

Rekindling the Art, Craft, and Science of Policy Network Studies in Canada

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INTRODUCTION

The study of the way in which multiple, independent organizations – both in government and beyond it – work together to meet common objectives has roots in political science, public policy, and public administration. A majority of scholars refer to these interorganizational arrangements – particularly as they form around public policy issues – as policy networks, although the terms horizontal government, collaboration, network governance also apply. There are multiple methods, units of analyses, and theoretical and analytical frameworks. Subjects that have been largely gone overlooked within the study of networks (their democratic-ness, mechanisms for control) have recently garnered attention (see Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Skelcher et al. 2005; Mathur and Skelcher 2007; Klijn and Skelcher 2007; Greenaway 2007; Sørensen and Torfing 2007; Milward et al 2006). Other areas that were considered ‘new’, such as meta-governance and policy network management, are now well-established sub-fields, featuring their own annual conferences and societies (i.e. the Roskilde University Centre for Democratic Network Governance).

The plethora of work in this area has proven to be both a challenge and an opportunity. While these numerous sub-fields have certainly improved not only our understanding of what networks are, and more importantly, of their use as an analytical concept (and method, even!) to us is (there was a time when the entire concept of a policy network was at risk of being thrown out the window), it is often difficult to navigate through these multiple literatures, some of which have little connection to each other and to scholars working in similar areas but in different political contexts and jurisdictions. Canadian scholars have made a modest contribution to this literature, reminding network-oriented peers in the 1990s of the importance of meso-level analyses, which appropriately took place along sectoral lines (Coleman and Skogstad 1990). They also clarified key factors in network structure, conceptualizing networks along the lines of the capacity and autonomy of the state vis-à-vis that of society. This work allowed researchers across North America and Europe to see their work as intertwined, as the Canadian typologies – in the Canadian tradition – consolidated and incorporated sensitivity to different political contexts into their analyses (Coleman and Skogstad 1990, Howlett and Ramesh 1995, Lindquist 1992, Atkinson and Coleman 1992).

Of course, the field of policy networks has grown considerably since that time, and scholars have set aside interest in descriptions of network structures for more output-oriented analyses. These output-oriented analyses are concerned with how networks are governed and at times, controlled, how networks constrain and expand participation and legitimacy, and how they evolve and change over time and the impact for public policy. With these new research agendas, it is not entirely clear what the Canadian contribution is or will be. Certainly, network governance has been a principle occupation of scholars in Britain (i.e. Walker, Marsh and Rhodes 2007, Richardson 2000) and Continental Europe (i.e. Provan and Kenis 2007; Milward and Provan 2003; Milward, Kenis, and Raab 2006; Klijn and Skelcher 2007; Klijn and Koppenjan 2000; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004); American scholars writing in the public administration tradition have made recent and important contributions to the literature on

collaborative government as well (i.e. Agranoff and McGuire 2003, McGuire 2006; Keast, Mandell, and Brown 2006; O'Toole and Meier 2004; Hicklin, O'Toole and Meier 2007; Salamon 2002).

However, since late 1990s, it is not clear what Canadian scholars have contributed, comprehensively, to this most recent literature. Two quick search queries for 'policy networks' and 'collaboration' within the Canadian Journal of Political Science and Canadian Public Administration returns few recent (i.e. past five years) publications that expand our knowledge of network governance. Within the Canadian Journal of Political Science, there are some noteworthy additions: a 2007 article (Michael Howlett, "Analzing Multi-Actor, Multi-Round Public Policy Decision Making Processes), followed by a 2004 article (Kathleen McNutt, "Do Virtual Policy Networks Matter?"), the latter of which seeks to build on a 2002 article by Michael Howlett, which answers affirmatively the question in its title, "Do Networks Matter?". While this article made a contribution to a debate at the time about the usefulness of the concept of a policy networks (see Dowding 1995), a quick overview of recent studies in continental Europe tell us that we are far beyond answering this question. Aside from the above works, the study of policy networks has not featured prominently in this leading Canadian journal for political science.

