Performance Management and the Madison Office of Community Services

PA 895

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Introduction

The use of performance data can be collected, used, and interpreted in multiple ways. The variable nature of performance data is well-illustrated in an analysis of Madison's Office of Community Services and other municipalities' human service agencies. Within this context, our paper seeks to describe the different manifestations of performance data, and use this description to aid in a discussion of how the Office of Community Services (OCS) can utilize performance management to facilitate a process of learning. First, we provide a general overview of the OCS, including their current mission statement, budget, program goals, and structure of performance management. Next, we analyze the current collection and use of performance information in regards to the potential problems of ambiguity and subjectivity. We then examine how logic models, interactive learning forums, and networks might be used to reduce ambiguity, and benefit the OCS and the city of Madison by leading to new methods of learning. Embedded within this analysis are examples of other human service agencies within Ann Arbor, Raleigh, Seattle, and United Way of Dane County, which can provide potential alternative structures and organizational cultures as comparisons to the Madison OCS. Our analysis demonstrates that using performance information to facilitate learning could potentially benefit the OCS in the creation of a management strategy that both implicitly and explicitly cover the areas that Behn labels the eight managerial purposes: to evaluate, control, budget, motivate, promote, celebrate, learn, and improve.[1]

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[1] Behn, Robert. "Why Measure Performance? Different Purposes Require Different Measures" *Public Administration Review,* 63:5:586-607

OCS Overview

The OCS is an agency within Madison's Department of Planning and Economic and Community Development. Its stated mission is "to improve the quality of child care for all children and to provide information, assistance, and funding that enhances the health and quality of life in Madison's neighborhoods for the elderly, youth and families"[2] OCS accomplishes this mission by providing direct support to targeted groups, as well as funding local nonprofits that run various programs in support of these targeted groups. It has an annual budget of approximately $5.6 million, representing 2.4% of Madison's total budget.

Most of the budget of OCS ($3.6 million, or 64%) is distributed to local nonprofits and community-based organizations through its Community Resources Program. The types of services funded are divided into seven program areas: child care, support to families, senior services, youth services, domestic violence and sexual assault, community assistance/access, and neighborhood organizing/capacity building. These program areas have been created based on input from the Community Services Commission (CSC), the Senior Citizen's Advisory Committee (SCAC), and the Early Childhood Care and Education Board (ECCEB), which are volunteer groups comprised of citizens appointed by the mayor that have expertise or interest in a human service area.

The services and programs funded by the Community Resources Program are proposed by the CSC, SCAC, and ECCEB based on needs assessment data, service, reports, and public hearings. Once the funding is authorized, OCS gives grants to local nonprofits through use of detailed purchase of service contracts which reimburse organizations after services have been provided.   Local agencies seeking funding through the Community Resources Program must complete a consolidated application which is the standard grant application used by OCS,

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[2]   Madison Office of Community Services, 2008.

