often involve subtle but possibly important differences stemming from perspective. For instance, management scholars pay close attention to goals and emphasize that they should be clear and attainable, while policy scholars are more concerned with coherent policies treating tractable problems, at least from a top-down perspective. (Bottom-up scholars seem to prefer more malleable policies, but these scholars rarely conduct empirical work on public service performance for it is viewed as a top-down exercise.) There are clearly similarities and differences here, as with other variables of interest.

In another example, organizational scholars have tended to focus on red tape and rule-boundedness as an impediment to performance, while policy scholars have identified competing policy mandates and other complexity variables that can undercut performance. Here, we note that rules are organizational phenomena creating constraints, while policy mandates are externally imposed calls for action.

These commonalities are important, but the two perspectives also identify some unique variables. ‘Performance management’ is largely treated as an organizational variable confined to public management studies; there is not really a parallel variable in public policy studies. On the other hand, policy diffusion is a policy variable – there is not really a public management counterpart.

On balance, public management and policy studies scholars have identified large caches of variables that are thought to impact performance. Even on their short lists, there is some overlap, but also some important differences. Yet many of these differences can be attributed to their differing perspectives, which dictate how they define and measure performance and their notions on relevant structures and units of analysis.

*Management’s Role in High Performance.* Both public management and policy studies scholars emphasize the importance of leadership and skilled management, but they seem to be talking about slightly different competencies and skill sets. For management scholars, the emphasis is on organizational management which includes managing personnel and budgets, and generating results. In this context, managers have authority to bark out orders and act as leaders, entrepreneurs or enablers. In contrast, for policy studies scholars, the emphasis is on more fragile structures – such as policy coalitions and implementation networks. Moreover, their interest is in policies rather than organizations so they hold a different conception of management. In their view, managers, particularly in inter-organizational networks, often operate without much formal authority, and they must rely on social skills such as inducing cooperation and building trust. Management also involves massaging or tweaking fragile implementation processes to concert action across multiple but not always interdependent actors and shepherd policy initiatives through to completion. As a result, managers are described as brokers, fixers, facilitators, central nodes, etc.

*Means of Achieving Democratic Accountability.* Another major difference is in democratic accountability: management scholars seem much more concerned about the bureaucracy achieving high degrees of overhead political accountability, while policy scholars seem more concerned about achieving accountability through faithful execution of public policies and the achievement of successful outcomes.

Within the two camps, there are important differences though. We have already mentioned the top-down and bottom-up approaches to policy implementation, which have sharply different views on accountability and the role of individual public servants (Hupe and Hill, 2007). In public management studies similar cleavages exist. Some scholars hold rather constrained views on the roles of managers and employees, while others advocate a more energized and proactive stance for them. The differences between public management- and policy studies being evident, they seem to be paralleled by differences *within* each of the two academic fields.

Next, we provide a brief review of empirical studies on public sector organizational performance in which the dependent variable purports to capture several salient dimensions of performance (as opposed to studies that focus on a single output or dimension of performance). The studies shown here are clearly not exhaustive; they are merely representative of the type of research being conducted in the several pockets or clusters of research activity mentioned above. They include:

- *U.S. Federal Agency Studies* (Brewer, 2005; Brewer and Lee, 2005; Kim, 2005; Brewer and Selden, 2000; Rauch and Evans, 2000).
- *U.S. State Government Studies* (Pandey and Moynihan, 2006; Brewer and Li, 2005; Cogburn and Schneider, 2003).
- *Texas Public School District Studies* (Meier and O'Toole, 2006; 2002; Hill, 2005; Brewer and Lu, 2004; O'Toole and Meier, 2003).
- *English and Welsh Local Government Studies* (Andrews et al., 2005; Brewer and Walker, 2005; Boyne, Brewer and Walker, 2006; Walker and Boyne, 2006).
- *International or Cross-Country Studies* (Brewer and Choi, 2007; Brewer, 2004; Islam and Montenegro, 2002; Rauch and Evans, 2000).

#### **4. Performance from a Public Policy Perspective**

The difference in point of departure has implications for the way 'performance' is being looked at in both research traditions. In the public policy perspective, 'performance' implicitly is conceived as the desired results of a specific public policy. On normative grounds related to the rule of law and democracy, these results in fact are presupposed. Like implementation is expected to follow formulation-*cum*-decision making, those desired results – implicitly thought of as real world impacts or policy outcomes – are assumed to follow from the policy process as a whole. When the results are perceived as disappointing, the top-down standard reaction is to blame the implementation process and try to diminish the discretion of street-level bureaucrats.

