



Toward a model of school inspections in a polycentric system



Frans J.G. Janssens^{a,b,*}, Melanie C.M. Ehren^c

^a University of Twente, Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social sciences (BMS), University of Twente, 7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands

^b Inter-Continental University of the Caribbean, Plaza Brion 1, Willemstad, Curaçao

^c UCL Institute of Education, University College London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 July 2015

Received in revised form 2 March 2016

Accepted 7 March 2016

Available online 2 April 2016

Keywords:

Networks of schools
Network evaluation
Polycentric governance
School inspections

ABSTRACT

Many education systems are developing towards more lateral structures where schools collaborate in networks to improve and provide (inclusive) education. These structures call for bottom-up models of network evaluation and accountability instead of the current hierarchical arrangements where single schools are evaluated by a central agency. This paper builds on available research about network effectiveness to present evolving models of network evaluation. Network effectiveness can be defined as the achievement of positive network level outcomes that cannot be attained by individual organizational participants acting alone. Models of network evaluation need to take into account the relations between network members, the structure of the network, its processes and its internal mechanism to enforce norms in order to understand the achievement and outcomes of the network and how these may evolve over time. A range of suitable evaluation models are presented in this paper, as well as a tentative school inspection framework which is inspired by these models. The final section will present examples from Inspectorates of Education in Northern Ireland and Scotland who have developed newer inspection models to evaluate the effectiveness of a range of different networks.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, many governments around the globe increasingly recognize the limitations of centralized policy. They acknowledge that hierarchical forms of coordination have distinct drawbacks in allowing schools limited flexibility in responding to external demands. Arvidsson (2003) also points to the information overload of central policy-makers when trying to implement and monitor (new) policy from one central core. As collaborative, partnerships and networks are, according to Gray et al. (2003), are expected to be more effective in creating an education system in which schools can be responsive to their context and provide innovative and affordable services they are being utilized to a greater extent. Networks as the dominant form of organizing and social coordination reflect the idea that one single government (such as in a hierarchical model) does not have all the knowledge required to solve complex, diverse, and dynamic

problems, and that no single actor has the overview necessary to employ all the instruments needed to make regulation effective. Governments realize increasingly that they cannot solve complex social problems on their own and turn to networks and partnerships to provide better and less expensive services to citizens, according to Mayne, Wileman, and Leeuw (2003). Examples are from England where the Department of Education has introduced national, local and (subject) specialized leaders of education who support (groups of) schools in specific areas of improvement, has introduced consortia for professional development (Teaching School Alliances), and has established trusts that run chains of schools under a funding agreement with the Secretary of State; or the Netherlands where mainstream and special schools are now working under a new education authority to provide inclusive education to students in their region.

These changes fit theoretical conceptions of 'polycentricism' which signify 'a structural feature of social systems and refer to many centres of decision making that are formally independent of each other' (Ostrom, Tiebout, & Warren, 1961, p. 831). 'Polycentric regulatory regimes are those in which the state is not the sole locus of authority, but where state and non-state actors are both regulators and regulated in highly complex and interdependent relations' (Black, 2008; p. 1–2). In these systems the relations

* Corresponding author at: University of Twente, Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social sciences (BMS) University of Twente, 7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands.

E-mail address: F.J.G.Janssens@xmsnet.nl (F.J.G. Janssens).

between government and schools are changed to address the insufficient knowledge of government to identify the cause of problems and design effective solutions that are adequately and fully implemented by schools. Changes have included a decentralizing of decision-making and inventing new ways to regulate the self-regulation of schools.

These changes towards a more network-oriented education system have far reaching consequences for the Inspectorates of Education as Ehren et al. (2016) describes. Inspectorates of Education traditionally use a top down model of (single) school evaluation which is not suitable to deal with the dynamics of collaboration of schools within a network. Jenkins et al. (2003) and Gray et al. (2003) for example point out that such top-down systems provide limited insight into the value partners within a network add to services in a particular area over time. These systems emphasize individual agencies' performance targets and budgets and get in the way of them working together and may hinder cross-cutting work. As network outcomes are often the result of collaborative efforts and fragile compromises between partners with different political, social and economic aims who often also have to satisfy and negotiate conflicting stakeholder interests, a top down hierarchical model will have difficulty to find clear and simple evaluation criteria to evaluate aims and objectives of the network (Schwartz, 2003). Honingh and Ehren (2012) and Ehren and Perryman (2015) describe how most Inspectorates of Education predominantly use standardized inspection frameworks to judge quality of single schools, often ignoring the collaborative work of schools with others schools and stakeholders or their contribution to network-level outcomes. In a more polycentric and decentralized system, their centralized and standardized methods are however becoming increasingly obsolete. As Honingh and Ehren (2012) and Ehren and Perryman (2015) suggest, their roles and responsibilities need to change towards more agile and local methods of evaluation.