Madison Community Development Office (funded by CDBG)[3], the Dane County Department of Human Services, and the Dane County CDBG Program.   Agencies must request funding for each individual program and list two outcomes and corresponding performance standards that they will strive to achieve. Additionally, each agency must submit monthly financial reports and quarterly service reports. OCS staff complete annual service reports for each program which highlight the activities of the previous year and summarize how the program performed on its annual goals and outcome objectives.   Currently, the purpose of these reports is primarily to provide performance information to the CSC during the funding process, and to alert the OCS to any "red flags" of agencies that may need additional management attention.
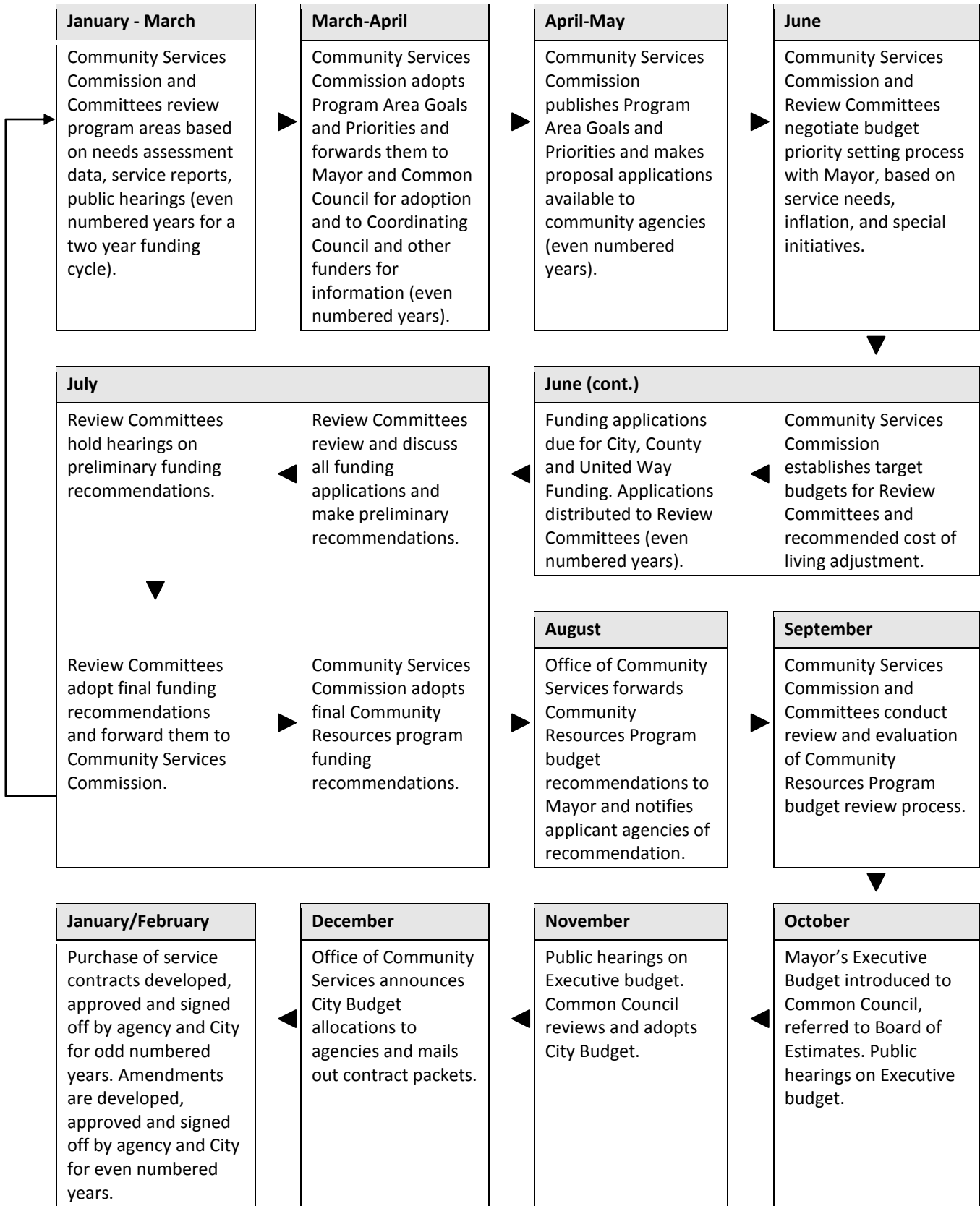
The Community Resources Program funding process occurs prior to the OCS distribution of funds to community agencies. It is a process in which various stakeholders are involved in setting priorities, making recommendations on funding, and ultimately voting on who receives funding.   Figure 1 provides a flow chart illustrating the described funding process through which local agencies seek funds.   The flow chart highlights a few key areas where multiple sources of information can influence decision-making, including performance data.   During the months of January to March, the CSC uses various sources of data to review program areas and set priorities according to the needs of the community.   These sources of data include the Dane County Youth Survey, Dane County Youth Gang Prevention Task Force, United Way Disconnected and Violent Youth, State of WI data, Madison Police Department, and various anecdotal sources.[4]   The extent to which each of these sources is utilized is not easily measured. Furthermore, recent concern has arisen among the CSC whether this is an appropriate method for setting funding priorities.