As indicated above, one may expect that the academic interest in explaining variation in what has been called ‘governance performance’ or ‘public service performance’ got an impetus from the adoption of New Public Management measures in the practice of government. Likewise, the perception of implementation deficits or ‘policy failures’ as identified in studies like Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) not only led to a reaction in the form of *bottom-up* studies, but to a range of what Rothstein (1998) later would call ‘misery research’ as well. In other words, in the public policy perspective, the reaction to disappointment about ‘performance’ to a large extent had – and in practice remains to have – a normative or even political character rather than a theoretical one. It was not earlier than in theoretical approaches like the advocacy coalition framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) and other *synthesizing* approaches (Goggin et al., 1990; Matland, 1995) that in the study of public policy for the first time an interest in causal explanation arose – although not under the heading of analyzing ‘performance’.

According to some contemporary authors, studying implementation now has become a yesterday’s issue (for a critical view of this claim see Hill, 1997). It is a fact that under the traditional heading more or less straightforward implementation studies continue being done, with a more or less top-down character and often in the form of a single case study (for an overview see Saetren, 2005). However, the fashionable character of studying policy implementation seemingly has withered away. That is to say: at the forefront of the study of government, implementation as a theme seems to have been replaced by other themes and labels, most especially ‘governance’.

With its artistic connotation, the term ‘performance’ in relation with government or governance can be conceived of as a measure of action. Then relevant questions are ‘who is the performing actor’, ‘which specific activities are involved’, and ‘on which dimensions should the results of these activities be measured’? As performing actors, particularly nations, separate organizations and individual persons can be distinguished. Activities can be divided, for instance, along the lines of an economic cycle (production, distribution, etc.) according to the stages of a policy process, or according to the dimensions of governance described in the second section of this paper. The results of those activities, including performance as such, can be measured in a theoretically indefinite variety, going from the gross national product of a country to the number of parking fines issued by a police officer per week. It should be noted here that the term ‘outputs’, which is usually used in policy studies (more often than outcomes or impacts), in fact has a meaning similar to the term ‘performance’ which is currently used in public management studies.

Apart from the implementation literature referred to above, it seems relevant to explore the ways in contemporary public policy studies that attention is being given to explaining variation in outputs – i.e., ‘performance’. In *Theories of the Policy Process*, Sabatier (2007, 7) provides an overview of ‘more promising theoretical frameworks’ used in the study of public policy. To be included, according to Sabatier, a ‘framework’ or theoretical approach has to meet the following criteria. First, it must be possible to call the approach a scientific theory (that is, there are defined concepts and testable

hypotheses, and the approach is fairly broad in scope). Second, the approach must have been applied and tested already. Third, despite some normative elements, the approach must be a positive theory aiming at explanation. Fourth, the approach must address one or more scholarly themes that have been traditionally central in political science, like conflicting interests or institutional arrangements.

In the first edition of the volume mentioned above, Sabatier (1999, 8-10) selects seven ‘frameworks’ that meet these criteria. They are: the Stages Heuristic, Institutional Rational Choice, the Multiple Streams Framework, the Punctuated-Equilibrium Framework, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the Policy Diffusion Framework, and ‘the Funnel of Causality and other frameworks in large-*N* comparative studies’. In the second edition of the book, Sabatier (2007) explains his revised list by referring to the criticism of a too large stress on American approaches and literature.

In Table 4, we position the theoretical approaches of the policy process listed by Sabatier (2007) as ‘promising’. Now there are eight: two chapters are added, respectively about a social constructivist and a network approach to the study of public policy, while the chapter on the stages heuristic was omitted. We position the approaches in relation to the scale of analysis on which variation is sought to be explained. The authors referred to not only are the writers of the specific chapter in the volume, but almost all can also be seen as protagonists of their respective approach.

Table 4. Studying Public Policy: Theoretical Approaches and Levels of Analysis

Level of analysis	Approach
Nation (state)	Innovation and Diffusion (Berry and Berry, 2007) ‘The Policy Process and Large- <i>N</i> Comparative Studies’ (Blomquist, 2007)
Policy domain	Networks (Adam and Kriesi, 2007) Multiple Streams (Zahariadis, 2007) Punctuated-Equilibrium (True, Jones and Baumgartner, 2007) Advocacy Coalitions (Sabatier and Weible, 2007)
A public policy	‘Social Construction and Policy Design’ (Ingram, Schneider and DeLeon, 2007)
Institutional arrangements	Institutional Rational Choice (Ostrom, 2007)

Source of the overview of approaches: Sabatier (ed., 2007), *Theories of the Policy Process*.

