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Desperately Seeking Selznick: Cooptation and the Dark Side of Public Management in Networks

Most literature on public-sector networks focuses on how to build and manage systems and ignores the political problems that networks can create for organizations. This article argues that individual network nodes can work to bias the organization's actions in ways that benefit the organization's more advantaged clientele. The argument is supported by an analysis of performance data from 500 organizations over a five-year period. A classic theoretical point is supported in a systematic empirical investigation. While networks can greatly benefit the organization, they have a dark side that managers and scholars need to consider more seriously.

Research and popular literature on networks and public management has burgeoned during the last several years. The bulk of this literature frames the emergence of networks in terms of a tendency or necessity to use multiple linked social actors, often multiple organizational actors, to achieve collective purposes. Corollary attention, unsurprisingly, has been directed at logically related issues such as how to manage networked arrays, how to measure and improve network performance, and how to understand network operations through empirical theory. With this attention to networks and management has come an implicit notion among researchers, albeit not necessarily among practitioners, that network development, use, and performance are topics that carry little direct political import—aside from the obvious point that the performance of networks might itself be of interest to a broader public.

The inadvertently depoliticized analysis of networks in recent research has neglected issues that should be part of the research agenda. We outline ways that networks and network management point toward significant political issues. We then focus on one political dimension of networks and their performance: the likelihood that, rather than being neutral producers of collective goods while enmeshed in a broader environment, network managers respond to the stronger and more politically powerful elements of their surroundings, thus magnifying the tendency toward inequality already present in the social setting. This dynamic—what we call the "dark side" of managing networks—has largely been unexplored by network researchers. Such patterns, however, should not be unexpected. The reasons are explicit in longstanding streams of research that have been ignored in the work done thus far on networks. We report some empirical results that give considerable credence to the dark-side hypothesis. In so doing, we argue there is a need for systematic study of the political aspects of networks and their management.

Networks and Network Management: The Functionalist Perspective

A major outpouring of research on networks has issued forth during the last decade or so. Characterizing the full array of studies is almost impossible, in part because researchers have used the term "network" in many different

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ways. By "network," we mean a pattern of interdependence among social actors in which at least a portion of the links are framed in terms of something other than superior–subordinate relations. Parts of a network may include hierarchical arrays, but at least some portions of the pattern are linked in another fashion.[1] Networks may include multiple organizations or parts of organizations.

During the past decade, many studies have proclaimed the importance of networks for the formulation and implementation of public policy (Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Klijn 1996; Provan and Milward 1995; Rhodes 1997). If we ignore the perspective of social-network analysis—which is focused on mapping the structures of networks and the interactions within them[2] rather than the consequences of network arrays for results—a set of the most prominent streams of work can be found in the literatures of governance, public policy, and public management.

Investigations of governance, increasingly visible in Europe and the United States, emphasize the broad social character of current arrangements for deciding and generating policy-oriented action. According to the phrase that is now in good currency, "governance includes more than governments." In particular, studies developed around the governance theme have emphasized the role of nongovernmental actors such as unions, businesses and business associations, and not-for-profit organizations, as they work—often in at least partial collaboration—with governments to develop and achieve public purposes (Held 1996; Pierre and Peters 2000; Weiss 1998). The European Union has stressed this theme (EC 2001), and analysts in the United States have also treated governance as an idea that is relevant in many policy spheres, including social policy (Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill 2001), the environment (O'Toole and Hanf 2002), and other fields (Moynihan and Roberts 2002).

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

In the European scholarship on policy making, similar themes have been developed, although the distinctive features of policy making in many countries have driven the characterizations toward somewhat different elements. Analysts of corporatist systems have obviously emphasized a particular version of the network theme (Bogason and Toonen 1998; Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan 1997). In the United Kingdom, scholars have been particularly active in sketching "policy networks" as crucial features of the landscape (Jordan 1990; Rhodes 1997; Richardson 1996). Although not so restrictive or formulaic as the notion of a triple alliance, the British-style policy-network analysis has been distinctive for its portrayal of such arrangements as fairly closed and controlling. Some critics notwithstanding (Dowding 1995; Kassim 1994), the policy-network notion continues to feature prominently in British scholarship.

