Factors Related to PART Performance Scores of U.S. Federal Programs: Goal Ambiguity, Program Size, Type, Political Content, and Budget Increases

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Abstract

Evaluating the performance of governmental activities has been a major topic in public administration for many decades, but has received increased attention in recent years. As part of this trend, in 2003 the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) began using the Performance Assessment and Rating Tool (PART) to assess the performance of federal programs. PART assesses program purpose and design, strategic planning, program management, program results (performance on strategic goals), and an overall performance rating that combines these four categories of indicators. Researchers have reported analyses of PART results, in relation to such variables as budget decisions in OMB, and whether the program head is a careerist or political appointee (e.g., Gilmour and Lewis, 2006). Common performance measures for disparate government programs are rare, especially in the U.S. at the federal level, and PART scores provide comparable performance indicators. The availability of PART results for a very large number of federal programs (767 programs, for the present analysis) provides an opportunity for analysis of an important performance assessment initiative, and analysis of factors related to performance indicators for federal programs. The analysis reported here relates PART performance scores (program results), as well as other PART scores, to factors that should influence such performance indicators. These include measures of the programs' levels of goal ambiguity (as opposed to goal clarity), political content of the program, program size, program type ("direct" versus "indirect"), and program budget increases. Each of these variables shows a significant relationship to at least one of the PART categories. Measures of goal ambiguity ("specification goal ambiguity" and "program evaluation ambiguity") show the strongest and most consistent relations, negative relations, to PART scores. The analysis for program type shows that indirect programs consistently show lower PART scores than direct programs. These goal ambiguity and program type variables show the strongest associations with the PART program results ratings and the overall rating.

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Introduction

Evaluating the performance of governmental activities has been a major topic in public administration for many decades, but has received increased attention in recent years. As part of this trend, in 2003 the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) began using the Performance Assessment and Rating Tool (PART) to assess the performance of federal programs. PART assesses program purpose and design, strategic planning, program management, program results (performance on strategic goals), and an overall performance rating that combines these four categories of indicators. (Appendix A provides examples of questions in the PART). Researchers have reported analyses of PART results, in relation to such variables as budget decisions in OMB, and whether the program head is a careerist or political appointee (e.g., Gilmour and Lewis, 2006). Common performance measures for disparate government programs are rare, especially in the U.S. at the federal level, and PART scores provide comparable performance indicators. The availability of PART results for a very large number of federal programs (767 programs, for the present analysis) provides an opportunity for analysis of an important performance assessment initiative, and analysis of factors related to performance indicators for federal programs. The analysis reported here relates the various PART performance scores to factors that should influence such performance indicators. These include measures of the programs' levels of goal ambiguity (as opposed to goal clarity), political content of the program, program size, program type ("direct" versus "indirect"), and program budget increases. Each of these variables shows a significant relationship to at least one of the PART categories. Measures of goal ambiguity ("specification goal ambiguity" and "program evaluation ambiguity") show the strongest and

most consistent relations, in negative relations to PART scores. The analysis for program type shows that indirect programs consistently show lower PART scores than direct programs. These goal ambiguity and program type variables show the strongest associations with the PART program results ratings and the overall rating.

Concerning goal ambiguity, in the literature on the distinctive characteristics of government organizations and public policies, one encounters a well-established tradition in which leading scholars assert that public agencies and public policies have particularly vague or ambiguous goals, as compared to the goals of business firms. These authors further assert that this goal ambiguity has important consequences for government organizations and their managers (e.g., Allison 1983; Dahl and Lindblom 1953; Downs 1967; Drucker 1980; Lynn 1981; Lowi 1979; Matland 1995; Wildavsky 1979; Wilson 1989). This body of work contributes to a diffuse, but discernable theory of public organizations, that emphasized their status as organizations under the more direct control of government authorities than business firms, and subject to less influence of economic markets for their outputs. The observations about goal ambiguity play a central role in this theory.

In related developments, psychologists have reported abundant empirical research on the influences on individual and team performance of goal attributes, such as goal specificity, proximity, complexity, and conflict (see Locke and Latham 2002; Bandura and Locke 2003; Bandura 1989; Lee, Locke, and Latham 1989; Latham and Lee 1986; Bandura and Cervone 1983; Locke et al. 1981). In this stream of research, the goal-setting theory of work motivation has performed as one of the most consistently supported theories in social science. Empirical research has consistently supported the prediction that clear, challenging, but acceptable goals enhance work performance, as compared to work setting without such goal attributes as goal clarity.

Intriguingly, however, one can find very little analysis of the meaning goal clarity or ambiguity anywhere in the social sciences. Major organization theorists also point to extreme

difficulties confronting analysis of the concept of organizational goals (e.g., Scott 2003). Except for some surveys asking managers about organizational goal clarity (e.g., Pandey and Rainey, 2006), researchers have reported virtually no evidence from large sample quantitative research on the topic. Noting this scarcity, Chun and Rainey (2005a, 2005b) developed goal ambiguity measures for federal agencies. They reported findings of relations between the goal ambiguity measures and antecedents of goal ambiguity such as financial publicness (proportion of funding from government allocations) and regulatory status (2005a). They also reported relations between goal ambiguity and indicators of organizational performance, based on employee perceptions of performance reported in employee surveys (2005b). The analysis reported below regresses the PART performance scores on ratings of the programs' goal ambiguity, using concepts of goal ambiguity similar to Chun and Rainey's (such as "evaluative goal ambiguity"). The concepts and measures, however, are distinct and newly developed for use with the PART data and the new level of analysis, the program level rather than agency level.

