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- *Networking is an innovative process for the delivery of public services.*

- *Through networking, government officials coordinate efforts with other public and private sector leaders to achieve public service goals.*

- *Failure to network doomed the Clinton administration effort to improve health care services and was one of the root causes for the disastrous government response to Hurricane Katrina.*

- *Effective networking enabled the Clinton administration to avert a Y2K disaster.*

- *Networking poses new challenges for coordination, delegation, and accountability in government.*

issue: *Networking: The Key to 21st Century Government*

by James M. Banovetz, Norman J. Johnson, Sylvester Murray

The three largest disasters in American governance in the first decade of the 21st century all share a common cause: a failure of adequate networking.

The 9/11 disaster occurred in part because of a networking failure: a failure of communication between the several agencies charged with intelligence gathering to protect the nation's security.

The shambles in Iraq resulted from networking failures: the failure of the United Nations to achieve effective coordination and cooperation between governments with interests in the Middle East before the war, and the U.S.'s post war failure to develop effective networks between the ethnic groups and other internal factions involved in the nation's rebuilding effort.

In New Orleans, the governments' failures in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina provide a classic case study of what happens when networking had not occurred before the storm and did not occur after the tragedy.

What is networking?

Networking is a process through which public services are delivered, not by a particular agency, or office, but rather through the coordinated efforts of a varying polyglot of public, not-for-profit, and even private agencies. It is a governance model which sees government executives redefine their core responsibilities from managing people and programs to coordinating resources from diverse sources in order to deliver public services.

Viewed from a different perspective, *networking is the process by which individual government officials, by cultivating and maintaining contacts with a variety of leaders in agencies with which their agencies share common interests, lay the groundwork for effective inter-agency response to problem situations, and for coordinated efforts to achieve public service goals.* In its most generic sense, it is the process of engaging in horizontal inter-organizational

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communications to establish a basis for cooperative accomplishment of goals.

In the public services field, the term is used to refer to a problem-solving approach which blends together the resources of a variety of sources – governments, not-for-profit agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGO's), for-profit corporations, and sometimes even other private sources – to accomplish a public service objective.

When should networking be used?

Networking has wide and diverse applications in today's government. Managing the nation's huge homeland security operations (i.e. coordinating the efforts of many different national, state, and local government organizations) is the most obvious and best known example of a public service that badly needs something – networking – to make it work better. Thus it is something other than another approach to intergovernmental relations.

The failure of national, state, and local agencies to prepare for, and then respond to, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005 shows what happens when government agencies have not developed inter-organizational and inter-personal networks that enable them to work together effectively in a crisis situation. On the other hand, the reaction of Florida's Charlotte County governments in the aftermath of Hurricane Charley in 2004 shows how effective networking can produce just the opposite result.

There are many other examples in which public service networking has produced such results. In the Greater Cleveland Metropolitan Area, for example, many suburban communities found that the cost of providing a full range of necessary services was simply too great. A group of east side

suburbs, using a network approach, found a way to provide collectively the same level of services to their residents that the area's wealthier west side suburbs could provide on their own.

Is networking another term for intergovernmental approaches?

No. Intergovernmental approaches to problem solving can emerge from networking approaches, but it is not the same thing. Intergovernmental approaches often involve institutionalized approaches to problem solving, sometimes involving the creation of new agencies to deliver services or negotiating deals between participating parties with different objectives. Networking focuses more on building effective communication networks of individuals within different offices that produce improved communication channels which, in turn, produce joint collaboration to solve problems and deliver services.

Intergovernmental relations are built upon cross-jurisdictional organizations working together. Networking is the process of individuals from many organizations building and sustaining relationships that enable them to interact together more effectively to accomplish shared objectives.

In short, intergovernmental approaches to problem solving are not networking, but they can be the product of networking.

Why is networking needed or even desirable?

Networking is viewed as a timely, and perhaps optimal, way for organizations, *and especially governmental organizations,* to operate in the modern world. It is also a strategy for maximizing scarce resources. As society has changed in recent decades, so, too, has government. Operationally, governments have changed profoundly. Today they are, as a general matter, less

in the business of providing services than they are in the business of organizing resources, often other people's resources, to produce and increase public value.