Scholars of public management and governmental performance in several countries have emphasized the networked character of public programs as they convert policy intentions into concrete actions. In both Europe (Scharpf 1993; Kickert, Klijn, and Koopenjan 1997; Rhodes 1997) and the United States (Provan and Milward 1995; Agranoff and McGuire 2003), considerable attention has been directed toward networked patterns for program execution (Hall and O'Toole 2000, 2004). Some analysts have argued these patterns require fundamentally different forms of management (Mandell 2001), while others have sought to sketch key research questions that should be addressed by scholars (McGuire 2002). "Treating networks seriously" is likely to involve these and many other kinds of research questions, and the answers are only beginning to emerge (O'Toole 1997).

What is little noted in the literature is that most efforts depict these arrays as products of one or more production imperatives, aimed largely at optimizing output in complex circumstances. Networks, in short, are viewed as a way to improve programs.

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

The theoretical claims, parallels, and distinctions among these strands of causal logic represent a complex and somewhat confusing pastiche. The point to be emphasized, however, is that the political interpretation of networks, in terms of their likely causes and consequences, seems largely lost

in the analytical picture. Researchers seem to buy into a production logic of one sort or another regarding network formation and operations, and one result is a blindness toward the distributional consequences of network actions.

The point can be put another way. The bulk of research on networks and public management effectively reenacts a network version of the venerable politics–administration dichotomy. This statement holds in two respects: First, instrumental logic is used to explain network patterns, typically with an emphasis on program or clientele needs. This theme gives little attention to certain political drivers of network formation and use that have little to do with program needs and more to do with incentives that can operate on political leadership. Second, researchers typically ignore important political issues about what networks do, how they perform, and how they can be directed toward goal achievement. The modal study of networks and public management recognizes that program results matter for stakeholders. But those results—the dependent variables tapping performance—are treated in a rather sterile fashion, as products of a production system, without attention to distributional aspects or contest among stakeholders. Instead, such studies emphasize management, facilitation, coordination, and related themes. The politics of network performance, in several relevant respects, is virtually ignored.

We can use other literature, however, to sketch three political themes regarding network-associated impacts. One in particular admits to systematic exploration. We present this one last and probe it with some data that are particularly suited to the purpose.

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

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

An obvious instance in this regard is the response of U.S. governments to the HIV/AIDS problem in the early years of the epidemic. As has been documented in some detail (Shilts 1987), American governments—particularly

the national government—were slow to accept the policy and political responsibility for the challenges of HIV/AIDS. The topic was contentious, the solutions not obvious, and the target groups marginalized. The HIV problem challenged the standard approaches favored by public health bureaucracies at all levels of government and exposed the "wicked problem" aspects of the issue. As a consequence, for a number of years key political actors showed little interest in tackling the HIV direct-service challenge directly. Nonetheless, activists and some public health experts pressed the government for action. The upshot was a pattern of indirect government support for a network of (primarily) nonprofit, community-based organizations and related groups. The nongovernmental actors carried the work at the front lines, exposed themselves to direct local visibility and challenge, and advocated for the cause and for the partially disempowered constituencies. Meanwhile, national and most state governments were able to distance themselves from service-provision efforts and the more controversial aspects of public education. Work with gay communities and intravenous drug users was conducted at a distance, with many governments establishing plausible deniability with regard to their own responsibility for whatever actions were under way.[5] The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act, passed into law in 1990, formalized the arrangement by setting up a program of grants to support direct services to community-based HIV organizations, provided those organizations would establish and be advised and overseen by a broad set of community organizations—units with which HIV efforts are presumably interdependent (hospitals, social service organizations, homeless shelters, public health units, and so forth).