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[3] CDBG stands for Community Development Block Grant
[4] Interview with Laura Noel at OCS, 11/20/2008

Figure 1: Madison CSC Funding Process

January - March

Community Services Commission and Committees review program areas based on needs assessment data, service reports, public hearings (even numbered years for a two year funding cycle).

March-April

Community Services Commission adopts Program Area Goals and Priorities and forwards them to Mayor and Common Council for adoption and to Coordinating Council and other funders for information (even numbered years).

April-May

Community Services Commission publishes Program Area Goals and Priorities and makes proposal applications available to community agencies (even numbered years).

June

Community Services Commission and Review Committees negotiate budget priority setting process with Mayor, based on service needs, inflation, and special initiatives.

July

Review Committees hold hearings on preliminary funding recommendations.

Review Committees review and discuss all funding applications and make preliminary recommendations.

June (cont.)

Funding applications due for City, County and United Way Funding. Applications distributed to Review Committees (even numbered years).

Community Services Commission establishes target budgets for Review Committees and recommended cost of living adjustment.

Review Committees adopt final funding recommendations and forward them to Community Services Commission.

Community Services Commission adopts final Community Resources program funding recommendations.

August

Office of Community Services forwards Community Resources Program budget recommendations to Mayor and notifies applicant agencies of recommendation.

September

Community Services Commission and Committees conduct review and evaluation of Community Resources Program budget review process.

January/February

Purchase of service contracts developed, approved and signed off by agency and City for odd numbered years. Amendments are developed, approved and signed off by agency and City for even numbered years.

December

Office of Community Services announces City Budget allocations to agencies and mails out contract packets.

November

Public hearings on Executive budget. Common Council reviews and adopts City Budget.

October

Mayor's Executive Budget introduced to Common Council, referred to Board of Estimates. Public hearings on Executive budget.

In their meeting on September 10, 2008, the CSC examined their current process and asked:

1. Does the current program area structure reflect the current reality of community need, our contracted programs and their relationships to our stated priorities?
2. What information was the most useful in identifying community needs? What information was lacking?
3. Is it realistic to think we can get a community wide needs assessment every two years, or might we take a more targeted approach, i.e. develop structure/plan that conducts needs assessments by program areas or neighborhoods on a rotating basis?[5]

In order to address these questions, the CSC is examining the use of the Madison Neighborhoods Indicators. Currently, the indicators are focused on seven categories: basic area characteristics, public safety, health and family well-being, community action and involvement, economic vitality, housing quality and availability, and access to transportation. The Neighborhoods Indicators is a pilot project and to date has only done modeling for a few neighborhoods. However, its goal is to eventually produce a full-scale system that will provide a needs assessment that is better targeted to the city of Madison (compared to county-based data), more responsive (compared to census data), disaggregated by geographical location, and of course is accurate. [6] At the time of this analysis, the indicators are available to the public on the Internet, and will be continually reviewed as more input is received.[7]

After setting the goals and priorities for a funding year, the CSC issues grant applications to which human service agencies are eligible to apply. In July, the CSC meets to review the applications and make initial recommendations for funding. It is at this stage in the funding process that the CSC examines annual summary reports issued by the OCS which contain financial data, outputs, and outcomes data on each of the previous year's funded programs and

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[5] September 10, 2008 Meeting Minutes, Attachment: "Funding Process Review"
http://legistar.cityofmadison.com/meetings/2008/9/6944_M_COMMUNITY_SERVICES_COMMISSION_08-09-10_Meeting_Minutes.pdf
[6] Information on Neighborhood Indicators Pilot Project gathered from September 10, 2008 Meeting Minutes, Attachment: "Neighborhood Indicators Presentation" http://legistar.cityofmadison.com/attachments/6c2199fe-bcca-4157-bb8b-cfda43fea6b4.pdf
[7] http://www.planning.wisc.edu/madison/Index.html

agencies.[8]   In their review of the current format for the funding process, the CSC also had questions regarding this stage:

