CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

The Governance, Structure and Management Processes of an Emergent Goal-directed Organizational Network: an Evaluation of a Configurational Framework of Goal-directed Networks.

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Whole networks, defined as three or more autonomous organizations collectively working together to achieve not only their individual organizational goals, but also a common network goal[i] are argued to be the appropriate approach to address wicked problems[ii]. These networks, either emergent or mandated, are complex systems, hence understanding how they can be effective is also a complex endeavor[iii]. Especially in the context of emergent networks two issues are central. The first issue is what drives the development and effectiveness of the network, and second what holds the network together without the presence of a mandate, unity in command and ownership?

In this article the authors conducted an in-depth case study of an emergent whole network in Flanders, Belgium. In particular, the focus was on the combination of three integration mechanisms: network governance, structure and management processes to explain what drives the development, integration and effectiveness of this network. The authors propose to use a configurational framework taking into account not only isolated effects of network characteristics, but also, as recent literature suggests, conceptualizing whole networks as clusters of structures and practices[iv].

The contribution of this article is threefold. First, this article advances our understanding on how whole networks organize the joint action of various organizations in the network. In particular, we contribute to the literature on emergent whole networks in a developmental phase[v]. Second, we evaluate a configurational framework of whole networks that allows for causal complex recipes of explaining network effectiveness. Third and especially relevant for practitioners and administrators, the authors discuss whether the particular combination of network governance, network structure and management processes in the emergent network explains whether the network was perceived effective by the network members and constituents as a whole in delivering the requisite care and support to multi-problem clients in a region of Flanders, Belgium.

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The implication of this article is that developing "the whole network" into a most appropriate and effective system of service delivery requires not only to bring together diverse set of organizations, but instead necessitates a purposively organization of network governance, structure and management processes. It is important to mention that our inferences are limited by our single case study approach at a single point in time.

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