The offloading of the most controversial aspects of the problem and its most interested parties to networks of distant organizations accomplished several purposes unrelated to direct program delivery. While it could be argued that community-based organizations are effective organizational vehicles for service-related problem solving, and these organizations may have incentives to experiment because they are not tied down by formal regulations and red tape, the main benefit of working through networked patterns—from the government's standpoint—has been political. A diffuse network of actors, in which direct involvement in controversial issues and with marginalized clientele is dominated by nongovernmental units, allows political authorities and the agencies that report to them to distance themselves from contentious efforts.

This side of the network issue has been absent from systematic investigation, but it is likely involved in the design of institutional arrangements for addressing other policy issues, such as family planning services and some aspects of social welfare policy. Networks as protection, or as in-

sulation from controversial issues or marginalized target groups, is a topic deserving systematic exploration. The implicit assumption that network arrays are probably goal-oriented responses to today's policy problems may be valid in some cases, but not so in others. The choice of program design in many sectors needs to be explored carefully.

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

Networks can have another political effect that has typically been ignored in the research literature: the incorporation of additional perspectives or constraints that shift the policy emphasis during implementation. One way this result can develop is through the dynamics of coproduction.[6] The literature on networks and policy implementation frequently emphasizes the need for coproduction to tackle complex policy problems. The tenor of the coverage is that adding actors increases the policy apparatus's leverage in problem solving. Often the logic is tied explicitly to the limited reach or steering capacity of central state actors, a theme that is explicit in the European literature (Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan 1997).

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

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

One example can clarify the point. In a comparative cross-state investigation of the institutional arrangements for allocating wastewater treatment construction funds for infrastructure development, evidence indicates that states that involved private-financing actors tended to skew their financing choices toward more affluent local communities—that is, those that are better loan risks—rather than

toward those with the greatest infrastructure needs (O'Toole 1996; Wolman 1971). In states that involve corporate actors in crafting financing vehicles, the private sector contributes funding to the loan corpus and, quite predictably, prefers to put its dollars at reduced risk. The result is that the fundamental purposes of the program are compromised during implementation as the network expands to incorporate coproducers with different and partially competing goals.

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

Networks as Political Actors III: Desperately Seeking Selznick

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

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

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

The imperative of managers—whether they are working in "lonely organizations" (Hjern and Porter 1982) or through complex patterns—to generate support for what they must do is a standard feature of the public manage-

ment setting. The complication, highlighted by Selznick many years ago, is that such support comes at a price. The more public programs are designed to alter the existing order, the greater the threat of the program to those who benefit most from the status quo. A result is heightened emphasis on capturing benefits of the program during execution by those who are best positioned to shape the details of program implementation. By design, after all, networks are leaner and weaker in the face of larger institutions and significant individual actors in a policy system. This straightforward lesson deserves attention by network analysts, who—once again—treat network forms without focusing on distributional implications.

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

One way of explicating the point has to do with networks, network nodes, and the pattern of exchanges that can be so important in facilitating network action. Virtually all assessments of public management patterns recognize that networks are built around exchanges between the nodes in the network, often with managers framing and brokering the exchanges (O'Toole and Montjoy 1984). An exchange implies that node A provides something to node B and vice versa, in such a way that the overall aggregation is better off. This positive-sum view of networks and networking overlooks the fact that each node enters the network with a distinct set of goals. Only a portion of these goal sets overlap. Despite the extensive literature on cooptation, the ability of network nodes to shape the direction of public programs has not been carefully investigated. For public organizations that seek multiple goals— that is, all public organizations—the risk is that network interactions will emphasize some goals to the detriment of others. The vast literature on interest groups (Zeigler and Peak 1972; Salisbury 1984; Scholzman 1984; Golden 1998; Browne 1990) and on citizen participation (Baumgartner and Walker 1988; Verba and Nie 1972; Peterson 1988) indicates that network nodes seek greater benefits for goals that are favored by more entrenched interests and downplay efforts that favor disadvantaged clientele.

This aspect of the network politics of program management is amenable to systematic analysis. Performing such an investigation of this venerable theme to explicate the political implications of interdependent action can therefore make a contribution to the study of networks and public administration. The next section sketches a set of empirical settings that can provide a test. The objective is to look beyond overall managerial contributions to performance in network settings to explore how equitably the benefits of those efforts are distributed across parties with interests in the outcomes, as well as to elicit some hints as to what may be generating the results observed.