1. Do Commission members understand the format of the application well enough so that they can evaluate the content of the application?
2. In this last process, what was expected in terms of staff input was not clear or well defined. Are there standardized questions that staff should respond to about the strengths/weaknesses of every application or agency, performance issues, and their roles in key networks or communities?[9]

These questions, particularly the second one, raise a concern about the current collection and use of performance data by the OCS and the CSC.   As previously mentioned, the current form of communication to the CSC by the OCS consists solely of written reports.   Additionally, the CSC is not only concerned with the content of the performance reports but also the method by which the funded agencies communicate to the CSC.   Within the same document, they ask, "Does the Public Hearing as currently structured give the Commission information it can use to inform decision-making?   Would a structure that incorporates agency presentations as a part of the application process be more informative, useful, and fair?"[10]   The current system favors those agencies that can attend the public hearings and best present their case for future funding. However, if the Commission allowed every agency to present, with almost 50 agencies and sometimes multiple programs per agency, this could be an extremely time-intensive process.

The questions the CSC asks and the information given to us by the OCS inform our analysis of performance management in the OCS.   The OCS can look both internally to how they use performance information to inform their management process of community agencies, and externally in how they interact with agencies important to the funding process, such as the CSC.

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[8] Interview with Laura Noel at OCS, 11/20/2008
[9] September 10, 2008 Meeting Minutes, Attachment: "Funding Process Review"
[10] Ibid.

Ambiguity and Subjectivity in Performance Information

One of the concerns raised by both the CSC and the OCS is the current method of communicating performance information, and how that information is then utilized in the budget review process.[11]   A common theme in the discourse on performance management is the warning that performance information can be both ambiguous and subjective, despite the fact it is often touted as being superior because of its objectivity.   Moynihan references March and Olsen, stating:

> Ambiguity is likely to occur in issues where objectives or issue-definition is unclear, where there is a lack of clarity on causal mechanisms between organizational actions and outcomes, where it is difficult to interpret the past, and where the pattern of individual participation in different decisions is uncertain and changing[12]

This concept is directly applicable to many aspects of the performance information that is managed by the OCS.   As apparent from an examination of the CSC meeting minutes, a lack of clarity in performance information is a primary concern, and the group is seeking to find alternative means of collecting and using performance information to reduce ambiguity.   In addition to the objectives of the Community Resources Program, the clarity of the objectives set by the funded community agencies themselves can widely vary, with some agencies having a well-developed strategic plan, while others have not reached the same level of expertise.   The next section provides some examples of how agency objectives and causal connections can be established in a clear, concise, and logical manner.

Performance Information to Improve Learning by Agencies & OCS

Performance information is often referenced as a means to more efficiently allocate resources to agencies or programs. However, one very important (and often overlooked) use of

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[11] Conversations with Laura Noel, Minutes from CSC meetings
[12] Moynihan, Donald. The Dynamics of Performance Management: Constructing Information and Reform, p.103

performance measurement is to facilitate internal learning in an organization. Recent high profile initiatives such as the Office of Management and Budget's Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) may cause organizations to view this emphasis on measuring performance as simply a compliance requirement. However, an organization that simply feeds its superiors required information loses out on potentially valuable learning opportunities. Moynihan states that "performance management doctrine is based on what is essentially a theory of learning."[13] Through the analysis of performance information, it is possible to learn what techniques work more effectively than others. As systems and programs change to reflect this learned knowledge, better performance should be expected in the future.

While this process sounds straightforward, the actual practice of organizational learning is often complex and difficult. The example of OCS underscores some of these challenges to learning. Since the success of OCS is largely judged on the outcomes of external agencies, the dynamics of learning are different than in a direct-service public agency. "Learning" for OCS can mean more than just observing which agencies achieve their program outcomes. Rather, it can attempt to discover *why* certain programs were successful. Furthermore, its role as a managing organization creates an opportunity to diffuse this process of learning through the network of human service providers that it funds.