Results in Canadian Public Administration are not any better. The most recent article on 'collaboration' was published in 2000 (Mark Sproule-Jones, "Horizontal Management: Implementing Programs Across Interdependent Organizations"), and on 'policy networks', was published in 2001 (Michael Howlett, "Managing the Hollow State: Procedural Policy Instruments and Modern Governance"). That three of the five policy-network oriented articles that this search pulled up in the last seven years were written by the same author does not bode well for the cultivation of a unique Canadian contribution to the sub-field.

Fortunately, there are many opportunities for Canadian scholars, particularly new ones to contribute to this field. The existing literature is neither comprehensive, nor well integrated (Provan and Kenis 2007; Rhodes 2006; Borzel 1998). Since Canadians have, in the past, been adept at bringing others together to the table, linking Pluralists and Corporatists together in a model of state-society relations, it is possible for them to make such a contribution yet again. Indeed, there are new divides needing bridges.

The purpose of this paper is to review the existing work, to clarify what we know and do not know about policy networks, and outline four new agendas for scholars – perhaps Canadian scholars – to pursue, to both consolidate advancements across the policy-oriented disciplines and carve out new areas that tie in more closely with work that has occurred beyond the scope of policy networks. This includes meta-level concepts of democracy and governance, as well as micro-level theories of actor behaviour.

THE ART, CRAFT, AND SCIENCE OF POLICY NETWORKS

The concept of a policy network has been around since the 1960s, although normative assumptions about the concept's utility, both in what a policy network is and what it does, has

changed significantly over their period. Originally, the concept of a policy network came into being in the United States where suspicions were brewing that the supposed openness of the policy process theorized by Pluralists, did not actually exist (Howlett and Ramesh, 1995). In contrast to Pluralists, critics contended to have found in Washington, close and tightly insulated relations between politicians, powerful industry groups, and regulatory agencies of government (Lowi 1969). This amounted to the usurpation of democracy by powerful state and society actors.

From the 1970s to the late 1990s, scholars have gone back and forth in defining the archetype of a policy network: from diffuse, decentralized, and largely open policy arena featuring all representatives of state and society back to a more closely controlled and exclusionary pact between politicians, bureaucrats and private groups featuring a high level of organization, a desire to work amicably with government, and the articulation of interests closely aligned with the policy objectives of government (Hecl 1978; Ripley and Franklin 1981; Richardson and Jordan 1979; Jordan 1981; Jordan and Schubert 1992; Van Waarden 1992). Literature at this time focused mainly on descriptions of state-society relations as open or closed, and therefore, sought to address at the macro-level, the democratic implications of network-based forms of governance. Marsh and Rhodes (1992) defined policy networks as a meso-level concept which linked micro-level concerns (policy actors, their interests, and activities, particularly governments) with macro-level concepts, such as the distribution of power in society. The description of policy networks came full circle with the identification of a continuum of state-society relations, of which the closeness between actors, and the type of actors that enjoy influence, have been theorized as the most important factors. From continuums, scholars developed more complex typologies that identified the size of the network, integration between members, and resources of members, as determinant of network structure. Models of the larger policy process, in which policy networks are embedded, have also been developed, the driving forces being learning on the part of network members (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993), serendipity, timing, and entrepreneurialism (Kingdon 1995), and the expansion of conflict beyond the network through alternative venues of power (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). The unique contribution of Canadians to this literature has been the theorization of state capacity and autonomy vis-à-vis non-state actors in any given sector, and the impact of this structure for the nature of relations and the likely policy outputs (Atkinson and Coleman 1989, 1992; Coleman and Skogstad 1990, Howlett and Ramesh 1995). As Rhodes (2006: 428) has noted however, “this lepidopteran approach to policy networks – collecting and classifying the several species – has become deeply uninteresting”.