Shining Some Light on the Dark Side: An Empirical Test

The research question to test is whether network management has a dark side. Do networks for public-program execution operate so as to produce greater benefits for goals that are favored by more entrenched interests and downplay efforts that favor disadvantaged clientele? Do the benefits of network management accrue disproportionately to those who already have more than others? While the politics of policy holds that the "haves" are likely to get more, a distinct set of additional findings suggests that bureaucracies do not themselves reinforce these biases (note, for instance, the conclusions of studies of urban services delivery; Lineberry 1977; Mladenka 1980; Jones 1985). Work on school systems in particular shows such bureaucratic systems as relatively insulated from the tendency to distribute benefits to those who are better off (Meier, Stewart, and England 1991). Still, the earlier work did not take into account the networked character of administrative action, and therefore did not test whether networks and networking are associated with an accentuation of inequities. We do so here. Public school systems are an ideal setting to test this notion because they display a wide variety of goals and can sit within networked settings. Because schools seek goals that benefit different races and social classes differently, and because networks are more likely to be populated by actors and organizations that already possess political resources, particularly at the critical loci of such networks, our working hypothesis is that managers who expend greater effort in working the network will improve educational performance more for goals that benefit their relatively advantaged clientele than for goals that benefit their disadvantaged clientele.

Sample and Measures

Although public education is not among the most highly networked public service production and delivery sectors, this policy arena has developed into a significantly more complex and interdependent setting than many recognize. Schools in the United States are now venues for the delivery of a host of associated services or regulatory programs, from public health (vaccination programs, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases), to substance abuse, to the prevention and control of child abuse, to the achievement of nutritional objectives, to the reduction of adolescent violence, to civil rights, and to the improvement of life chances

for disabled children. The "core" educational function is surrounded by a panoply of other public objectives, and, in turn, a host of other organizations have become involved in the day-to-day functioning of school district activities. Funding and curriculum strength as well as program innovations depend partly on school district support from other important stakeholders in the business community, among community groups, in other school districts, and from elsewhere. School districts, in short, typically operate within a network of other organizations and actors that influence their students, resources, programs, goals, and reputation.

School districts in the United States are generally independent local governments with their own taxing powers;[7] all districts in the sample are organized in this way. The state of Texas, the locus of our sample, operates in a relatively decentralized system, with most authority residing with the local school districts. Each district determines its own curriculum and makes all of its own personnel decisions. Although schools and school districts are the most common public organizations in the United States, they have some distinct characteristics. School districts are highly professionalized with elaborate certification processes for various occupations. The organizations themselves tend to be highly decentralized with a great deal of discretion vested at the street level (classroom).

We collected data from more than 1,000 Texas school districts. District superintendents (the top managers) were sent a mail questionnaire on management styles, goals, and time allocations (return rate 55 percent, with 507 useable responses).[8] Pooling five years (1995–99) of data on performance and control variables produced a total of 2,535 cases for analysis. All nonsurvey data were obtained from the Texas Education Agency.

This analysis builds on our previously published model of public management (O'Toole and Meier 1999, 2003; Meier and O'Toole 2001). While the details of the model are not crucial to the current investigation, what is relevant is that the studies based on the model have sought to estimate the performance effects of management, particularly the networking efforts of public managers. We developed and explored a measure of managerial networking that has been validated in a series of empirical tests that link it to both managerial choices and the performance of public organizations. The present article takes advantage of the multiple goals of schools and the beneficiaries of these multiple goals to probe the dark side of networks: What impact does managerial networking have on educational performance? Do the most advantaged parties gain the most from such networking?

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

Managerial Networking. This measure is intended to get at the reported behavior of school district top managers as they interact with the important parties in the district's environment. Because school districts operate within a network of other organizations and actors that influence their students, resources, programs, goals, and reputation, the extent to which superintendents manage in their school district's network should be related to school district performance (Meier and O'Toole 2001, 2003).