Such a shift is however no mean feat as the ambiguous nature of networks, differences in perceptions of connectedness, divergence in defining criteria for success, and the difficulty in identifying and attributing measurable outcomes make such network evaluations a challenging task (Dolinski, 2005; Popp et al., 2005, 2013; Provan, Veazie, Staten, & Teufel-Shone, 2005; Rose, 2004). The collaborative and often complex arrangements for decision-making, communication and reporting complicate how organizations can be held to account as questions such as 'who is accountable to whom and what kind of accountability is in play in such arrangements' are difficult to answer? Add to this, networks as dynamic 'moving targets' combined with difficulties identifying and understanding network effectiveness, and one can begin to understand the complexity of network evaluation (Popp, MacKean, Casebeer, Milward, & Lindstrom, 2013). Evaluating a network requires studying how decisions and activities occur in a diffused decision-making model. It also involves recognizing that networks evolve through stages of development.

This paper proposes a range of evaluation models that can capture such decision, activities and stages of development to evaluate the effectiveness of networks. We will provide examples of how such models can be, and are (to some extent) used by Inspectorates of Education in their evaluations of school networks. Such an evaluation and 'polycentric' inspection model essentially starts with an outline of what effective networks in education look like, which will first be presented in the next section (see also Ehren et al., in press). In the last section of this paper we conclude by describing a range of promising examples of Inspectorates of Education in Ireland and Scotland and discuss the changing role of inspectorates in the governance structure of networks of schools.

2. Network effectiveness

2.1. Defining network effectiveness: multilevel purposes of a network

Unlike organizations, networks create distinctive network effects, like rapid growth and transmission of information. As networks grow and new members provide access to additional connections, the network can diffuse information, ideas, and other resources more and more widely through its links and become more effective.

Network effectiveness may include open communication, strengthened network capacity and production of knowledge to solve problems that are relevant for the entire network and go beyond the remit of each individual organization. For education networks, such effects can for example include addressing low achievement orientation in communities, lack of homework support, or improved service provision and integration of services across the network such as access to specialized education programmes (e.g. for gifted students).

Provan and Kenis (2008) emphasize that network effectiveness needs to be defined by looking at the network as a whole and whether it has been able to move forward in addressing the issue on which they came together to work. In order to justify investing in networks, there is a need to measure the overall impact of the network and demonstrate the added value of the network in terms of achieving new outcomes or improving efficiency or effectiveness, instead of looking at improved performance of individual members of the network (Popp et al., 2013). Network effectiveness is not a mere aggregation of the performance of its members but should be understood as outcomes that cannot be reached by each of the individual members, although there is an expectation that individual organizational participants may, and probably should, benefit as well from collaborating in the network.

Network effectiveness can therefore be defined "as the attainment of positive network level outcomes that could not normally be achieved by individual organizational participants acting independently" (Provan & Kenis, 2008; p. 230).

These outcomes will be somewhat unique to each network, and to each sector in which a network exists, depending on the purpose of a particular network (Provan et al., 2007). Following Provan and Milward (2001) and Kenis and Provan (2009), networks can be considered successful when they are able to achieve their expected objectives. Gray et al. (2003) categorize network effects as (1) creating synergy where partnership adds value by combining mutually reinforcing interests, (2) leading to transformation, where the partnership objective is to transform different views into an ideological consensus, and 3 enhancing (financial) efficiency when the use of resources is maximized across the partners in the network.

For example, if the main purpose of a network is to improve the efficiency through better coordination of services, reducing both gaps in and duplication of services, then the ultimate outcome of interest will be more coordinated service delivery across the network. If the main purpose of a network of schools is to improve inclusive education, then the quality of joint provision of services to vulnerable students across the network is the outcome of interest (see Janssens & Maassen, 2015).

Recent analyses of effective networks in education indicate that strong networks of teachers and head teachers promote cooperative learning and improvement in, and across schools and enhance effective teaching practices and student achievement (Earl & Katz, 2006; Chapman and Hadfield, 2010; Hargreaves, 2012; Ainscow, 2015).

Isolating network effectiveness from individual member outcomes is however fraught with difficulties as activities and service delivery are often located within each member of the network

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6792779>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6792779>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)