That descriptions of policy networks in structural terms have limited value to policy-oriented scholars, has been raised by many others (Dowding 1995; Borzel 1998; Peters 1998; Van Buuren and Erik-Hans 2006). The most prominent contention has been that policy networks offer very little in the way of explanatory insight. Categorizing motor vehicles by their colour, engine size, and occupancy tells us very little about what they do, how and why these factors are important, and in turn, what impact these differences might have for their outputs. The point is that if policy networks stand to be an important theoretical concept and empirical reality, we

must direct our attention to understanding their implications at the same time as we seek to understand their various compositions and operations. Simply put, policy networks must be explored both as an independent and dependant variable (Peters 1998).

Of course, attention to policy networks as an independent variable has been on the rise, but not without disagreement. One debate in policy network studies has surrounded the appropriate unit of analyses. Keith Dowding (1995) has argued that if networks are to advance our analytical understanding of state-society relations, then it is features of actors within networks, not features of the network as a whole nor features of the relationship between actors, that require our attention. For those like Dowding that adhere to a 'thin' rational choice and methodological behaviouralism, policy networks have made a limited contribution to understanding the policy process or public policy because they have remained at the meso-level of analysis, rather than the micro-level {{7 Blom-Hansen, Jens 1997/psee also }}. Others however, have not held to such a rigid conception of the utility of the policy network approach, and insist on its usefulness as a meso-level concept (Daugbjerg 1997, Peters 1992). This is because policy actors do not only and do not always act rationally, and structural factors can be just as important to understanding the policy process. As Daugbjerg has demonstrated, tight, closed, and well-integrated policy networks are worth distinguishing from their less restricted, larger, and more open counterparts, because the latter in turn are likely to produce much different policy outputs, and these policy outputs cannot be explained by individual interests alone. What Daugbjerg finds, and argues, is that networks with few members enjoy a structural power that does not exist in networks with many members. This structural power results from a greater credibility and trust members have in collective action, which in turn leads to more coordinated action. Howlett's (2002) work too, suggests that the meso-level is the appropriate unit of analysis for examining policy networks; in his study of four Canadian policy sectors, Howlett found that different configurations of network (its openness to new actors and new ideas), in turn were associated with different policy outcomes. Paradigmatic policy changes were found in sectors in which new actors and ideas could be inserted into the policy network.

Recently, scholars have begun to focus more directly on networks as an independent variable, moving the study back towards that which is was originally intended to illuminate: its implications for democracy and policy effectiveness. Simply put, are policy networks good for governance? The approach here has however, been amended from that of the past, which deemed closed networks as undemocratic and open ones as democratic. In fact, interest in broad structural characteristics of networks – notably, its openness to new actors and ideas – has been replaced by interest in organizations and in the operation of networks. In terms of operation, attention has turned to the importance of network managers and network mediators, the presence of mechanisms for control, the intensity of organizational interdependency by way of shared finances and personnel, and distinct types of inter-organizational activities, such as collaboration, coordination, and cooperation (Provan and Kenis 2007; Sowa 2008). Meier and O'Toole (2007) have taken the interesting perspective of examining networks from the perspective of a single organization, which must allocate its time and resources between organizational and inter-organizational work. They find that participation in networks has a positive (although

diminishing) impact on an organization's outputs, so that from a quantitative perspective, networks are considered good. They increase policy effectiveness. They allow organizations to get more done than they would get done alone.

A problem with this approach, common in public administration (see Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan 1997) however is that it tends to treat networks as if they are unwavering in their structure, or, if not, that their structure does not matter for policy outputs independent of how network managers *choose to* structure them. Structure then, becomes merely a product of network management. Provan and Kenis (2007) propose to consolidate interest in networks as an independent variable with scholars' previous interest in network structure. Provan and Kenis (2007: 229) use the term, 'network functioning' to denote the "the process by which certain network conditions lead to certain network-level outcomes" and are particularly concerned with how different network structures are adopted and what this adoption means for public policy. They identify three main network structures according to what type of organization leads the network (no lead organization, a lead organization that is a participant of the network, and a lead organization that is not a participant of the network but rather, an administrative body created specifically for this task of leading). Networks will be successful in achieving their self-identified goals to the extent that the type of network structure adopted (by network managers) best fits realities of the network environment: existing levels of trust between network members, number of participants, degree of goal consensus, and nature of network tasks.