Although these theoretical approaches might be applied to other levels of analysis, they mainly focus on explaining variation on the level of analysis indicated in Table 4. The table makes it clear that even if the dependent variables are some type of outputs or performance, the level of analysis will vary. By consequence, the independent, explanatory variables will be sought on different scales of action.

In this context, it seems worthwhile to think about which frameworks Sabatier (1999, 10-12) in the first edition of his edited volume categorized as 'omitted frameworks'. As such he considered successively: Arenas of Power; Cultural Theory; Constructivist Frameworks (included in the 2007 edition), and the Policy Domain Framework as developed by Laumann and Knoke (1987) which refers to 'a rather complex set of concepts for guiding network analysis' (Sabatier 1999, 11). The major difference between this latter category of 'omitted' approaches to the study of public policy and the former one is that in Sabatier's view, they do not meet all the four criteria of scientific rigor put forward by him. It therefore may be expected that, in general, the differences with the empirical public management studies of performance will be greater than for the category of 'more promising' approaches to the study of public policy.

In a book on the political foundations of public policy, one author of this paper distinguishes three recent developments in public policy studies. First, since Martin Rein (1976, 266) discovered that policy making can be seen as 'telling stories', language has become central in the work of many analysts, both *in* and *of* policy. What Fischer and Forester (eds., 1993) have coined as 'the argumentative turn' shows a variety of theoretical approaches. The range goes from *Evidence, Argument and Persuasion in the Policy Process* (Majone, 1989); via narrative policy analysis (Roe, 1994); discourse analysis (Hajer, 1995); argumentative policy analysis (Hoppe and Peterse, eds., 1993); and deliberative policy analysis (Hajer and Wagenaar, eds., 2003); to *How Does a Policy Mean* (Yanow, 1996) and *Policy Paradox* (Stone, 2002). This language-oriented, constructivist school of thought could be labeled as *policy as argument* (Hupe, 2007).

As a second development, Hupe identifies a renewed attention on the policy process as a whole in the literature on multi-level governance. This is particularly the case when in such studies the policy consequences of the European Union are considered. In fact, the traditional questions about the relationship between implementation and policy formation are posed anew (for instance Lampinen and Uusikyla, 1998; Knill and Lenschow, 1998). Often in these studies mainstream social-scientific methods are used. Because of the contemporary pre-occupation with traditional issues, perhaps the label *neo-implementation studies* is appropriate here (for a critical examination, see Hupe and Hill, 2003).

In a third development Hupe sees the treatment of *policy as a dimension of something else, particularly governance*. In meta-theoretical analytic frameworks like the 'Logic of Governance Framework' developed by Lynn and associates (Heinrich and Lynn, 2000; Lynn et al., 2001) and the Multiple Governance Framework (Hupe and Hill, 2006), the substance of government-in-action gets attention, although as one of the distinguished dimensions of action. It is not that the *what* of government (values, goals, and so on) is defined away, but it is positioned within a larger framework. Unlike the policy stages heuristic (see the previously mentioned development), these frameworks do not necessarily exclusively have a vertical or even hierarchical character.

In the theoretical approaches to public policy presented here, attention on what can be called performance varies. In the argumentative or narrative approaches, for instance, the attention of the analyst is focused on giving meaning to language rather than to causal explanation. In the multi-level governance studies, the attention so far seems more focused on the implementation/policy formation nexus ('correct' compliance of EU-directives by member states) than on explaining variation in the outputs of multi-layered policy processes from a comparative perspective (Hupe and Hill, 2003).

However, in policy studies where explaining variation in outputs *is* the objective – see Sabatier's overview of 'most promising' approaches – two observations can be made. First, the explanation of variation in outputs in public policy studies mostly happens under a different heading than the one of 'performance'. Second, to the extent that performance is looked at, it is that of a different 'performing actor' than the organization or an individual person. In particular, systems or subsystems, like nation-states or policy domains, are the favored levels of analysis.

The most inviting orientations for explaining public service performance seem to be the multi-dimensional frameworks mentioned above. Their inviting character is situated in the fact that they enable the identification of relevant explanatory variables while not starting by putting forward an *a priori* central concept deemed most relevant. Rather, these analytical frameworks enhance an open, research question-driven search for independent variables. It seems especially this perspective on middle-range theory formation that may make connections with approaches from public management studies worthwhile.

## **5. Governance and Performance**

In this paper we have focused on the variety of studies in which 'government performance' in its various manifestations has become a theme. We started with the assumption that there are differences between 'Public Administration', 'Public Policy', and 'Public Management'; however, we felt that these differences could not be traced to fundamental, substantive cleavages. In particular one may look at public management studies and public policy studies as two domains, in the sense that each is a scholarly community, addresses certain issues, has its specific, preferred journals, and so on. At the same time both fields seem to have developed as 'path dependent' results of academic institutionalization, rather than as products of major ideological conflicts (cf. Lynn, 2006). After all, each of these scholarly fields has the same object of study – however labeled.