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

Performance Indicators. Although virtually all programs have multiple goals, and thus are subject to multiple performance indicators, some objectives are defined as more important by the political environment than are others. This study incorporates 10 performance indicators to determine whether networks influence the way public management affects a variety of organizational processes.

Although each performance indicator is salient to some portion of the educational environment; the most noticeable by far is the overall student pass rate on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The TAAS is a standardized, criterion-based test that all students in grades three through eight and eleven must take. The eleventh-grade exam is a high-stakes test, and students must pass it

to receive a regular diploma from the state of Texas. TAAS scores are used to rank districts, and it is without question the most visible indicator of performance used to assess the quality of schools. Our measure is the percentage of students in a district who passed all (reading, writing, and math) sections of the TAAS.

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

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

The final two measures of performance might be termed bottom-end indicators—attendance rates and dropout rates. High attendance rates are valued for two reasons. Students are unlikely to learn if they are not in class, and state aid is allocated to school districts based on average daily attendance. Attendance, as a result, is a good indicator of low-end performance by these organizations; the measure is simply the average percentage of students who are not absent. Dropout rates, while conceded to contain a great deal of error, are also frequently used to evaluate the performance of school districts.[11] The official state measure of dropouts is the annual percentage of students who leave school from eighth grade onward.

The basic hypothesis is that networking contact will contain biases that have distributional consequences for the performance of public organizations. In this case, because we know that participation and interest-group action is positively correlated with socioeconomic status, superintendents who network are more likely to be exposed to portions of the network that seek benefits for better-off or higher-status students than those that seek benefits for disadvantaged students. We expect the networking measure, therefore, to be positively correlated with test scores for Anglo students, ACT test scores, SAT test scores, and the percentage of students who exceed the college criterion on these tests (1110 on the SAT or its ACT equivalent). We would not expect significant positive relationships for those indica-

tors that reference the performance of disadvantaged students: TAAS pass rates for black, Latino, and low-income students, attendance rates, and dropout rates. These dark-side hypotheses are supported by both the participation literature cited previously and a substantial literature in education policy (Tyack 1974; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Kozol 1991; Meier and Stewart 1991).

Control Variables. Any assessment of public program performance must control for both task difficulty and program resources. For school districts, neither of these elements is under the substantial control of the districts themselves, and therefore they can be considered key parts of the vector of environmental forces. Fortunately, a well-developed literature on educational production functions can be used for guidance (Hanushek 1996; Hedges and Greenwald 1996). Eight variables, all commonly used, are included in our analysis—three measures of task difficulty and five measures of resources.

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

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

Results

Estimations were developed using multiple regression analysis for each of the 10 performance indicators. The

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

Table 1 displays the results for overall TAAS pass-rate performance. Results for all variables aside from the dummies for the years are shown. The adjusted R^2 is approximately 0.59, indicating a reasonable amount of explained variance. Relationships are all in the expected directions and significant. Of particular interest is the impact of managerial networking, which shows a positive relationship to TAAS scores. The maximum effect size for this variable is more than four points on districts' overall pass rate. This figure may seem relatively modest, but such an impact—particularly from the top position in the system, one far removed from the core of the educational process—can be seen as substantial, and the impact of management can show impressive results over time.

Table 1 Impact of Managerial Networking on Organizational Performance

Dependent variable = Student exam pass rates

Independent variables	Slope	t	p
Managerial networking	.7035	(4.60)	.0001
Control variables			
Teacher's salaries (000s)	.4665	(4.31)	.0001
Class size	-.3117	(4.72)	.0001
Teacher experience	.1943	(1.90)	.0575
Noncertified teachers	-.1873	(5.30)	.0001
Percent state aid	-.0173	(2.09)	.0366
Percent black students	-.2167	(13.49)	.0001
Percent Latino students	-.1091	(10.39)	.0001
Low income students	-.1670	(11.16)	.0001

R^2 .59
Standard error 7.62
F 276.07
N of Cases 2,534
Dummy variables for individual years not reported.