Today's complex issues, combined with modern insistence upon transparency, control, and customization, demand a new approach. These customer-focused demands require far more sophistication and a more rapid response than implied in the traditional, standard notions of incrementalism and bounded rationality.

Governing in the 21st century means dealing with complex issues amid a web of organizations. It means approaching problems, not through hierarchical structures, but through a "flat world" of organizations connected by *networks* of personal contacts between people within organizations. It is about individual people exercising their people skills to develop dynamic programs to serve the public's needs. The success public and private schools have had in utilizing resources from private corporations to deliver educational programs is an example of this new process in action.

Can networking succeed in the public sector?

This is the wrong question. The better question is: Can the public sector succeed in the current era without networking?

Networking is a transformative activity. It is an activity which seeks to build relationships between people – and especially between people in different offices, organizations, and even sectors of the economy – so that familiarity can be developed and trust can be nurtured.

Such familiarity and trust can be the difference between personal and organizational success or failure. Familiarity and trust

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are the key. Persons sharing familiarity and trust can achieve a higher level of co-operation. This, in turn, increases the probabilities that programs can be developed, services delivered, and crises averted.

Public administration has often used terms such as Charles Lindblom's incrementalism and Herbert Simon's satisficing to describe the way decisions are made and progress is achieved in policy making and public service delivery systems. But the context in which governmental action is required is changing so dramatically that these concepts are no longer adequate. The residue of such 21st century disasters as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina demonstrates that something more is needed; that governmental problems often can no longer be solved by unitary action on the part of an office, an agency, a department, or even a government. Rather, all of these must work together.

Increasingly, in modern times, government officials must move beyond such defined boundaries; they must expand their efforts to include others, inside and outside of their organization with whom they might usefully cooperate programmatically at some future time. They must, in short, make professional networking a principle element of their job.

Has the failure to network ever caused government failures?

Failure to network has caused major failures at all levels of government. Some typical examples are presented in Illustrations 1, 2, 3, and 4. Illustration 2, in particular, demonstrates how an absence of networking can cause problems even when efforts are being made to address widely acknowledged problems.

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illustration*one*   **Networking Failure at the Federal Level**

In his first term, President Bill Clinton appointed a special task force, headed by his wife, Hillary Clinton, to reform the nation's troubled health care system. The task force worked solely within its own organizational "silo," gathering data, considering alternatives, and formulating recommendations. As it worked, it neither established effective linkages with affected interest groups nor released information to the public about its work.

This failure to work or communicate with others outside the commission – i.e. the failure to network – led to rampant speculation about what it was doing and what it was likely to propose. Affected groups released worst case scenarios to the public. The absence of networking hardened opposition, frightened possible supporters, and created an atmosphere in which the recommendations, when finally presented, had no chance of moving forward.

As a result, the effort at health care reform was not only derailed at that time, but has not been meaningfully revisited even at the time this is written (15 years later).

Problem solving and policy development in the public sector are particularly difficult; attempts to solve public problems are routinely beset by continuously changing and shifting patterns of activities, attitudes, problems, and even allegiances between affected interests. *In such a milieu, net-working is essential so that the decisions being made can sustain the high level of flexibility needed to adapt to changing and unforseen circumstances.* Illustration 2 suggests the importance of networking to prepare for the unexpected.

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illustration*two*   **Networking Failure in Intergovernmental Action**

The failure of government to respond adequately and meaningfully to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005 can be traced directly to inadequate networking. All governmental organizations and all three levels of government – national, state, and local – failed to respond in a timely and adequate fashion in the New Orleans crisis because neither the formal nor the informal patterns of communication between the agencies and governments were sufficiently well established to stand up to, and ameliorate, the stresses in the pre and post hurricane periods.

Many examples of the results of networking failure could be cited. Most are well known. One horrible consequence has been the failure of the New Orleans public schools, nearly two whole school years after the storm, to reopen its doors to students.