Literature Review, Conceptual Framework, and Hypotheses

A framework for program performance

Figure 1 presents a framework of the variables that this analysis relates to the PART performance scores. Factors that influence performance criteria can be roughly characterized as internal and external factors. Organizations or programs seek to accomplish explicit and implicit goals that are part of the organization, and hence internal factors. Therefore, the characteristics of goals influence performance (Pfeffer 1982; Price 1972). For example, according to goal setting theory, two fundamental attributes of goals include goal content and intensity (Lee, Locke, and Latham 1989). Goal content, which specifies what is supposed to be attained, has over five dimensions, including specificity, proximity, difficulty, complexity,

and conflict (Lee, Locke, and Latham 1989; Bandura 1989).[1] In addition to the focus on goals, researchers focus on different internal factors that influence performance, such as procedures, communication systems, management capacity, policy type, organization (program) size (Chun and Rainey 2005b; Selden and Sowa 2004).

Some analysts emphasize external factors that influence performance. Seashore and Yuchtman (1967, 393), who developed the system resource model, argue that organizational performance means "the ability to exploit its environment in the acquisition of scarce and valued resources to sustain its functioning." In this model, inputs are more important than outputs for the survival of the organization. An important external factor for government agencies and programs, political content of a government program (Gilmour and Lewis 2005), can influence program performance.

Figure 1 also shows, as performance criteria, the categories of performance indicators that OMB includes in PART, that serve as dependent variables. These include program design, planning, management, results, and the overall rating scores, that we draw from the 2007 PART data. For its overall PART rating, a program can receive one of five potential ratings: Effective, Moderately Effective, Adequate, Ineffective, and Results Not Demonstrated. This overall score combines the ratings on the four categories, with weights on the categories. "Program assessments are comprised of four sections. Each section addresses a different aspect of the program with different weights for the overall program assessment rating: program purpose and design (20%), planning (10%), management (20%), and results and accountability (50%) (OMB 2007)." In addition, we employ, as independent variables, specification goal ambiguity, program evaluation goal ambiguity, program type, assessment year, increased budget, and political party initiative (political content).

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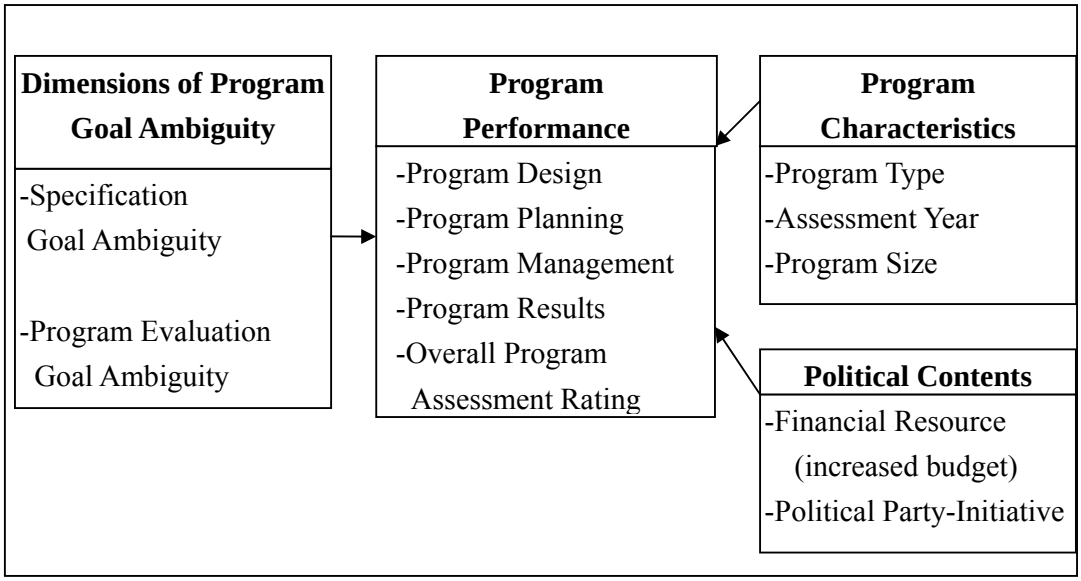
[1] According to Bandura (1989), intensions of goals do not automatically facilitate motivation or performance. Different properties of goal structures can affect differently motivation or performance. Thus, in this study, we try to develop one kind of goal ambiguity in program dimension by employing the one property of program goals, that is, specificity.

Figure 1: A Framework for Program Performance



Two Dimensions of Program Goal Ambiguity and Performance

In their analysis of goal ambiguity in 115 U.S. Federal agencies, Chun and Rainey (2005a) used four dimensions of organizational goal ambiguity: mission statement ambiguity, evaluative goal ambiguity, directive goal ambiguity, and priority goal ambiguity. Since all organizations have multiple goals and goals have multiple dimensions (Cyert and March 963), we need a multidimensional construct for programs goals as well. The present study provides first analysis of goal ambiguity of federal programs, so we developed two new dimensions of program goal ambiguity, specification goal ambiguity and program evaluation goal ambiguity.