LINKING POLICY NETWORKS TO COLLABORATION-BASED GOVERNMENT

The study of policy networks has gradually moved from broad understandings of state-society relations, to an increasing recognition of the need to disaggregate these interactions into sectoral studies, and most recently, giving due attention to the discrete activities of policy networks and actors within them. This is not simply a harkening back to rational-choice based analysis; on the contrary, interest in the discrete activities of policy networks stems from both scholars' mutual concern for agents and structure. In particular, how does structure impact what actors actually do within networks? Provan and Kenis (2007) make an important contribution in this regard, by linking different mechanisms for network steering to network effectiveness. The behavioural variable, however – the content of interorganizational work – continues to go under-examined. Studies of within public administration have something important to contribute here because they transform the notion of a network into an action, an activity, and thus necessitate attention to the behavioural content of networks (Agranoff and Mcguire 2003; Meier and O'toole 2001; Keast, Mandell, and Brown 2006). This literature does not put the emphasis on networks (if it mentions networks at all), but rather, on *networking*. If new interorganizational forms (networks) exist, then it follows that some activity or activities must take place within them. Although the term 'networking' has been used in this literature to refer to activities in networks, *collaboration* has been more often cited. Collaboration tends to denote the activities of policy networks that exist at the service delivery level. Policy networks are differentiated by the extent

to and intensity by which members collaborate with one another (Sowa 2008). What is shared and how much is shared, matters.

Studies of collaboration present interesting opportunities for political scientists, whose interest lies in understanding the policy process through policy networks. For one, the notion of collaboration allows us to delve more deeply into what exactly is a policy network. While networks are often defined by political scientists in structural terms (i.e. “two or more independent organizations with some common objective that come together to achieve common mandates...”), it is, arguably, what is done within that structure that matters as much, if not more than the structure itself. If a policy network can indeed be defined as organizations that come together to deliver on common mandates, it begs the question, come together ... *and then what? Interact? Interact, how?* While this may seem to be an obvious question, it is one that has been overlooked in the last few decades of policy network studies. What do organizations actually do within policy networks? From a descriptive perspective, the question has been answered. They bargain; they broker; they collaborate and so on. But such descriptive analyses are weak, because they do not paint an adequate picture of why, when, and how. Understanding who bargains, how they bargain, and when do they do it means observing the actual practices of different organizations in different networks. Why they bargain requires an additional analysis of their motivations, and perceived opportunities, tensions, constraints, and decision paths. It means understanding not only what bargaining means to a particular actor, but what other activities mean to them as well. The interaction between the structure of the network and the activities within them are important here too.

With this in mind – the need to marry noun with verb, networks with networking – this paper will outline three aspects of a network-oriented research agendas for political scientists to contribute to. In particular, political scientists could carve out a better understanding of interaction and strategies for interaction in network-settings, the role of government actors, and the implications of interaction and in particular, government interaction for democratic governance.

NEW AGENDAS FOR NETWORK-ORIENTED SCHOLARS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Understanding Behaviour in Policy Networks

A corollary of networking behaviour existing is the prospect for organizations to have different strategies for interaction. Unfortunately, recent literature seems to treat networking as a singular activity. In particular, ‘networking’ is management of the environment external to the organization (see Meier and O’Toole 2007, also Hicklin, O’Toole, and Meier 2007). But, how one ‘networks’, should matter, especially, if this involves different activities and types of interactions. Fernandez and Gould’s work suggests that networking is heterogeneous, and specify six different structures for brokerage. A limitation of Fernandez and Gould’s conception of brokerage is that it does not differentiate the interests, nor the sources of power that come from the positions held by members of a network so that it is not clear what brokers actually do in these positions, including, if they broker at all.