For the most salient performance indicator, therefore, managerial networking contributes to positive results. This result fits with the expectations developed from the research tradition of Selznick and others. How does networking effort play out across the range of performance measures? We ran nine additional regression analyses to determine the answer; the results for those targeting performance for the relatively disadvantaged parts of the educational constituency appear in table 2, while those measures of interest to more powerful parts of the public school networked environment are reported in table 3. Both tables provide summary reports: They include the results for managerial networking but omit the portions of the estimations pertaining to the controls.[13]

Table 2 summarizes five direct tests of the dark-side hypothesis by showing the impact of managerial networking on the five performance indicators that matter most to

Table 2 Impact of Network Interaction on Disadvantaged-Student Indicators

Performance measure	Network slope	t	R^2	N
Latino pass rate	.4081	1.56	.36	2,310
Black pass rate	.2437	.64	.37	1,568
Low income pass rate	.1168	.61	.51	2,518
Dropout rate	-.0424	2.04*	.16	2,514
Class attendance	-.0028	.18	.24	2,534

All equations control for teacher's salaries, percentage of state aid, class size, teacher experience, percentage of teachers not certified, percentage of black, Latino, and low-income students, and yearly dummy variables.
*significant $p < .05$, two-tailed test.

Table 3 Impact of Network Interaction on Advantaged-Student Indicators

Performance measure	Network slope	t	R^2	N
White pass rate	.8097	5.31*	.42	2,506
Average ACT score	.0670	2.50*	.38	2,220
Average SAT score	5.0762	3.49*	.50	1,836
Percentage above criterion	.5512	2.80*	.30	2,416

All equations control for teacher's salaries, percentage of state aid, class size, teacher experience, percentage of teachers not certified, percentage of black, Latino, and low-income students, and yearly dummy variables.
*significant $p < .05$, two-tailed test.

minority constituents, the poor, and low performers. The pattern is striking. For Latino students, black students, and low-income students,[14] managerial networking does not add to performance with any statistically significant impact. The same can be said for attendance. All of these performance measures are of more interest to marginalized constituencies of the school-system network. Only for dropout rates does managerial networking seem to matter. This anomaly, however, may result from the poor quality of the dropout data, the least reliable of those analyzed in this study.

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

The overall results are clear: The estimations retrieve Selznick's insight with detailed findings. Those parts of a networked constituency that are influential and care about the performance results have managerial networking assisting what they do; those parts dealing with more marginal or less salient issues are less—or not at all—influenced by managerial networking. Selznick's argument is

strongly supported by the findings. Here, as well as for the results to be discussed next, the findings represent a distinct impact from networking, not simply distributional inequities generated in school districts. In other words, the results indicate a set of systematic relationships between networking and distributional effects. Networking actions generate greater inequalities than the school system would have without network activity.

Further insight as to what is occurring in these settings can be gained by taking a more thorough look inside the managerial networking activity reported by district superintendents. To do so, we replace the overall networking factor scores with the reported degree of networking with each node. We enter each node or networking partner into separate regression analyses that are otherwise specified identically to those performed for the overall networking measure. We explore the impact of interaction with each node on each of the 10 performance measures already reported. These additional analyses amount to 50 estimations—10 each for each of the nodes (school board members, local business leaders, and so forth). The results of these analyses are reported in tables 4 and 5. The tables omit the findings for the controls in favor of reporting only on the impact of each of the networking contacts of the school district top managers. Table 4 summarizes findings for the all-pass rate (the most highly salient performance measure) and the advantaged student indicators, while table 5 provides a parallel set of results for the disadvantaged-student indicators.

Although we do not have measures of the goals of each of the nodes, in a few cases clear expectations can be inferred. Local business leaders are likely to push for improvements on the elite end of the educational spectrum because their own children are likely to be relatively advantaged in the education system. The Texas Education Agency is most associated with its exam, the TAAS, and it sets standards for students by race and ethnicity. Other superintendents are likely to reflect professional interests, and professional educators in the United States are likely to push education benefits or have ideas for new programs that affect both the haves and have-nots. The exact preferences of the political actors—that is, school boards and state legislators—depends on the composition of their constituencies; systematic data on the "electoral" constituencies, that is, who voted for the office holder, are not available.