One example of this process of learning and subsequent diffusion by a managing organization is the "Schools of Hope" initiative of United Way of Dane County (UWDC). This project began as a pilot program aimed at reducing the racial achievement gap in elementary education, specifically third grade reading levels. Their strategy, developed with community input and research data, placed volunteer tutors in schools to work in concert with teachers to assist students in need of reading help in the Madison Metropolitan School District. According to

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[13] Moynihan, p. 164

UWDC, "between 1995 and 2005, the racial achievement gap for third grade reading went from 21 percent to 2 percent."[14] After having learned that this strategy did indeed work, UWDC has encouraged the organizations it funds to develop similar models throughout the school districts of Dane County focusing on all areas of academic achievement.

Logic Models and Non-profits

One key method United Way used to develop its "Schools of Hope" initiative was the logic model. A logic model (or an outcome-sequence chart) shows "the flow of intermediate and end outcomes expected to result from program activities and the outputs produced by those activities."[15] The outputs were volunteer hours spent tutoring and mentoring minority children and the intermediate outcome was improved third grade reading scores. This logic model could be extended to show further beneficial outcomes (such as reduced drop out rates) that are likely to result when children are reading at the standard level for third grade. One advantage that United Way had was that the measurement of the outcomes was already being done by the schools; all they had to do was analyze the information.

Developing logic models for other human service outcomes is much more difficult when there is not a simple method to measure the desired outcome. In these situations it is necessary to use outcome indicators which are measurable results that should logically lead to the desired outcome. For example, a program that provides counseling services to children that are victims of domestic violence might have an outcome goal to improve the ability of these children to socialize and interact with their peers. An indicator to measure this outcome could be an

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[14] UWDC Website (2008) Retrieved from http://www.unitedwaydanecounty.org/index.php?page=1027&l=0 on December 12, 2008.
[15] Hatry, Harry P., *Performance Measurement: Getting Results,* 2nd edition. Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute 2007, p. 52

independent evaluation or interview with each child in the program to determine their emotional well being.

In our review of program goals and outcomes in OCS's Annual Services Report Summaries, we found that the quality of the performance information varied widely. For example, many agencies describe a program outcome as serving a certain number of persons in a given year.[16] In terms of an accepted performance measurement definition, this would be better termed an output. Outcomes should describe "not what the program did but the consequences of what the program did."[17] This failure to address outcomes may be a result of a number of factors. Much of it probably comes from a lack of knowledge of program evaluation terminology and logic model development by staff in some agencies that have not been trained in this area. It may also be indicative of the difficulty in choosing outcome indicators that can be measured by the nonprofit.

Another issue is that the OCS only partially funds most of these agencies, sometimes an extremely small portion. Therefore, it would be unreasonable for the OCS to make strict demands for large amounts of performance data, particularly for agencies with a minimal amount of resources and expertise. In response to this issue, the OCS has recently proposed using a sliding scale to determine the amount of performance data and interaction that they require from the community agencies they fund. For example, agencies that receive over $50,000 in funding have the most administrative oversight, including site visits, Board contact, and program reviews in addition to the standard report requirements.[18] Although an interesting way to help improve the quality of performance information without being overly intrusive, the OCS could also

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[16] This was determined based on information found in the "Annual Service Report Reviews for Contract Year 2007" published by the City of Madison Office of Community Services Community Resources Program.
[17] Hatry, p. 16-17
[18] Information provided by Laura Noel, draft proposal 7/31/08

improve performance information by helping to provide the tools to gather data.   The Urban

Institute, in partnership with The Center for What Works, has worked to compile material that

seeks to provide a common outcome framework for non-profits to measure performance.[19]

These materials seek to create logic models that are specifically tailored to measure performance

of non-profits, since it is recognized that these outcomes can be difficult to measure and that

resources are limited to perform this analysis.   The authors of these resources use language that

helps non-profits to distinguish between concepts such as outputs and outcomes, gives them the

tools to create a logic model, and uses many illustrative examples in their descriptions.   Rather

than dictating compliance or actively trying to shape community agencies' goals and outcomes,

the OCS can take a different, more complementary approach to managing, providing the tools

and guidance to allow agencies to create their own goals, while still instilling a sense of quality

and direction.