A reoccurring theme in the study of policy networks is the categorization of networks according to structure, which Fernandez and Gould continue with this framework. Taking a step back from Fernandez and Gould's framework, it is possible to buttress this formation with a behavioural account. In particular, we can identify 'brokerage' as one type of strategy of interaction within an interorganizational context. That is to say, brokerage (mediation) can be contrasted with other roles played by those individuals in the very organizations being 'brokered'. Simply put, if not everyone plays broker in networks, other activities must exist (Kingdon 1995). Some actors might abstain from the network, especially if the network is a waste of their time and they'd rather do things on their own (Marsh and Olsen 1986; Hicklin, O'Toole, and Meier 2007). Others – especially if they perceive that they are perceived by others to be useful to the network – might abstain as a means of leverage, waiting for compliance or resources to attract them into a more active strategy. Then there are those that do participate, but are only interested in making things happen to the extent that things happen *their way*: having formed a particular interest or goal they would like to see realized, they go about trying to get others to align with them. Finally there are those that are actively involved in the network, but who neither conform to a solely participatory, nor solely brokerage position. These types of individuals have been identified by scholars as key members of networks, and in particular, to the effective realization of network-level goals (Kingdon 1995; Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan 1997; Provan and Kenis 2007), these individuals are part participant and part broker. They exist within the network at the same time as they lead it.

Managing a network however, can be extremely difficult work because of the inherent tensions between being a participant and being a broker. Fernandez and Gould (1994) found that government representatives positioned to be brokers within a network (meaning that they enjoy communication links with at least two separate actors that do not enjoy communication links with each other) that abstained from advocating particular policies enjoyed far greater influence as reported by all other participating actors than government representatives that pursued policy preferences. As such, Fernandez and Gould (1994: 1481) concluded that “the power of the state derives *in part* from a structural position that mediates the flow of information in the policy-making process, but that this form of power vanishes if government actors publicly endorse specific policy initiatives”.

This idea of structural and ideational power is not a new one. Daugbjerg (1997) has also argued that influence in interorganizational settings where organizations lack the ability to command others that are not directly under their hierarchical control can stem from solidarity and high levels of trust that well-integrated groups have for one another (structural power) and lacking that, from the material resources they have at their disposal for the purpose of lobbying, bullying, and persuasion (ideational power). Network mediators are rich in structural power, but weak in ideational power; network participants are weak in structural power but rich in ideational power, and network managers have intermediate endowments in ideational and structural power. The propositions we put forth, are as follows then:

- i. *Confronted with the existence of a policy network, an organization may opt to join the network, or abstain from the network.*

- ii. *Organizations that opt to join a network will occupy one of three positions within it: network mediator, network participant, or network manager*
- iii. *A network mediator is one who enjoys influence over network processes but maintains no interest in its outcomes*
- iv. *A network participant is one who enjoys an interest in network outcomes but has little influence over its processes*
- v. *A network manager is one who enjoys partial influence over network processes and partial interest in its resulting policy outcomes.*
- vi. *There is a trade-off between network participation and network mediation such that the point in which an actor acquires some faculty in both activities is the position of network manager.*

Future studies should investigate the existence of these four network roles, as well as the trade-off between network participation and network mediation. Does it actually exist? If so, how do actors manage the tension?

Understanding the Role of Government

Identifying the network strategies of abstainer, participant, mediator, and manager allows us to better understand policy networks because it supplements the predominantly structural approach that has been taken to studying networks, allowing us insight into how networks actually operate. Alone however, these propositions do not tell us very much about governance or public policy. To link policy networks to issues of democracy and the policy process, future studies must re-focus on state-society relations, but unlike past studies, embed their analyses at the operational level. This means understanding the role of public servants and politicians in policy networks, of what roles they play, how they come to assume the particular roles they do, and why.