The analyses provide some hints as to what may be going on as top managers of the school districts interact with their environments. While not definitive, the results sug-

Table 4 Impact of Individual Network Nodes on Advantaged-Student Indicators

| | | Performance measures | | | |
| | | Anglo | | | 1110 |
Interactions with	TAAS	tests	ACT	SAT	criterion
School board members	-.589	-.572	-.011	-.87	-.200
	(3.39)*	(3.33)*	(0.37)	(0.52	(0.89)
Local business leaders	.268	.450	.104	8.18	1.093
	(1.72)**	(2.92)*	(3.71)*	(5.48)*	(5.49)*
Other superintendents	1.011	.974	-.013	1.20	.037
	(5.77)*	(5.62)*	(0.42)	(0.71)	(0.16)
State legislators	1.504	1.170	.056	6.33	.398
	(4.21)*	(4.73)*	(1.29)	(2.70)*	(1.24)
Texas Education Agency	.631	.569	.061	-1.97	-.256
	(3.15)*	(2.88)*	(1.72)**	(1.05)	(0.98)

All equations control for teacher's salaries, percentage of state aid, class size, teacher experience, percentage of teachers not certified, percentage of black, Latino, and low-income students, and yearly dummy variables.
*significant p < .05, two-tailed test.
**significant p < .10, two-tailed test.

Table 5 Impact of Individual Network Nodes on Disadvantaged-Student Indicators

| | | Performance measures | | | |
| | | TAAS tests for | | | |
Interactions with	Blacks	Latinos	Poor	Attend	Dropout
School board members	-.184	.059	-.746	-.117	.049
	(0.44)	(0.20)	(3.43)*	(6.97)*	(2.15)*
Local business leaders	-.768	-.500	-.535	-.025	-.016
	(1.95)**	(1.91)**	(2.75)*	(1.66)**	(0.80)
Other superintendents	1.180	.850	.837	.078	-.057
	(2.82)*	(2.91)*	(3.80)*	(4.51)*	(2.49)*
State legislators	.975	.419	.307	-.009	-.060
	(1.59)	(1.01)	(0.98)	(0.38)	(1.81)**
Texas Education Agency	.556	1.040	.733	.038	-.027
	(1.14)	(3.11)*	(2.94)*	(1.93)**	(1.03)

All equations control for teacher's salaries, percentage of state aid, class size, teacher experience, percentage of teachers not certified, percentage of black, Latino, and low-income students, and yearly dummy variables.
*significant p < .05, two-tailed test.
**significant p < .10, two-tailed test.

gest possible causal links, and thereby plausible production processes. For business leaders the pattern is especially clear: Such contacts help on every measure of advantaged-student performance tested and hurt on four out of five measures of disadvantaged-student performance.[15] In this case, cooptation is a likely explanation. More contact with business leaders probably exposes top school district managers to the complaints, concerns, and preoccupations of the local business elite, from whom some support (for instance, for the district's revenue-raising agenda) may be crucial. To the extent that superintendents use their discretion to direct or redirect attention to these matters, some sacrifice to the more marginalized clientele may follow.

Superintendents' interactions with their counterparts in other districts contributes to performance on seven of the 10 measures, including all five measures tapping disadvantaged students' results. What is likely happening here is information sharing and professional assistance to col-

leagues, suggesting that collegial professional interaction can be a route for the diffusion of innovations and relatively equitable performance boosts across organizations and governments. Interaction with the Texas Education Agency is also helpful to several measures of performance, three each for the advantaged and disadvantaged groups.[16] Most of these have to do with performance on the TAAS, a subject of obvious concern at the state level. This pattern is consistent with what one might expect from interaction with a regulatory agency—which is, in effect, how the Texas Education Agency operates.