Communication and Use of Performance Information

From the questions the CSC was asking in the recent 2008 meetings, it seems apparent

that there is also a concern about the method of communication of performance information, and

its consequent effect on creating information asymmetry.[20]   Although it is virtually impossible

to completely eliminate the ambiguity and subjectivity of performance information, there may be

options available to at least reduce it.   In addition to a discussion of how the definition of

objectives and logic models can affect ambiguity in performance information, it has also been

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[19] http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411404_Nonprofit_Performance.pdf
[20] See above section: "OCS Overview" in which the CSC asks: "In this last process, what was expected in terms of staff input was not clear or well defined. Are there standardized questions that staff should respond to about the strengths/weaknesses of every application or agency, performance issues, and their roles in key networks or communities?"

noted that the roles of an organization or an individual can have a significant impact on how performance information is presented and interpreted, especially in political settings. Regarding the agency's role Moynihan states:

> Agency staff are likely to be advocates, using information to cast the agency in the best possible light and to argue for more resources. …Agencies have been found to select goals that will cast the agency in a favorable light, ignoring or dropping unflattering measures or goals over which they have limited control.[21]

Whether conscious or sub-conscious, community agencies' use of performance information in this manner is inherently a part of the funding process in Madison, in which public hearings allow agency staff to advocate on behalf of their agency to retain or increase funding, making their case to cast their agency in a favorable light.   This is an important step to keep in the process because the public is allowed a democratic voice in the budget process. However, it may be beneficial to include a mechanism for the OCS to also present performance information.   The role of the OCS is primarily one of a managing agency, or as they view themselves, as a "partner" to the funded community agencies.[22]   This role is in contrast to one as an enforcer of measurement quality, such as the OMB, or as a funding organization, such as the CSC or Congress.   Therefore, although the OCS still is influenced by all of the above-mentioned concerns, it could still be considered one of the better candidates in terms of objectivity, since their primary role is to distribute funds to the agencies, negotiate the contracts, and disseminate information to the CSC.   Additionally, since one of their primary responsibilities is to collect performance information, the OCS is familiar with all of the agencies to a certain extent, which may be further increased if the "sliding scale" method of collection is implemented.

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[21] Moynihan, p. 109
[22] Interview with Laura Noel at OCS, 11/20/2008

Certainly, the presentation of performance information by the OCS will not make it become fully objective and devoid of a certain degree of narrative quality, but it may have certain advantages.   First, in the CSC meeting minutes from September, a question was raised indirectly referencing the subjectivity of performance information when they asked whether "a structure that incorporates agency presentations as a part of the application process be more informative, useful, and fair?"   While creating a structure in which every community agency presented their information would give equal opportunity to each agency to tell their own story, this process would definitely be extremely time-consuming, and might also retain all of the subjectivity that is leading the fear of information asymmetry that the CSC presents.   If the OCS were to present the performance information on all of the agencies, they would still be able to provide information on each agency, while also being more likely to provide a balanced picture of the situation.   Additionally, community agencies would still retain their ability to advocate on their own behalf in the public hearings.

A second advantage of presenting performance information in a presentation to the CSC would be a change in the current method of communication that could influence a change in organizational culture.   Currently, the OCS provides performance information solely in the form of written summary reports, synthesizing a year's worth of financial data, outputs, and outcomes for each agency in 1-2 pages.   Hence, although the current structure provides a reporting mechanism, it does not highly emphasize employee participation, nor is it regarded as a document for learning in the next year.   The cases presented in Moynihan's book on the Department of Corrections in three states, and other examples of performance management reform, have all found that the success of learning is not solely dependent on learning structures,

but also just as importantly on the organizational culture.[23] Stated differently, "managers can also increase the chances of learning (a) by encouraging a culture that values learning and (b) by establishing routines where performance information and other data are regularly considered."[24] If the OCS were to present performance information to the CSC in a forum in which employees of OCS were encouraged to participate in a more interactive manner, based on previous cases, it may have greater potential to alter the perception of performance management.   As one SSA regional commissioner aptly stated, "You don't change culture through memos."[25]   The case of reform in the SSA provides an example in which intra-agency communication fostered strong commitment at every level to achieve the agency's goals and objectives, disseminating a philosophy of performance management throughout the agency.[26]   A change from written reports to an interactive learning forum might provide the same effect.

