

# **Performance Regimes: A Critique and Agenda for Future Research**

**Pre-conference session, PMRC 2016, 22 June, Aarhus University**

## **Sessions organizers:**

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## **Purpose of Meeting**

The last two decades has seen a growing reliance on performance measures in the governance of public organizations. The scope of these changes are wide, and scholars of public organizations have offered new terminologies, including “performance regimes”, which refer “not just to the practices of measuring and managing performance indicators but also to capture the embedded nature of these practices in almost all aspects of contemporary governance” (Moynihan et al., 2011, p. 141). Furthermore, the burgeoning literature on performance management has identified different practices of using performance information for learning, control, and legitimization, and these practices have also been linked to not only the broader governance of organizations but also to various desired and undesired behaviors and outcomes.

*This workshop sought to bring state-of-the-art scientific research together with knowledge and insights from practitioners with the purpose of forming a future research agenda.*

*Format:* To reach this aim, we brought together researchers and practitioners who provided different views on the topic. The day began with a panel discussion by two researchers on strengths and pitfalls of public management. Next, various researchers presented their position on key issues in performance management. After lunch, two practitioners with substantial experience in performance management presented their perspective on what research should focus on. Next, three researchers presented exemplary papers that each provided a fresh perspective on performance management. Finally, the day concluded with a discussion about key takeaway points for future performance management scholarship, described below.

## Summary: A new agenda for public sector performance management research

**Neither wonder drug nor Black Death.** Performance management is often described in stark extremes, with proponents presenting it as the ultimate cure to governance problems and critics labeling it as a nightmare. Both approaches are overly simplistic, blinding researchers to important contingencies. Research needs to look into the preconditions of performance management and consider contextual factors such as task complexity and how the nature of performance systems differs. This implies a more nuanced approach to performance management reforms.

**Balance cognition and design questions.** As a field of research, performance management has improved dramatically in the last 15 years. The current research focus on biases in performance information processing is welcome and is providing remarkable new knowledge. At the same time, there is a risk of losing a design focus that aims at understanding the impact of the organizational and regime factors on performance systems. The next 15 years should both balance attention between research and design questions and seek to integrate the two.

**Links to other disciplines.** Our topic is defined by its focus on the public sector context. We should, however, continue to borrow from psychology, sociology, human resource management, and elsewhere. Broader disciplines deliver important knowledge on, for instance, the interplay between context, information processing and motivation. In particular, other disciplines could contribute to the question of how and when performance information is used.

**Shared language.** We need a shared language for key concepts such as context, performance, accountability, incentives, and learning. This will increase cross-fertilization between research projects, make the discipline more cumulative, and allow for meta-analyses of the key questions of the disciplines.

**Specific, yet nuanced theorization.** Our discipline is ripe with ambiguities and contradictions related to key concepts such as context, complexity, learning, incentives, accountability, performance, leadership, and motivation. We need more specific theory about such key concepts but also more nuanced theory about how they relate to each other and under which circumstances they produce positive or negative outcomes. For instance, how does external accountability potentially further or hamper learning and motivation?

**Linking levels and designing models.** Performance management research relates to the individual, organizational, and regime levels. Research should specify at which level they are focused (while being aware of other levels). The accumulation of knowledge implies linking these levels. A key question is which elements of performance systems and their contexts are more or less designable, that is, malleable to short-term change and easy to adopt. For example, the presentation of data, or the adoption of new organizational routines such as learning forums, are relatively designable. On the other hand, political support and organizational culture are assumed to be more difficult to alter.

**Linking to practice.** Performance management is an applied field. Without policymakers adopting performance practices, there is no strong justification for devoting scholarly attention to it.

Researchers must engage with practitioners to inform research and contribute to society. This requires a better mutual understanding of needs and practices between practitioners and researchers as well as a stronger research focus on the relevance of research for practitioners. The ideal model is for practitioners and researchers to work together to design changes before they are implemented. One question of paramount importance for practitioners is how to apply performance management to transboundary goals encompassing multiple organizations.

# Program of the Workshop

## 09.00 Introduction

- Per Læg Reid, Professor, Bergen University, Norway, "Identifying key problems"
- Donald Moynihan, Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, "State of the art in performance management research"

## 10.10 Coffee break

## 10.30 How should we study performance management?

- Asmus Leth Olsen, Assistant Professor, Copenhagen University, "Studying the cognitive processes and biases of performance information use"
- Wouter Van Dooren, Associate Professor, University of Antwerp, "Design, reform, and innovation"
- Nina van Loon, Assistant Professor, Aarhus University, "Performance regimes"

## 12.15 Lunch (in the cafeteria of social sciences)

## 13.00 A practitioner's/real-world perspective: what is missing from scholarship?

- Kate Josephs, Executive Director, Performance Improvement Council, US Federal Government
- Marie Munk, Vice Director, Agency for Modernization, Ministry of Finance, Denmark

## 14.00 New insights from the performance management research

- Jiaqi Liang, Assistant Professor, New Mexico State University, "Incentives and performance management: Environmental regulation"

## 14.30 Coffee break

## 14.50 New Insights from the performance management research (continued)

- Poul Aaes Nielsen, Assistant Professor, University of Southern Denmark, "Performance management and public service performance"
- Ed Gerrish, Assistant Professor, University of South Dakota, "Do performance reforms make a difference: Evidence from meta-analyses"

## 15.40 Summary: A new agenda for public sector performance management

## 16.30 End

## Participants

Julian	Christensen
Wouter	Vandenabeele
Jakob	Holm
Richard	Callahan
Petra	van den Bekerom
Maria	Francesca Sicilia
Ellen	Rubin
Machiel	van der Heijden
Rodney	Scott
Niels	Opstrup
Ed	Gerrish
Poul	Aes Nielsen
Jiaqi	Liang
Kate	Josephs
Wouter	Van Dooren
Asmus	Leth Olsen
Per	Laegreid
Donald	Moynihan
Nina	van Loon
Martin	Baekgaard
Mads	Leth Jakobsen
Urszula	Zawadska-Pak
William	Maguire
Eva	Knies
Peter	Leisink
Jodi	Sandfort
Veronica	Junjan
Niels	Bjoern Grund Petersen
Martin	Bilberg
Morten	Bonde Klausen
Kristian	Larsen
Vibe Bolvig	Hyldegaard
Line Stjernholm	Tipsmark