Specification Goal Ambiguity and Performance

Specification goal ambiguity refers to the level of interpretive leeway available in deciding on the quantity and/or quality of work toward the achievement of a program's performance goals. As explained later, we measure this construct as the proportion of a program's stated goals for which the PART report states performance targets and states actual

achievements against these targets. (For some of the goals reported in PART reports, such target and achievement information is stated. For other goals, it is not.) Some motivation theorists posit that more specific lead to higher performance (Bandura 1989; Lee, Locke, and Latham 1989). "Explicit standards regulate performance by designating the type and amount of effort required to attain them by furnishing unambiguous signs of accomplishments (Bandura 1989, 42)." Reviewing 14 laboratory experiments and 8 field studies, Latham and Lee (1986) concluded that specific goals produce higher levels of performances than non-specific ones. In addition, numerous studies have found that more specific goals facilitate performance more than do general intentions, such as "do your best" (Bandura and Cervone 1983; Locke et al., 1981).

Hypothesis 1: Federal programs with lower specification goal ambiguity will show a higher level of performance.

Program Evaluation Goal Ambiguity and Performance

For program evaluation goal ambiguity, this study follows Chun and Rainey's (2005a, 4) definition of evaluative goal ambiguity, as "the level of interpretive leeway that a program goal allows in evaluating the progress toward the achievement of the goal." We use a different measure, however, as explained later. According to numerous authors, such as Grizzle (1982), program managers who transform program goals into performance indicators and targets, for use in performance evaluation, will achieve higher levels of performance.

Hypothesis 2: Federal programs with lower program evaluation goal ambiguity will show a higher level of performance.

Federal Program Type and Performance

According to Chun and Rainey's (2005b) research, the type of program or policy that federal agency carries out shows a relationship to organizational performance. Scholars have

proposed various typologies of public policies. Lowi's (1972) system of classifying public policies included distributive policy, regulative policy, constituent policy, and redistributive policy. Meier (1993) has employed this typology in analyzing characteristics of government agencies. Ripley and Franklin (1982) classified public policies into distributive policy, competitive regulatory policy, protective regulatory policy, and redistributive policy. More recently, in relation to goal ambiguity, Chun and Rainey's (2005b) policy types included regulatory policy, non-regulatory policy, and hybrid policy responsibilities. As numerous authors observe, but as seldom measured with a large sample and clear measures, Chun and Rainey found that regulatory agencies showed higher levels of certain types of goal ambiguity than other types of agencies.

The present analysis follows Lowi's (1972) assumption that "policies determine politics." Different types of federal programs face different political situations, which cause differences in policy processes (Meier 1993; Ripley and Franklin 1982; Lowi 1972). Therefore, we hypothesize that different types of public programs will show different levels of performance.

However, the previous typologies of public policy show some weaknesses. First, the conceptual distinction between distributive and redistributive policy has been criticized as a distinction with no difference (Chun and Rainey 2005a). Second, Chun and Rainey's (2005b) classification is for the analysis of federal agencies; it not suited for analysis of federal programs rather than federal agencies, since a federal agency generally manages several programs and programs have characteristics different from those of agencies.[2] Therefore, this study follows Salamon's (2002) classification system for public policies and programs instead of the typologies described above. Salamon's categories include direct programs (direct federal, research & development, credit, and capital assets & service acquisition) and indirect ones (block & formula grant, competitive grant, and regulatory). Salamon (2002)

[2] To take a representative example, Department of Agriculture has more than 50 different kinds of programs.

divided the public "tools" into two groups, the direct and indirect tools. Direct tools have medium coerciveness[3], high directness[4], and high visibility.[5] They include direct government, government corporations, economic regulation, public information, and direct loans. Indirect tools have medium coerciveness, low or medium directness, and low or medium visibility. They include social regulation, contracting, loan guarantees, grant, tax expenditures, fees and charges, insurance, tort law, vouchers, government-sponsored enterprises.

We expect that direct programs will experience less intervention and influence in the policy process from multiple constituencies, as compared to indirect programs. Direct programs will have higher performance than indirect ones, since managers have more discretion to improve performance (Behn 2001; Lowi 1979; Wilson 1980).

Hypothesis 3: Indirect programs have lower levels of performance than direct ones.

Increased Funding Level from the federal government and Performance

The current administration has expressed the intention to base budget allocations to programs on PART performance measures (OMB 2006). In their study using the PART data, Gilmour and Lewis (2005) suggest that "low budgets could be a cause of poor performance". Similarly, we hypothesize that public programs with higher levels of increased funding will have higher levels of performance. Conversely, those with lower levels of increased funding will have lower levels of performance.

Hypothesis 4: Federal programs with higher levels of increased funding will have higher levels of performance.

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[3] "*Coerciveness* measures the extent to which a tool restricts individual or group behavior as opposed to merely encouraging or discouraging it (Salamon 2002)."

[4] "*Directness* measures the extent to which the entity authorizing, financing, or inaugurating a public activity is involved in carrying it out. A direct tool is one in which authorization, funding, and execution are all carried out by essentially the same entity (Salamon 2002)."

[5] "*Visibility* measures the extent to which the resources devoted to a tool show up in the normal government budgeting and policy review processes (Salamon 2002)."

Assessment Year and Performance

One might also predict that assessment year would also have an influence on the performance of federal programs. This study hypothesizes that the assessment year of a program would be positively related to performance. OMB (2007) says that "assessment year is the year of the most recent program assessment. Programs are reassessed when significant changes have been made to improve the rating of the program." In addition, the Bush administration has emphasized strategic planning as a means for "managing for results." If a federal program is assessed later than others in the present administration, one would expect that the manager of the program would devote effort to collecting more information and to follow carefully the guidelines of OMB, to improve performance scores and to get larger budget allocations (Matland 1995; Browne and Wildavsky 1984).