Examples of how other agencies in similar roles communicate performance information to their respective funding bodies can provide some potential options to how the OCS might propose altering their current method of communication.   In our last conversation with an OCS employee, Laura Noel, she discussed how the written summary reports do not give an especially strong voice to the OCS, and referenced the Madison Office of Community Development (OCD) as a comparison agency.   One of the OCD's primary responsibilities is to distribute CDBG funds, and they report to the CDBG Commission, similar to the rapport between the OCS and the CSC.   Unlike the OCS-CSC interactions, the CDBG Commission sets aside a specific time slot in which the OCD discusses the applications and any information related to the agencies, including performance information.

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[23] Moynihan, p.184
[24] Moynihan, p.195
[25] Broadnax and Conway, Ch.7 "The SSA and Performance Management" p.12
[26] Ibid.

In the city of Raleigh, the Community Services Department (CSD) shares program areas, goals, and a funding process that are similar to the Madison Office of Community Services. One important distinction is the composition of the members of the decision-making groups within the funding process.   Figure 2 illustrates the funding process utilized by Raleigh to provide contracts to community agencies.   An important step to examine is the point at which the grants committee reviews funding applications and makes recommendations to the Human Relations Commission (HRC).

Figure 2: The Raleigh Human Service Agency Funding Process[27]
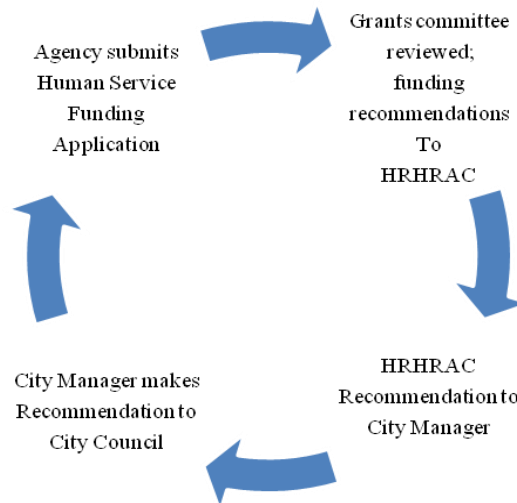
HHRAC=Human Resources and Human Relations Advisory Commission, renamed in 2004 to the Human Relations Commission

The Grants Committee has nine members, composed of 5 HRC members, 1 County representative, 1 Triangle United Way representative, 1 Substance Abuse Advisory Commission representative, and 1 Community Agency representative.   Therefore, when making funding recommendations for the HRC to vote on, many important stakeholders at various levels have a voice in the process.   Additionally, when examining the meeting minutes of the Raleigh HRC,

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[27] City of Raleigh Community Services Department

we found that for every meeting of the past year a designated time slot was given to the director of the CSD, while in the Madison CSC minutes, reports from the OCS were provided in a more ad hoc fashion by various staff members.[28]

The city of Raleigh's Community Service Department and Madison's Office of Community Development show two alternative ways of communicating with council members. Both organizations have more formalized mechanisms of communication between the managing agency and the council subcommittee that submits funding recommendations for the city budget. At the OCD, this relationship is strictly formalized between the OCD and the CDBG Commission.   In Raleigh, many members of the community are represented on the Grants Committee, and the director of CSD submits weekly reports to the HRC at each meeting.

The advantage of a more intimate relationship between the managing agency and funding body is that hopefully, the presentation of performance data will be less subjective than if it was presented by the funding agency, less ambiguous than if it was submitted in the form of a written report, and more representative of a wide range of agencies.   The potential drawback of a more intimate relationship is that this could result in new authority for OCS, thereby potentially changing the dynamic of OCS as a "partner" to community agencies.   Furthermore, there is no guarantee that an interactive method of communication will better communicate performance information, but the evidence from other cases suggest an interactive dialogue model may be one of the more effective ways to learning.