From that stance we have asked the question how especially the fields of public management studies and public policy studies relate to each other as far as their focus on public service performance is concerned. We do so because we think it possible that communication between the two fields programmatically will help advance the study of public service performance. This implied that in our paper that the contributions to both

fields in one way or another had to be compared. As criteria for such comparison we identified the following dimensions; with each we summarize our findings.

### *Findings in Comparison*

*Locus/Focus Combinations.* In the second section of this paper we identified some dimensions of governance, using the latter as the common denominator for the kind of studies observed here. We observed that in public management studies the locus comes first: the point of departure is the single public organization or the individual public manager. The focus is looked at next. It is viewed as the *process* of getting things done. With public policy studies the order is reversed. First is the focus – the ‘what’ of a policy (its *contents*); while the locus, or rather set of loci, is presupposed. Like in the tone-setting Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) study: ‘Washington’ is expected to take care of the legitimate policy formation, while implementation is assumed to take place in ‘Oakland’ accordingly.

*Conceptualization and Measures of Performance.* In public management studies, ‘administrative and operational functions’ are central (Kim 2005, 251). Public policy studies, in contrast, tend to use a broader ‘systems-type approach’, comparing results and intentions. *Units of analysis* in public management studies are usually single organizations or individual managers. In public policy studies, mostly configurations of actors as subsystems are observed.

*Important Variables.* Goggin (1986) described the state of policy implementation studies as one of ‘too many variables, too few cases’. This judgment does not seem valid, however, for most approaches to the study of public policy identified by Sabatier (2007) as ‘promising’. For the empirical public management studies of performance, which are largely data-driven, one could say the opposite – there are almost ‘too many cases, too few variables’. To illustrate, theory strongly suggests that funding levels are related to organizational performance, but so far, public management researchers have not unpacked and tested this assertion.

*Management’s Role.* In public management, the act of managing stems from formal authority and explicitly required competence. In public policy studies, by contrast, ‘managing’ activities seem far softer and less well articulated. Such activities more often seem to involve applying social skills to concert action across complex and often shifting policy subsystems or implementation networks.

*Democratic Accountability.* Public management scholars seem oriented towards management behavior within given lines of authority, as a set of vertical relationships of what could be identified as a political-administrative accountability regime (Hupe and Hill, 2007). In public policy studies, however, researchers seem to construct for themselves what accountability means in a given case. In the end, they seem to define accountability towards society in general – in relation to what they perceive as the problem the studied policy is responding to.

*Level of Scientific Ambition.* Results of social science differ overall as far as the level of scientific ambition is concerned. A distinction can be made between description and analysis by using a few central concepts: causal explanation and hypothesis testing; and theory formation. Not every single study aims at all of these three ambition levels simultaneously. Examples include the conceptual exploration, theoretical essay or normative contribution to the public debate. All are different but legitimate forms of scholarly work. One might also distinguish between research reports, policy advice and management consulting. Yet our finding is that, as far as there *is* an effort to study public service performance in both fields, they appear to be comparable on this dimension. Explaining variation is the shared objective, although not all explanation may be deemed equally 'causal' (think of the constructivist approaches to the study of public policy). In general, this seems to be related by the jointly declared applicability of the criteria for enhancing rigor in practicing social science.

*Used Methods and Techniques.* In methodological handbooks, the variety of methods and techniques goes from literature reviews, via discourse analysis to advanced arithmetical regression techniques – or the other way around. In the empirical studies of performance from both scholarly fields the used methods seem to vary. Although certainly in the public management studies reviewed above, quantitative methods seem to prevail, it would go too far to identify this domain as such with *hard science*. Work of some of the internationally most well-known scholars of public management, such as George Frederickson and Laurence Lynn from the U.S., and Christopher Hood and Christopher Pollitt from the UK, has a predominantly qualitative nature. There is a multiple variety in sorts of contributions, but it does not coincide with the demarcation lines between the two fields. In the end, the most splitting dimension seems, again, to be the classic epistemological divide between the 'story telling' of hermeneutic interpretivism via social constructivism and the 'measuring and counting' of (neo-)positivism. Despite our finding that performance studies to a certain extent share a common orientation at systematic analysis, on a macro-level this demarcation line runs *within* each of the two fields.