Hypothesis 5: Federal programs assessed more recently will have higher levels of performance.

Program Size and Performance

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO 2004), PART scores have been higher for smaller programs. In addition, although the units of analysis and performance measures were different, Chun and Rainey's (2005b) research showed that organizational size related negatively to organizational performance indicators, such as customer service orientation, perceived productivity, and perceived work quality. Thus, we hypothesize that program size will decrease performance scores for the federal programs. Larger federal programs usually have more long-term performance goals and annual performance goals than smaller ones, and a greater variety of functions. Hence, larger programs face more challenges in performing well on their multiple goals.

Hypothesis 6: Smaller federal programs will have higher levels of performance.

Political Party Initiative (Political Content) and Performance

Gilmour and Lewis (2005, 177) contend that the department that houses a program serves as "a reasonable proxy for the political content of the program", since "some departments do work that is more central to the agenda of the Democratic Party than other departments." (They referred to this construct as program content, while we refer to it using that term, but also as "political party initiative.") They compared programs that receive more attention and support from Democratic officials to those of greater interest to Republicans. They hypothesized that, during the Bush administration, programs housed in Democratic departments would receive weaker support than programs housed in Republican departments in the Republican administration.

Hypothesis 7: Programs housed in Democratic departments have lower performance than programs housed in Republican departments.

Methodology

Data sources and sample

The programs analyzed represent a variety of federal programs that are differ from each other in various ways and represent an array of goals and functions. According to OMB (2006), the PART data represents efforts to assess and improve program performance in order to achieve better results, by assessing the program's purpose and design, strategic planning, management, results/accountability, the overall assessment rating, performance measures and program improvement plans. OMB documents state that, "we use a standard questionnaire called the Program Assessment Rating Tool, or PART, for short. The PART asks approximately 25 important, yet common sense, questions[6] about a program's performance

[6] The sample questions are described in Appendix A.

and management…… Once each assessment is completed, we develop a program improvement plan so we can follow up and improve the program's performance (OMB 2006)." This PART data provides the assessment information we analyze.

Using the PART data affords several advantages that help to alleviate methodological complications that have often hindered previous studies on goals. The first advantage is the standardization of terms, that addresses a frequent problem in gathering organizational data from archival sources (Van de Van and Ferry 1980; Chun and Rainey 2005a). All federal agencies prepared the data for PART under the same guidelines provided by the OMB (Chun and Rainey 2005a). In addition, OMB made it clear that federal programs should describe their goals based on statutory mandates (OMB 2006). This links goal statements more directly to statutes than in cases where researchers have had to rely on goals identified indirectly from formal mandates (e.g., Perry et al. 1999; Meyers, Riccucci, and Lurie 2001). The sample for this study includes all the federal programs that are included in the OMB PART data for both 2006 and 2007. The sample size is 767 programs.[7] We use the items in the PART data for dependent variables and independent variables.

Measures of the Dependent Variables (Program Performance)

According to OMB (2006), the PART is used to evaluate four dimensions of performance: design, planning, management, and results/accountability. As described above, the four sections have different weights for the calculation of the overall program assessment rating. Each PART questionnaire includes 25 questions that are divided up into the four sections. OMB (2006) explains the four sections as follows: "The first section (design) of

[7] Total number of the federal programs in 2006 PART is 794. 10 programs were left out, since they did not show any performance goals in 2006 or 2007 PART data. We also left out 6 programs, because they were not included in the 2007 PART data. In addition, one program was excluded in the regression model, since it was not possible to classify the program due to being coded as 'mixed program' in type1 category of PART. Therefore, in this research, the sample size is 767.

questions asks whether a program's purpose is clear and whether it is well designed to achieve its objectives. The second section (planning) involves strategic planning, and weighs whether the agency establishes valid annual and long-term goals for its programs. The third section (management) rates the management of an agency's program, including financial oversight and program improvement efforts. The fourth section (results/accountability) of questions focuses on results that programs can report with accuracy and consistency."[8] In addition, the scores of all the four sections are presented as ratios. As did Gilmour and Lewis (2006), we use as measures of performance the scores of the four sections and the overall assessment rating[9]. In this study, therefore, the degree of performance for a program is the scores for program performance provided by OMB.

Measures of the antecedent variables

Specification goal ambiguity. Performance assessment systems such as PART assume that performance goals of individual programs need to be specified quantitatively or qualitatively. That is, they should include concrete targets and reports of actual achievements against those targets. For some programs, the PART reports state targets for some of the goals, and actual achievements against those targets (e.g., for the Bureau of Economic Analysis, a target for 2006 was "meet major milestones." The PART report states the actual achievement for this target as "met.") PART reports for a number of programs, however, report no such information for some of their goals. This implies that officials representing those programs cannot state such targets and achievements because of various difficulties in doing so, or exert no effort to do so. PART assumes that, with goals represented by concrete targets and actual achievements, individual programs can be appraised, and they should

[8] These explanations about program assessment sections reflect well the definition of effectiveness or performance of Rainey and Steinbauer (1999).