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The governmental failure in New Orleans after Katrina did not happen because the staff involved were not bright or did not work hard, nor was it the consequence of poor staff work per se. It was, rather, the failure on the part of officials from all three levels of government to engage – either before, during, or after the disaster – in the kind of network building that permits fast, easy, and effective communication in times of emergency. A major lesson from Katrina is that failure to network leads to sub-optimal performance on a continuing basis.

Illustration 3 demonstrates that the policy-making process is just as susceptible to failure from an absence of networking as is administrative action to solve problems and deliver services. It also demonstrates that even normal support systems can be alienated by networking failure

But simple networking alone is also not sufficient. Networking interactions must be sensitive to the *"sociology"* of the people and organizations with whom networking is conducted. Attempts at collaboration through networking can develop agreeable provisions for sharing funds and resources, can formulate acceptable structural arrangements (division of responsibility, rules of procedure, and measures of accomplishment) and still fail if the differing sociology (behavioral modes) of the participating parties is not understood and taken into account. Illustration 4 offers evidence of the critical role played by sociology.

To be effective, networking requires blending and modification of the sociology of the lead organization to accommodate the sociology of the cooperating or partnering organizations. Since the dynamism of public sector networks must be especially sensitive to the shifting nature of priorities and the quickly shifting issues that come and go, they require that managers be

illustration*three* **Networking Failure in State Policy Making**

The failure to network doomed, from the outset, the recent effort of Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich to fund his proposed program of guaranteed health care for the children of Illinois.

The Governor announced and implemented, without prior warning to either the public or the legislature, and without seeking enabling legislation or funding, a new program to provide health care to all Illinois children (a goal widely viewed as highly laudable). More than a year later, after getting re-elected on a "no new taxes" pledge, he proposed a major new tax increase on the state's largest businesses, promising that the new tax proceeds would be used to support health care for children and education.

Although his own party controlled both house of the Illinois General Assembly by large margins, Governor Blagojevich launched his tax proposal without prior networking with either the legislative leadership, his own party, or affected interest groups. As a result, his proposal was rejected in the Illinois House of Representatives by a vote of 107 – 0 with seven voting present.

illustration*four* **Networking Failure in Local Government**

After Hurricane Katrina, the Houston public schools experienced a sudden inflow of 30,000 student refugees from the hurricane. Houston treated the new students like all other incoming transfer students. That approach produced problems. Houston failed to realize that the hurricane victims posed a unique challenge. With so many coming from the same place, the new students not only brought new faces, but existing behavioral patterns. Houston did not plan for the new behavioral patterns. When the incoming students reacted together in their accustomed patterns, which were different from those of Houston's continuing students, unnecessary behavioral problems developed.

The problems could have been avoided by networking. Houston school officials would have been well advised to work with New Orleans school officials to gain the benefit of their insights into the behavioral patterns – the sociology – to be expected from their incoming students.

In this instance, the appropriate integration of New Orleans school officials in those Houston schools impacted by the New Orleans-based surge in enrollments would have indicated network savvy of the highest order.

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relentless in getting the sociology of the interacting participants right.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, for example, is having difficulty getting organized – of getting networked – because of the challenges inherent in trying to merge many different organizational cultures (sociologies) into a new, hopefully cohesive organization.

Does networking really make a significant difference?

Yes. Illustrations 5, 6, and 7 provide examples of how effective networking can accomplish nearly unbelievable results. In the first example, Illustration 5, networking was not only used to avert a looming national crisis of major proportions, but to do so in a way that did not even require the use of public resources.

Another example of networking, presented in Illustration 6, comes from Wisconsin's northwoods. This example is noteworthy because the instigator of the network was not a government official, but a non-profit organization, the Nature Conservancy, which worked with government agencies, for-profit organizations, and private corporations to find a win-win solution for all concerned while protecting one of the nation's most valuable and productive forests from private development.

A similar example of the way in which networking can produce major public benefit without tax dollars, but with large scale collaboration between governmental organizations and both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations is presented in Illustration 7 (on the next page). Again, it should be noted, that both Illustrations 5 and 7 also demonstrate what can be accomplished by the unusual energy and skill of a single leader successfully developing and working within a networking context.