Within the policy-oriented literatures in public administration and political science exist two different but equally interesting sets of drivers to form a political account and a technical account of government's role in policy networks. The point of this construction is not to assert, a priori, the explanatory variables for public actor behaviour in networks but rather, to demonstrate the value of this particular analytic for further theoretical and empirical clarification at the sectoral level.

The technical account is informed by Canadian policy network studies, which highlight the nature of public policy issues as critical to a network's processes and outcomes. According to this literature, public actors assume different roles within network settings based on the complexity of the network's policy processes and policy issues. These factors include the number of participants and settings, the diversity of ideas and interests, the availability of time, and the accessibility of information about the problem (Howlett, 2007; Fernandez and Pitts, 2007).

In terms of the specific behaviour of public actors, the most important network factor suggested in this literature is the capacity of the state – in terms of time, information, and administrative resources – compared to the complexity of the network (Atkinson and Coleman,

1989; Coleman and Perl, 1999; Coleman and Skogstad, 1990; Howlett and Rayner, 1995; Lindquist, 1996; Pal, 1993; Pal, 1997; Malloy, 2003).

- vii. *As the complexity of the network increases public actors will move from intrusive strategies (participate, manage) to non-intrusive strategies (abstain, mediate).*
- viii. *As the capacity of the state increases, public actors will move from less demanding strategies (abstain, participate) to more demanding ones (mediate, manage)*

A second hypothesis is informed by Donald Savoie's (1999) work on departmental coordination and central government priorities as well as Anthony Downs' (1972) work on issue attention cycles. Savoie argues that the extent to which an agency's mandate is prioritized on the political agenda will affect the degree to which the agency receives guidance and support from central agencies and can subsequently develop an interest in and pursue substantive policy issues within the network. In the absence of strong political will however, Savoie finds that departments are merely left to 'tread water', in other words, to minimize conflict by mediating between conflicting actors within the network (1999). As such, it can be hypothesized that as the political salience of an issue increases, government actors in networks will increasingly engage in network management. If political attention to the issue decreases later on, government actors will increasingly engage in network mediation.

That the salience of a policy issue will fluctuate over time necessitates attention to why issues enjoy greater political attention in some periods and less political salience in others. That is to say, a theory linking political salience to network behaviour is incomplete in the absence of an understanding of the temporal dimension of this independent variable. Downs' public choice model of political priorities supplies such a perspective. Anthony Downs (1972) argued that the political salience of a policy issue is temporary and fleeting due to the nature of public opinion. He argued that because of the public's limited attention span to any one particular problem, combined with the multiple policy issues that are vying for the public's attention, the salience of any policy issue will rise and fall over time. This 'issue-attention cycle' features five major phases that Kathryn Harrison (2003) has shown to roughly correspond to the stages of the policy process. Incorporating Downs' issue-attention cycle with Harrison's work on policy stages and Savoie's (1999) findings regarding government department behaviour, we propose that the degree to which actors' pursue the role of abstainer, participant, mediator, or manager is influenced by the stage of the policy process mediated by the political agenda.

- ix. *As a policy issue approaches implementation, public actors will shift from peripheral positions (abstain, participate) to central ones (manage, mediate) in the network.*
- x. *As the political salience of a policy issue increases, public actors will increasingly exhibit active (participate, manage), rather than passive (abstain, mediate) network behaviours, since the interests of political actors has shifted from the desire for minimal action and minimal conflict around the issue to seeing particular policy options realized.*

Future studies should work to develop an understanding of the roles that public actors actually play in policy networks, whether they conform to the model of network participant,

abstainer, mediator, and manager, and furthermore, the conditions that lead to particular strategies on the part of public actors. Although not discussed here, it is likely that personal characteristics, including personal preferences of a public official, as well as their skill-set (negotiating versus brokering), should impact the role they adopt in network settings.