#### *Issues towards a 'Synthesizing' Research Agenda*

In this paper our aim was to sum up the current state of affairs between policy studies and management studies, particularly in how they are analyzing public service performance. Our coverage has been selective, focusing on several common issues or themes and exploring differences in how they are treated in the management and policy literatures. Several such points emerged as major differences: point of departure (the locus of public management is on the organization and individual, while from the public policy perspective, the point of departure in any case normatively is the system as a whole, for there legitimately the goals are set.), unit of analysis (organization versus policy or program), and outcome (getting things done versus 'misery studies'). A next logical step would be to synthesize these two literatures on the assumption that each could add something unique and useful. This would presuppose advancing a more clearly defined research agenda and formulating a set of propositions on how these two domains might synchronize their efforts in their quest to understand and explain public service

performance. Apart from the conclusion that one important unifying factor is increasing the focus on public service performance as the dependent variable, the question is how the current state of affairs could be improved.

On the basis of the findings presented, above we would like to highlight a few topics here, by way of first recommendations. On the *meta-theoretical* level it may be wise to identify questions like who, what, where, on which scale and how, before engaging in substantive theory formation. What does one want to know? What do we know already and what not? Too often questions like these – perhaps because they are so obvious – remain unanswered, or even unasked. This may lead to theoretical randomness and stepping into methodological pitfalls, while dimensions are confused that should be distinguished. On the *theoretical* level something could be gained from cross-fertilization, to be started with reading each other's journals. A concept like 'accountability', for instance, could fulfill more functions in theoretical-empirical performance research than it currently does, if systematically operationalized into measures drawn from certain, qualitative, public policy studies. Developing research designs in which qualitative and quantitative elements more frequently are being combined is a recommendation in itself. A very practical suggestion – on a '*meta-methodological*' level – would be to make existing data-sets available for researchers from an alternative perspective, as a first step towards joint research projects.

### *Conclusions*

A series of questions has been posed and at least partially answered in this paper. Do policy and management scholars mean something different when they talk about public sector performance? Indeed, we think so, at least to some extent. What are the bases for these differences? One example is their slightly different definitions of performance and units of analysis: policy scholars think of policy performance carried out in policy subsystems while management scholars think of organizational performance in the context of public organizations. Are there common touchstones? Surely there are, at least in terms of end-goals and outcomes sought by the two approaches. So how prevalent are these differences in general? Probably not as prevalent as we suspect, and they may be exacerbated by academic turf battles and historically grown variety in institutional settings. Does it make sense to attempt to bridge these differences? Yes, in our view, it does. The result could be worthwhile. Among other things, it could produce a stronger theoretical infrastructure, increased momentum for the research effort, and more opportunities and increased likelihood for research utilization. Considering the challenges facing governments everywhere, and the need for improved public service performance, making these connections and building bridges across our respective fields seem quite important.

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**TABLE 2**  
**FIVE POCKETS OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON PUBLIC SECTOR PERFORMANCE**

	Unit of Analysis	Sample Frame	Measure of Performance	Range of Management Measures	Consistency of Questions	Longitudinal Dimension
UK Local Gov't Studies	Multipurpose Local Gov'ts	Multiple Mgt Informants	All of below	Robust	Highly Consistent	6 surveys, 2001-2004
Texas School District Studies	Local School Districts	Elite Surveys – Supers Only	External Objective	Robust	Highly Consistent	5 surveys. 2000-2006
U.S. Federal Agency Studies	Large Federal Agencies	Full Organ. Sample	Internal Subjective	Robust	Moderately Consistent	8 surveys, 1989-2005
Cross-Country Studies	Central Governments	'Expert' Informants	External Subjective	Limited	Not Very Consistent	12 surveys, 1990-2006
U.S. State HHS Studies	State HHS agencies	IT Mgt Survey	Internal Subjective	Robust	Highly Consistent	2 surveys, 2000-2003

**TABLE 3  
DATA SETS, IMPORTANT VARIABLES, AND RELATIONSHIPS TO PUBLIC SERVICE PERFORMANCE<sup>1</sup>**

	Networking Frequency	Organizational Culture	Red Tape	Strategy	Structure – Stability & Centralization	Goals	Public Service Motivation	Financial Resources	Human Resources	Performance Management	Communication	Diversity/Representation	Political Support
UK Local Gov't Studies	-	+/-	-	+	+/ns	+				+		-	
Texas School District Studies	+			+/-	+							+	
U.S. Federal Agency Studies		+	-		-	+	+			+		+	
Cross-Country Studies			-		+	+			+	+			
U.S. State HHS Studies		+	-			+	+				+		+

<sup>1</sup> This table is meant to be illustrative of the work being done – it is not necessarily exhaustive or up to date.