[9] For the overall assessment rating score of programs, as shown above, we use the total weighted score for the program by using the weights of fours assessment sections: program purpose and design (20%), planning (10%), management (20%), and results and accountability (50%) (OMB 2007)."

receive budget increases according to the degree of achievement of performance goals

Specification goal ambiguity refers to this degree of specificity in the expression of program goals. It represents the level of interpretive leeway available in deciding on the precise quantity and/or quality of work for achieving the program's performance goals. In other words, this concept of goal ambiguity reflects the presence of concrete targets and reports of their actual achievement. It is measured by the ratio of performance objectives without concrete targets or actual achievements to the total number of performance objectives in individual programs.

Program Evaluation goal ambiguity We use the definition of evaluative goal ambiguity that Chun and Rainey (2005) developed in the dimension of organizations. Program evaluation goal ambiguity "refers to the level of interpretive leeway that a program goal allows in evaluating the progress toward the achievement of the goal (Chun and Rainey 2005a)." We employed a new method of measuring program evaluation goal ambiguity, however, because the unit of analysis has changed from agency to program, and for additional reasons.[10]

PART assess four different categories of goals--outcome goals, output goals, outcome-oriented efficiency goals and output-oriented efficiency goal (OMB 2006).[11] Our measure of program evaluation goal ambiguity is calculated as the ratio of output-oriented performance indicators (as opposed to outcome-oriented performance indicators), to all the performance indicators for stated for a federal program OMB (2007).

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[10] We measured evaluative goal ambiguity using Chun and Rainey's (2005) procedure. It did not have a significant influence on four out of the five program performance categories. In one of our analyses, the impact on program performance was positive. For conceptual reasons that require lengthy explanation, we concluded that it was necessary to develop a new method to measure evaluation ambiguity, since the unit of analysis changed from agencies to programs and for other reasons. Please contact the authors for further explanation.

[11] The performance indicators in the previous research consist of four evaluative goals, such as, subjective goals, objective goals, workload-oriented goals, and results-oriented goals (Chun and Rainey 2005a). In addition, this measure does not need to do inter-rating, unlike Chun and Rainey's (2005a), since the criteria for this measure are based on the judgment of OMB.

As OMB (2007) describes, all programs have outcome, output, and efficiency measures in the PART data. "An **outcome** indicator refers to the events or conditions of direct importance to the public/beneficiary that are *external* to the program (OMB 2007)." OMB gives as an example the goal of a job training program, which provides people with training in skills necessary to get a job. One outcome measure is the number and percent of people getting a job within one year after finishing the job training program. Another outcome measure is the increase in their income after training. "An **output** measure refers to the *internal* activities of a program, such as the products or services delivered (OMB 2007)." In the case of the job training program, an output measure indicates how many people complete the job training program. "**Efficiency** measures capture a program's ability to carry out its activities and achieve results (an outcome or output), relative to resources (an input such as cost and/or time)" (OMB 2007). The amount of money spent for achieving a unit of output represents one type of efficiency indicator, an output-oriented efficiency measure. However, OMB also designates some efficiency measures as outcome-oriented efficiency measures. For example, the Space and Flight Support program in NASA states some outcome-oriented efficiency measures. Thus, we can divide the performance measures into four categories, including outcome goals, outcome-oriented efficiency measures, output goals, and output-oriented efficiency measures. Employing these categories, program evaluation goal ambiguity is the ratio of output goals and output-oriented efficiency measures, as opposed to outcome goals and outcome-oriented efficiency measures, over all performance indicators for each federal program. That is, the higher the proportion of all performance indicators that are expressed as output goals and outcome-oriented efficiency measures (rather than outcome goals or outcome-oriented efficiency measures), the higher the program evaluation goal ambiguity. As described below, evaluative goal ambiguity for programs ranges from 0 to 1 as a ratio measure.

Federal program type. The method of classifying program types in this study

follows Salamon's (2002). Table 1 illustrates the differences between direct and indirect policies and programs, Salamon's application of the distinction, and the application of the distinction we use in this study. PART includes eight types of programs, including direct federal, credit, research and development, block and formula grant, competitive grant, capital assets and service acquisition, regulatory, and mixed[12] programs.

The classification of program types by OMB is similar to Salamon's (2002). In the PART data, direct federal programs (e.g., Agricultural Commodity Grading and Certification Programs, Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention, and Indian Health Service Federally-Administered Activities), research & development programs (e.g., Economic Research Service and USDA Research and Economic Opportunities for Producers), and capital assets & service acquisition (e.g., Missile Defense, Future Combat Systems/Modularity Land Warfare, Energy Conservation Investment, and others) are similar to direct government programs in Salamon's (2002) classification. Salamon contends that direct government programs directly operate research laboratories, and directly provide services, facilities, or products to citizens; they are generally quite visible to the public, and have the coercive power wielded by human health departments for quarantine, national defense department for national security, and similar authorities. Credit programs (e.g., Federal Family Education Loans and Agricultural Credit Insurance Fund Direct Loans) are in the category of direct programs, since they are similar to direct loans. Indirect programs include block & formula grant, competitive grant, and regulatory programs, on the basis their similarities to the sub-programs such as, grant, and social regulation[13] in Salamon's (2002) classification system. This procedure classifies four hundred and thirty five programs as direct, and three hundred and thirty two programs as indirect programs.

[12] As noted above, one mixed program was excluded.

[13] The regulatory programs in the PART data did not include economic regulation programs, in which products are fair prices, vehicles are entry and controls, and delivery system is regulatory commission (Salamon 2002).