Understanding Democratic Implications

Within the last few years, issues of control, accountability, notions of democracy have increasingly been explored as they impact and are impacted by, policy networks. The lack of attention that such ideas have been given in the network literature in the past has a lot to do with fractions among the existing sub-disciplines that study networks, and in particular, the different ways political scientists and public administration scholars choose to study the subject. The literature that exists on the democratic content of policy networks takes place primarily in political science, where the behaviour of public actors in interorganizational settings is less emphasized. Few studies in political science have been conducted to investigate the strategies, activities, and skills of public servants operating in inter-organizational environments, despite recognition of the unique role they stand to play in network arrangements (Kickert and Koppenjan, 1997; Kingdon, 1995; Lindquist, 1992). While scholars in public administration have taken up a behavioural account of the interorganizational work of government, this literature tends to assume that networks are a ‘good thing’, often overlooking structural differences of networks, particularly in the distribution of power within them, thereby offering very little in the way of an analysis of the impact of behaviour for network ‘democraticness’.

Thus, the study of the democraticness of policy networks requires the consolidation of political scientists’ concern for power and structure, with public administration’s interest in the network activity of public actors. One approach to studying democracy within policy networks is to examine the role played by public servants within network settings to identify the extent to which their activities lead to a more open policy process. An assumption of this research is that

xi. Network processes and outcomes are intricately connected to the roles that public servants play in network settings.

Such an assertion is not a new or uncommon one, as several others have suggested the importance of public officials to policy networks. In fact, it can be argued that the entire sub-field of policy networks within public administration is based on the very notion that public officials matter to them. As Kenis and Provan (2007: 33) have written, “the role of management is critical for effective network governance, especially regarding the handling of tensions inherent in each governance form.” Bueren, Klijin, and Koppenjan (2003) argue a similar point, emphasizing the importance of network managers for the smooth functioning of policy networks, for getting organizations to come together, air their disagreements, build up a level of trust, and develop some sort of agreement on a common way forward. In a context of weak hierarchical mechanisms for control, it is thought that network leaders might just be the necessary glue to keep a policy network functioning productively. As Lindquist (1992: 129-130) suggests “public managers should go beyond furthering the interests of particular departments and where possible

act in the interests of larger policy communities ... public managers are uniquely positioned to take up stewardship roles in [policy] communities”

Evaluating the openness of the policy process however, is not easy, both subjective and objective aspects of it being relevant. We suggest the following criteria for democratic network governance: Policy outputs of the network must be *effective*, to the extent that the outputs meets the self-identified collective goals of the network; Policy processes of the network should be considered *inclusive*, and *legitimate* by those who stand to be affected by its outputs; and finally, decision-makers must be *accountable* and for their activities on behalf of those they govern.

Accountability means that those who make decisions are directly answerable and responsible to those whom their decisions affect. Democratic accountability therefore entails the preservation of representative democracy (Esmark 2007). This requires a degree of transparency that may be reduced by involving non-elected actors in policy decision-making. *Inclusiveness* means that those who stand to be affected by collective decisions are heard by those making the decisions. *Legitimacy* in turn, is the notion that the actions and activities of those who make decisions are accepted by those whose abidance by them is necessary for their effectiveness. Finally, by *effectiveness*, the outputs of the policy network meet the collective goals identified by network participants.

As noted by others, democratic principles are not necessarily mutually obtainable since each of them contain a degree of exclusivity (Provan and Kenis, 2007; Klijn and Skelcher, 2007). The inclusion of ostracized groups in the policy process can inhibit quick, responsive, decision making since obtaining consensus takes time, and can thereby be at the expense of policy effectiveness. In turn, adherence to democratic accountability, by excluding non-elected public officials from the decision-making process, may severely weaken democratic legitimacy, since non-elected public officials have close relations with particular client groups and can act as brokers between politicians and civil society.