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illustration*five*   **A Networking Success in National Government**

The anticipated nation-wide crisis with computers expected when the nation entered the 21st century was averted through the use of a carefully crafted networking system, put together in response to President Bill Clinton's directive to prevent a Y2K meltdown in the nation's governmental and private sector computer operations. President Clinton appointed John Koskinen to the task.

Without resorting to White House pressure or influence, Koskinen resisted Congressional pressures to build a large staff to do the job. Instead, his strategy was based on the enlistment of the cooperation of leaders in organizations of public and private producers, suppliers, and servers to bring all computer networks into needed compliance before the turn of the century.

As a result of the success of Koskinen's network, Y2K came and went without notable problems in the nation's computing systems.

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illustration*six*   **A Networking Success Involving Public and Private Organizations**

Over 69,000 acres of some of the best managed forest land in the nation was preserved in perpetuity when the not-for-profit organization, the Nature Conservancy, undertook the networking needed to broker an agreement between the Office of the Governor of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and two private, for-profit timber management companies.

The outcome of the networking process was an agreement that protected for all time the valuable forest properties while assuring (1) sustainable forestry operations, (2) timber usage, and (3) public access to a wide variety of recreational uses in the forest and on its lakes. In the process, the economic health of the area surrounding the forest was sustained by preservation of both the timber industry's use of the forest and the tax revenue stream it provided to area governments.

No public funds were required to either reach or sustain the new agreement.

Is networking important for city and county officials?

Yes, local government leaders should constantly be involved in networking for two reasons. First and foremost, networking advances local government by achieving greater public service results. As a generality, public goals can be better optimized by acting in concert with others rather than acting independently. Cities and counties can and should maintain effective networks with:

- Each other
- School districts and other special districts operating either within the city or county, or in the general vicinity
- Not-for-profit agencies which serve local clientele, such as senior citizens, youth, persons suffering

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from physical or behavioral health problems, and those advancing such causes as historic preservation, economic development, neighborhood improvement, and education

- Regional agencies dealing with services and issues in such fields as public utilities, transportation, infrastructure improvement, and tax sharing
- State and federal agencies able to provide assistance in such areas as homeland security, criminal investigation, transportation, and human services
- Private, for-profit businesses and organizations with overlapping interests and concerns

Second, networking with professional colleagues from other cities and counties not only provides broader access to their knowledge and experience in resolving problems, but actively networking through personal participation in professional local government associations usually is a key element in achieving professional success. Illustration 8 points out the values of networking through professional associations.

Networking with other local governments and in professional associations is important. So, too, is networking among public and private organizations. The latter networking often leads to the development of significant community-based partnerships, economic development projects, and public-private partnerships, even including opportunities for service privatization.

Are collaborative projects the central purpose of networking?

No, collaborative projects are one possible outcome of networking efforts made by local government leaders. Other outcomes include:

illustration*seven*   **Networking Success Through Fund Raising**

The superintendent of the Golden Gate National Recreational Area, Brian O'Neill, was confronted with a major problem when he was offered the opportunity to convert hundreds of acres of donated prime waterfront real estate with major environmental pollution problems into a picturesque shoreline national park and environmental learning center. His problem: he knew public funds would not be available, at least for many years, to cover the cost of the transition.

Rather than start the long process of seeking funding through governmental channels, Superintendent O'Neill developed a network of local leaders to enlist local community support both to raise more than $34 million to support the project and to develop and sustain educational programming at the new facility.

His efforts were completely successful.

illustration*eight*   **Networking Through Professional Associations**

Active participation in professional associations is networking with a purpose. It offers opportunities to:

Become associated with professional leaders

Encourage profession and career advancement

Embrace professional values, standards, and ethics

Seek personal relationships and mentorship

Review best practices and shared information

Become a leader among peers

Making connections:
- With clients, who can provide valuable insights into the quality of local services.
- With employees and prospective employees
- With citizens to help maintain community awareness and build community support

Changing minds by providing expertise and new information which can lead to more informed attitudes about community governance.