Table 1. The Classification of Public Program types

Salamon's (2002) classification		**The classification of this study**	
Direct Tools (High directness, High visibility)	***Indirect Tools*** (Low or medium directness, Low or medium visibility)	***Direct Programs*** (High directness, High visibility)	***Indirect Programs*** (Low or medium directness, Low or medium visibility)
direct government, direct loans government corporations, economic regulation, public information	Grant, contracting, tax expenditures, social regulation, tort law, vouchers, loan guarantees, insurance, fees and charges, government-sponsored enterprises	Direct federal, Credit, Research & development, Capital assets & service acquisition	Block & formula grant, Competitive grant, Regulatory

Increased Funding levels. The Bush administration announced that budget allocations should be distributed on the basis of program performance (OMB 2006). The PART data provides information about the budget for every federal program in the dataset, in order to make it easy to check the present condition of the budget for each program. For measuring this funding increases, we employed the information on the 2005 actual budget and 2006 enacted budget in the PART data. The increase in funding level for each program is calculated by dividing the amount of the 2006 increase (2006 budget-2005 budget) by the 2006 budget.

Assessment year. We hypothesized that the more recently a program has been evaluated, the higher its program performance score would be. We use the latest assessment year for each program, as reported in the PART data.

Program Size We follow the same measurement method that Gilmour and Lewis (2006) used for program size. They divided the program size into three categories, including small, medium-sized, and large federal programs, based on the size of program budgets, although we use different sizes for the categories because of the different years covered by the data we use. The base category, small federal programs, includes those with less than $65 million budget allocations. Medium-sized programs range from $65 million to less than $400 million, and large programs include those with budgets of over $400 million.

Political Party Initiative (Political Content). As did Gilmour and Lewis' (2005), we classified programs into two categories, Republican and Democratic Party programs, according to the party with more influence and interest in the department where a program is housed.[14] All programs in the Departments of Commerce, Education, Energy, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and Health and Human Services and the Environmental Protection Agency are coded with "1", which means that they are Democratic programs, or as we sometimes put it, represent Democratic party initiatives. We code all other programs with a ''0'', which means that they are Republican party initiative programs.

Results

Our dependent variables from the PART data are expressed as percentages (%) but for analytical purposes we must treat them as proportions. OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) is heteroskedastic for proportions, so we calculate the logit transformation of the proportion[15] so that we can use OLS models (William 2000). These new dependent variables are included in our OLS model. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the logit-transformed dependent and independent variables. (The results are essentially the same with and without this transformation).

As Table 2 shows, five dependent variables--program design, planning, management, results, and overall program assessment rating score--were transformed into logit styles from percentages, which ranges from 0 to 100. Two dimensions of goal ambiguity and increased budget have ratios as their units. The other independent variables, such as program type, program size, and political party initiative, are dummy variables.

[14] Refer to Gilmour and Lewis' (2005) article for detailed explanation of this measure.

[15] The formula of logit transformation is as follows: $\ln(\pi/1-\pi)$. In addition, we need to pay more attention to interpret the OLS results in case of logit transformation.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Performance Variables and Independent Variables

Variables	Unit	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Program Design	Logit transformed	4.232	3.048	-6.907	6.907
Program Planning	Logit transformed	2.138	2.873	-6.907	6.907
Program Management	Logit transformed	2.953	2.718	-6.907	6.907
Program Results	Logit transformed	-0.237	1.968	-6.907	6.907
Overall Program Assessment Rating Score	Logit transformed	0.798	0.979	-2.143	6.907
Specification Goal Ambiguity	Ratio	0.312	0.332	0	1
Program Evaluation Ambiguity	Ratio	0.481	0.288	0	1
Program type	0, direct; 1, indirect	0.433		0	1
Increased budget	Ratio	0.014	0.307	-1	4.147
Assessment year	Assessed year-2000	3.823	0.993	2	5
Program Size	Category	0.934		0	2
Political Party Initiative	0: Republican 1: Democratic	0.433		0	1

The five tables below present the regression results for the five dimensions of program performance (program design, planning, management, results, and the overall program assessment). The five models are all significant ($p < .001$). Specification goal ambiguity and program evaluation goal ambiguity, among all the independent variables, show the most statistically significant and the strongest relations to program performance scores. These relations are in the directions hypothesized earlier.

Table 3 shows that program design scores for the programs in the analysis, specification goal ambiguity, program evaluation goal ambiguity, program type, and assessment year have significant influences. The negative influence of specification goal ambiguity on program design is the strongest, with beta = -0.128. An increase of one standard deviation (0.332) in specification goal ambiguity decreases the program design score by 0.128 standard deviation (0.128*3.048=0.390). A one standard deviation (0.288) increase in program evaluation goal ambiguity is associated with a 0.084 standard deviation

(0.084*3.048=0.256) decrease in the program design score. These results strongly indicate that federal programs with lower specification and evaluation goal ambiguity receives higher PART ratings on program design.

Table 3. OLS Results for Program Design

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients	T-Ratio
Specification Goal Ambiguity	-1.177	***	0.374	-0.128	-3.15
Program Evaluation Ambiguity	-0.891	**	0.391	-0.084	-2.28
Program Type (Indirect)	-0.484	*	0.266	-0.079	-1.82
Increased Budget	0.370		0.362	0.037	1.02
Assessment year	0.206	*	0.112	0.067	1.84
Program Size (Medium)	0.315		0.258	0.049	1.22
Program Size (Large)	-0.128		0.294	-0.019	-0.44
Political Party Initiative	1.456		2.924	0.237	0.50
Constant	3.000				
Specific agency effects are included					

Note: $R^2 = .178$; *Adjusted* $R^2 = .120$; F value=3.04***; Sample size=767
*Significant at .10; **Significant at .05 level; ***Significant at .01 level

Indirect programs have significantly lower program design scores than direct programs. The results for assessment year indicate that programs assessed more recently show higher program design scores. One standard deviation (0.993) increase has the impact of 0.067 standard deviation (0.067*3.048=0.204) increase on program design.