Inherent in this tension between democratic principles, is the idea that the way in which public officials are engaged in policy networks will impact what democratic principles are upheld by the network’s processes. We propose therefore that

- xii. *The democratic implications of networks may vary according to which role public actors decide to play within them.*
- xiii. *In particular, participant roles will privilege policy effectiveness; managerial roles will enhance democratic legitimacy; mediator positions will secure greater democratic inclusiveness, and abstention from the network altogether should preserve democratic accountability.*

Understanding how public actors choose to engage with policy networks should have significant implications for the democratic governance of those policy processes. Networks that are ‘managed’ by public officials will likely be more exclusionary. The purpose of engaging with the network here is (for public actors) to reduce conflict and better coordinate network activities, thus enhancing agreement and consent to government policy, also known as network legitimacy. However, part of getting groups to agree on a way forward involves ‘managing’ groups out of

the policy network altogether. In this way, networks featuring government actors as ‘managers’ work to weaken democratic inclusiveness. Where public actors opt to play the role of a network participant, networks are at risk of being dominated by the powerful economic actors, with little recourse to less-resourceful societal groups since public actors have very little influence over the process. This type of network behaviour on the part of public actors can lead to diminished democratic inclusiveness, but enhanced policy effectiveness, since it allows for the greatest variety of arrangements between state and societal actors for policies and programme delivery. It also demands far less government capacity than the role of network manager, thus being extremely attractive when dealing with complex issues.

Where public actors play the role of a network mediator, inclusiveness of the policy network will likely be enhanced as public actors bring in weaker societal groups, and grant them a voice and a standing in the process. However, network inclusiveness may come at the potential expense of network effectiveness, since stakeholders coming from diverse interests and backgrounds will be bound to disagree and since public actors have abstained from articulating any particular stance on the policy issues, it is unlikely that they will be able to quickly steer the conflict to resolution. Finally, with public actors absent from network processes altogether, other participants have little recourse to affect public policy aside from traditional pressure group tactics directed at the political decision maker which tend to favour groups with more material resources. In this way, network abstention strengthens democratic accountability, while reducing inclusiveness.

Future studies could build on this agenda further by offering a) a detailed empirical account of what each of the four public actor behaviours – manager, mediator, participator, and abstainer – entail in terms of goals, perceptions, strategies and interactions with other actors, and b) concrete theoretical links between these various empirical network behaviours and the multiple dimensions of democracy: effectiveness, inclusiveness, legitimacy, and accountability.

CONCLUSION

This paper argues that the concept of a policy network has much to contribute to political scientists’ understanding of democracy, governance and state-society relations and Canadian political scientists have an opportunity to re-establish themselves in this field as well. Moving the discipline forward however, requires some consolidation of efforts in political science with advancements made in public administration. In particular, public administration scholars have developed interesting theories and prescriptions for the behaviour of public officials in interorganizational settings. While many of these theories may lack sensitivity to different network structures and power relations within them, it is in this area that political scientists have something to contribute. Political scientists should incorporate behavioural variables into their analyses, paying particular attention to how organizations interact within policy networks, what strategies they adopt in their interactions, whether public officials do indeed play unique roles within them, and finally, the impact that all of this has on the democraticness of policy networks and on the quality of its policy outputs. Some preliminary propositions have been developed and offered here. It is theorized that interaction in networks is largely shaped by mechanisms of

control in networks, that public actors impact these control mechanisms through the roles of network participant, abstainer, mediator, and manager, and that public actors are guided by (subjective) political instructions as well as the (objective) capacity of government to resolve public problems. The roles that public officials play in policy networks in turn can privilege a particular aspect of democratic governance – legitimacy, accountability, inclusiveness, and/or policy effectiveness. Future case-study research should seek to address empirically, some of these assertions to refine existing theories of network management for more comprehensive, large-N, treatment.

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