Solving problems by thinking small, but smart. Such connections often help improve

leaders' problem-solving focus, sometimes by helping them concentrate on problem components, sometimes by helping them see the big picture more clearly, and sometimes by helping them focus on assets rather than deficiencies.

Doing democracy. An on-going process of discussion and deliberation with the public helps leaders better understand and utilize citizen perceptions during decision-making activities; it can promote greater citizen collaboration and it can mold public opinion in ways that better support public service activities.

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Isn't networking a tool that public leaders have always used?

Many public officials have long used networking techniques, often to great public and personal advantage. Networking as discussed herein, however, is something more than the traditional development of networks of friends and associates.

In the present governmental context, networking is a more conscious and planned strategy for utilizing modern technologies to maximize the inputs of others in developing broad based approaches to resolve the more intractable issues of the present time. What is different now is that:

 (1) In this era of globalization, even local issues take on critical new dimensions. Economic development activities, for example, must take account of global as well as local economic forces and be prepared to deal with global as well as local interests; and

(2)   Such networks must be *more strategically developed;* they can and should be designed to take advantage of *modern communication technologies;* and they can now more readily tap into the resources of not-for-profit and private sector participants.

The new public service environment that has evolved in the last half of the 20th century poses new and severe problems. Strategic networking is an adaptive, transformative strategy to help public leaders better cope with the new public service era evolving around them.

What organizational skills will such networking require?

Besides stronger interpersonal skills, this new concept of networking will make several traditional organizational leadership challenges more important.

First, the art of coordination will become immensely more difficult. In part, this will result from the greater variety and sociology of organizations whose efforts will have to be coordinated. Coordination will have to involve not just agencies accustomed to working with the sociologies typical of government organizations. It will have to include organizations and sociologies from other kinds of governments including not-for-profit agencies and from private sector organizations.

City and county officials, for instance, will have to work much more closely on many projects with school districts. While school districts are also government agencies, they have very different cultures and sociologies than their county and city counterparts. That difference in culture and sociology is what has traditionally blocked many cooperative activities between schools and their county and city neighbors in decades past.

In part, too, coordination will be more difficult because of the sheer increase in the numbers of partners likely to be involved in the endeavors of the future. One scholar, Donald Kettl, has suggested that coordination through structure may have to be abandoned in these networking activities and be replaced by *coordination through collaboration in decision-making.*

Second, the art of delegation will become much more critical. As cooperation and collaboration take on more of a "flat world" character, more autonomy (and hence more delegation) will be necessary to involve collaborative partners successfully. While the management literature is replete with references on the *need to delegate,* it is relatively silent on the question of *how to delegate."*

The problem is that delegation of authority also involves delegation of some measure of control. This becomes particularly hard for the public manager because delegation of authority and control is rarely accompanied by a commensurate delegation of accountability or responsibility. Nonetheless, networking will not work well without effective delegation.

Third, the biggest problem posed by public sector networking is accountability. Governmental activity must always be accountable, but the addition of not-for-profit and private sector agencies to the service delivery equation will only make accountability more difficult. Partly it will be more difficult because the public is routinely demanding more transparency on the part of those who serve it. It will also be more difficult because the standard tools for accountability – financial auditing, compliance monitoring, freedom of information provisions, and open meeting acts – are likely to be counterproductive, at least at times, in gaining essential cooperation and participation from concerned not-for-profit and private sector agencies.

Can networking work under such constraints?

As the examples cited earlier in this report suggest, effective networking has a sufficiently impressive record of accomplishments, and such an impressive potential for many more accomplishments, that it can not be dismissed or disregarded as a strategy for meeting the public management challenges of the future. Indeed, networking as a model provides one of the most promising suggestions for meeting public management's 21st century challenges.

Thus, one of the principal challenges now facing public management is the challenge of developing the accountability, coordination, delegation, and equilibrium management capabilities, as well as the people capacities, to make networking not only work, but work well!

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