Table 4. OLS Results for Program Planning

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients	T-Ratio
Specification Goal Ambiguity	-1.957	***	0.325	-0.226	-6.01
Program Evaluation Ambiguity	-1.06	***	0.340	-0.106	-3.12
Program Type (Indirect)	-0.532	**	0.231	-0.092	-2.30
Increased Budget	0.222		0.315	0.024	0.70
Assessment year	0.324	***	0.098	0.112	3.32
Program Size (Medium)	0.282		0.225	0.047	1.26
Program Size (Large)	0.215		0.256	0.034	0.84
Political Party Initiative	0.898		2.544	0.155	0.35
Constant	3.262				
Specific agency effects are included					

Note: $R^2 = .299$; *Adjusted* $R^2 = .249$; F value=5.99***; Sample size=767
*Significant at .10; **Significant at .05 level; ***Significant at .01 level

Table 4 shows that the significant variables for program planning scores are the same as for program design scores. However, the influences on the planning scores are more significant and stronger than for the design scores. A one standard deviation increase in specification goal ambiguity (0.332) and in program evaluation goal ambiguity (0.288) decreases program planning scores, respectively, by 0.226 standard deviation (0.226*2.873=0.649) and 0.106 standard deviation (0.106*2.873=0.305). These data show that the lower the specification and evaluation goal ambiguity levels are, the higher the programs' planning score is. The impact of assessment year on planning score (0.112*2.873=0.204) is larger than that on design score (0.067*3.048) for a one standard deviation increase. Additionally, direct programs show significantly higher planning scores than indirect ones.

Table 5. OLS Results for Program Management

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients	T-Ratio
Specification Goal Ambiguity	-1.316	***	0.315	-0.161	-4.18
Program Evaluation Ambiguity	-0.547	*	0.329	-0.058	-1.66
Program Type (Indirect)	-0.236		0.224	-0.043	-1.06
Increased Budget	0.754	**	0.305	0.085	2.48
Assessment year	0.261	***	0.094	0.096	2.77
Program Size (Medium)	-0.176		0.218	-0.031	-0.81
Program Size (Large)	-0.885	***	0.248	-0.149	-3.58
Political Party Initiative	-4.695	*	2.463	-0.856	-1.91
Constant	8.296				
Specific agency effects are included					

Note: $R^2 = .267$; *Adjusted* $R^2 = .215$; F value=5.10***; Sample size=767
*Significant at .10; **Significant at .05 level; ***Significant at .01 level

Table 5 shows that for program management as a performance indicator, more of the independent variables have significant effects on the dependent variable than in the others of the five OLS models in this study. Specification goal ambiguity again shows the strongest relation to the management score, out of the seven independent variables. Associated with a one standard deviation (0.332) increase in this variable is a decrease of 0.161 standard deviation (0.161*2.718=0.438) in program management. An increase of one standard deviation of program evaluation goal ambiguity has less influence on program management (0.058 standard deviation = 0.058*2.718 = 0.158) than on program design and planning. These results indicate that program management scores are higher when specification and evaluation goal ambiguity are lower. Assessment year also has a significant influence on the management score.

In a pattern differing from the other results, increased budget, program size (large), and political party initiative exert significant influences on program management scores. When increased budget changes by one standard deviation (0.307), the program management score changes positively by 0.085 standard deviation (0.085*2.718=0.231). As expected, program size has a negative impact on program management. In addition, programs with Democratic Party initiative show lower program management score than those with Republican Party initiative.

Table 6. OLS Results for Program Results

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients	T-Ratio
Specification Goal Ambiguity	-1.449	***	0.214	-0.244	-6.78
Program Evaluation Ambiguity	-0.791	***	0.223	-0.116	-3.54
Program Type (Indirect)	-0.415	***	0.152	-0.105	-2.73
Increased Budget	0.280		0.207	0.044	1.35
Assessment year	0.051		0.064	0.026	0.80
Program Size (Medium)	0.327	**	0.148	0.079	2.21
Program Size (Large)	0.258		0.168	0.060	1.53
Political Party Initiative	-0.296		1.671	-0.075	-0.18
Constant	0.941				
Specific agency effects are included					

Note: $R^2 = .356$; *Adjusted* $R^2 = .310$; F value=7.75***; Sample size=767
*Significant at .10; **Significant at .05 level; ***Significant at .01 level

As shown in Table 6, specification goal ambiguity, program evaluation goal ambiguity, and program type show the expected direction of influence on program results scores. The impact of one standard deviation change in specification goal ambiguity, the strongest influence in the analysis, is a negative change of 0.244 standard deviation

(0.244*1.968=0.480) in program results. This is larger than that of program evaluation goal ambiguity (0.116*1.968=0.228). These results support the hypotheses. Lower specification and program evaluation goal ambiguity leads to higher program results scores. Additionally, indirect programs have significantly weaker influence on results scores than direct ones. Inconsistent with our hypothesis is the evidence that medium-size programs show higher influence on program results than small programs.