The more intriguing results are those for the other two external links for the superintendents. Contacts with school board members do not help performance, and for half of the measures more networking with school board members impedes performance. The negative effects are spread across both advantaged and disadvantaged students. Whatever is going on in these contacts, the results do not seem to be aspects of cooptation in the usual sense. For instance, TAAS results for both Anglo and poor students are negatively associated with more contact with the school board. Somewhat surprisingly, contacts with state legislators show some effect; these are all positive with regard to performance, and three of the four significant impacts show up on measures tapping advantaged-student or generally salient measures.[17]

These findings do not fully demonstrate what is happening as managers engage in networking activity with an array of external parties. They show, however, that the benefits of this activity are unevenly distributed and that the consequences may be traced to contacts with particular actors. Networking with the external world can offer perils as well as prospects, and understanding the political and distributional dimensions of such settings can help to explain what is likely to be produced through networked public action.

Implications

Network researchers have appropriately emphasized the complex and interdependent nature of many of today's public programs, and they point to the challenges faced by public managers who are responsible for "making a mesh of things," in Appleby's well-known phrase (1949). In implicitly (or otherwise) suggesting the issues are coordination and management alone, however, much of the recent exploration of networks and policy implementation ignores potentially crucial political dimensions of network creation, coproduction, and cooptation. This article indicates these omissions are important, and systematic research on the political aspects of networks and their performance impacts is needed.

The last portion of the analysis in particular makes a strong case that networks and their management are not likely to produce leveraged performance without distributional implications. In a sense, these results validate a venerable theme. As Philip Selznick argued decades ago, administrative units situated in interdependent political environments must find ways to build support—particularly among those elements of their setting that have the clout and resources to matter to the agency's future prospects. This political dynamic does not disappear when agencies operate in networked contexts; it is likely exacerbated. As we have indicated, however, the point has *not* been a prominent part of the recent and extensive research treatment of networks and public management. In this article, it is not only sketched, it is supported with systematic evidence covering hundreds of organizations—and managers—over a several-year period. Treating network management as a cognitive or technical challenge misses the mark, for it obscures the likely tilting of the policy table toward well-established and influential interests. Managerial networking does not eliminate this bias—if anything, it can accentuate it.

In school districts in Texas, at a minimum, managerial networking boosts educational performance, but the most improvements accrue to the more privileged portions of the constituency, not to the marginalized ones. Network activity and management matter, but these elements are not ways of overcoming inequities in service delivery. Exposing managers to the pressures of their surroundings, particularly to influential actors with a distributionally related agenda, appears to push them to respond to the most influential portions of the network. But networking in other directions or with other types of actors may produce benefits—or even costs—without catalyzing further inequities. Positive, mixed, negative, and zero-sum games are all plausible. The details matter. Managerial networking is not a substitute for politics, nor is it a more sanitized—and thereby acceptable—form of political activity. It produces the kinds of patterns and dilemmas that social scientists have been documenting for years.

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

The findings in this article reintroduce distribution and

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

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Two bases aside from authority are common interest (social actors connected because each shares an interest in the collective endeavor) and exchange (side payments among social actors to maintain networked participation in the collective endeavor).

2. The tendency of social-network analysis to attribute causality to fairly detailed structural attributes of networks reinforces this tendency. For an early critical analysis of the power-based meaning of network arrangements, see Benson and Weitzel (1985).

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

4. Thanks go to H. Brinton Milward, who helped to clarify this issue in conversation.

5. Some governments, especially in large cities in the hardest hit areas of the country, did choose to undertake direct education and services to combat HIV. New York and San Francisco are obvious examples here.

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

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

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

9. The various pass rates do not correlate as highly as one might imagine. The intercorrelations between the Anglo, black, and Latino pass rates are all in the neighborhood of 0.6, thus suggesting the overlap is only a bit more than one-third.

10. The relationship between the percentage of students taking the tests and the test scores in Texas is actually positive, but it explains under 2 percent of the variance.

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

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

13. Nonetheless, the same controls listed in table 1 were included in all nine other regression analyses.

14. The performance measure is the TAAS pass rate for these subgroups.

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

16. If one restricts the criterion to only those performance indicators for which the impact is significant at $p < .05$, the Texas Education Agency shows results on four of the ten, all four related to the TAAS.

17. The fourth impact is on dropouts.

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