Table 7. OLS Results for the Overall Assessment Ratings for Federal Programs

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients	T-Ratio
Specification Goal Ambiguity	-0.872	***	0.102	-0.296	-8.57
Program Evaluation Ambiguity	-0.387	***	0.106	-0.114	-3.64
Program Type (Indirect)	-0.179	**	0.072	-0.091	-2.48
Increased Budget	0.251	**	0.098	0.079	2.55
Assessment year	0.034		0.030	0.034	1.11
Program Size (Medium)	0.112		0.070	0.054	1.60
Program Size (Large)	-0.007		0.080	-0.003	-0.08
Political Party Initiative	-0.209		0.795	-0.106	-0.26
Constant	1.244				
Specific agency effects are included					

Note: $R^2 = .410$; *Adjusted* $R^2 = .368$; F value=9.75***; Sample size=767
*Significant at .10; **Significant at .05 level; ***Significant at .01 level

As Table 7 indicates, the overall assessment rating, based on the total weighted score for the program performance variables, relates significantly to four independent variables, in the hypothesized directions. One standard deviation increase (0.332) of specification goal ambiguity, which still exerts the strongest impact, lowers the overall program rating score by 0.979 standard deviation (0.296*0.979 = 0.290). Program evaluation goal ambiguity shows

stronger influence on this dimension of program performance than the other independent variables, except for specification goal ambiguity. An increase of one standard deviation of this goal ambiguity variable negatively changes the overall rating score by (0.114*0.979 = 0.112). These data indicate that on the overall assessment ratings, programs with lower specification and program evaluation goal ambiguity have higher program performance scores. The result for program type is the same as those in the other models, as hypothesized. For the overall program assessment rating, increased budget shows a significant and positive relation. A 0.307 (one standard deviation) unit of increased budget is associated with a change in the overall rating score by 0.079 standard deviation (0.079*0.979).

Discussion and conclusions

Evaluating the performance of public programs is a challenge of obvious significance that receives much obvious emphasis among reformers, analysts and officials, and that need much more theoretical and conceptual development by scholars. While one can debate the merits of the PART evaluation procedure, it affords a rare opportunity to analyze the relationships among systematically developed performance evaluation scores and other important variables. This analysis of the data for 767 federal programs confirms hypotheses about the influences on performance scores of variables including program goal characteristics, program type (direct or indirect), program size, and program budget increases. The results for these variables are generally consistent with recent research (Gilmour and Lewis 2006; Chun and Rainey 2005a, 2005b). Such evidence can support development of both theoretical and practical decisions about performance evaluation for government activities. Theorists can pursue more refined explanations of why certain government agencies have certain goal characteristics, as well as other characteristics of the sort analyzed here, with implications for performance evaluation. For example, this research supports theoretically-relevant hypotheses about distinctions between direct and indirect programs,

with evidence and procedures similar to those in previous studies that have provided evidence supporting frequent academic observations about differences between regulatory agencies and other types of agencies (Chun and Rainey 2005a). Very significantly, the observations about agency and program types analyzed and supported in this study are observations that abound in the literature and resound in the work of prominent scholars, but that have virtually never received analytical attention in large sample empirical studies provided in the present study and the few recent ones cited here.

Practical and policy decisions can take into consideration variations among agencies that can influence their performance scores, and consider whether those variations can be taken into account in program design. Alternatively, they may be taken into account in designs of performance evaluations, that in some cases may need to acknowledge that some programs and activities should not seek premature specification of their goals. Other cases can be identified where goal specification is feasible, but underdeveloped.

As argued in the introduction, major scholars' claims about the important role of goal ambiguity as an influence on other characteristics of government agencies makes the topic central to the theory of public organizations. In spite of this centrality, very little large sample empirical research has provided evidence about the goal characteristics of government agencies, or analysis of goal characteristics. The results reported here add to recent research on goal ambiguity (Chun and Rainey 2005a, 2005b) that indicates that government agencies' goal characteristics can be conceived, measured, and analyzed. The present study provides evidence that such analysis can be conducted at the program level, in addition to the agency level. It provides new measures and conceptions of goal ambiguity, the analytical success of which suggests the robustness of this concept and its theoretical and practical value. For example, while many of the observations in the literature have generalized across government organizations about organizational goal characteristics, the results in these recent studies suggest that variations among government agencies and

programs can be analyzed systematically. These variations can be drawn into confirming and disconfirming theoretical propositions about agencies of different types and with different characteristics.

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Appendix A

Sample Questions From the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)

-Does the program address a specific and existing problem, interest or need?
-Is the program designed so that it is not redundant or duplicative of any other federal, state, local or private effort?
-Does the program have a limited number of specific long-term performance measures that focus on outcomes and meaningfully reflect the purpose of the program?
-Does the program have ambitious targets and timeframes for its long-term measures?
-Does the program (including program partners) achieve its annual performance goals?
-Are independent evaluations of sufficient scope and quality conducted on a regular basis or as needed to support program improvements and evaluate effectiveness and relevance to the problem, interest, or need?
-Are budget requests explicitly tied to accomplishment of the annual and long-term performance goals, and are the resource needs presented in a complete and transparent manner in the program's budget?
-Does the program use strong financial management practices?
-Has the program demonstrated adequate progress in achieving its long-term performance goals?
-Does the program demonstrate improved efficiencies or cost effectiveness in achieving program goals each year?