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[28]Raleigh minutes:
http://www.raleighnc.gov/portal/server.pt?space=Dir&spaceID=0&in_hi_userid=2&control=OpenSubFolder&subfolderID=4672&DirMode=1
Madison minutes: http://legistar.cityofmadison.com/calendar/search.aspx#current

Learning within a Network

The ability of a managing organization like the OCS to influence the learning of the agencies it funds can be facilitated by learning within a network. Nonprofit human service agencies in the Madison area often have similar programs and are funded by many of the same sources, giving them the structure of a human service network. An innovative and successful technique utilized by one program may be more easily spread throughout the network by a central entity. Provan &Milward refer to an entity that acts as a "disseminator of funds, administrator, and coordinator of the network" as a "*network administrative organization* (NAO)."[29] However, a unique factor in the human service network of Madison is the existence of at least three NAOs: OCS, Dane County Human Services, and UWDC. While this structure does not necessarily reduce learning, it may complicate it. Due to the fact that these three NAOs contribute funding to the many of the same programs, it is likely that they would receive some of the same performance information. However, as previously discussed, it is possible for two organizations to review performance information and reach different conclusions about the program itself. Therefore, even the process of network learning based on performance information is somewhat subjective. To use the example of the "Schools of Hope," it is possible that other environmental factors may have actually caused the significant increase in reading scores and not the Schools of Hope initiative. A different funding agency may have been less apt to push this model on other agencies.

What we can assume is that in the presence of three NAOs, the process of network learning may be problematic. In addition to interpreting performance information differently, they may have different goals and strategies that are a result of their organizational culture.

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[29] Provan, Keith G. & Milward, H. Brinton (2001). "Do Networks Really Work? A Framework for Evaluating Public-Sector Organizational Networks" Public Administration Review 61 (4): 417

Furthermore, NAOs with different goals may want to measure different outcomes creating a

more complicated system of performance management by the agencies that run the programs. It

seems reasonable that a human service network with a clear set of goals and strategies might

more easily collect performance information that the NAOs could then interpret in a more

meaningful way. This scenario would more easily facilitate network learning.

An example of this type of network cohesion is found in the community of Seattle, WA.

The city of Seattle has a Human Services Department (HSD) similar to Madison's OCS serving

approximately 580,000 residents. In 2004, the HSD completed its "Strategic Investment Plan"

(SIP) that would guide the future of human service delivery in Seattle. One outcome of this plan

was a set of six community goals that were developed in conjunction with United Way of King

County (UWKC) and the King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS).

Additionally, HSD also convinced UWKC and King County DCHS to align all program

outcomes and internal reporting of information "to enhance the efficiency of our contracting and

financing systems."[30] This level of coordination between human service funders is truly

remarkable. While it is still too early to determine the direct impacts of this type of arrangement,

it seems that in this situation a network of human service providers could flourish and learning

might be more achievable.

Another example of coordinated networking has occurred in the city of Ann Arbor, where

the Office of Community Development recently merged with the county, administering both

general city funds and county CDBG funds, and developing merged strategic plans.

Additionally, the Community Collaborative of Washtenaw County (CCWC) was established in

2006, fulfilling the mandate that each Michigan community have a multi-purpose collaborative

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[30] Seattle Human Services Department (2008). "Strategic Investment Plan Update 2008-2010," p. 34.

body (MPCB).[31]   The CCWC is not a service provider or participator in the budget process, but is a collaboration of community initiatives, city, and government agencies that seeks to improve service delivery.   The goal of the CCWC is "to ensure effective coordination of programs which enhance community health and well-being, identify opportunities to change systems and break barriers to effective service delivery, and advocate for systems change and effective resource allocation." In other words, the city of Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County have sought to create a more tightly knit network with common community objectives, in order to achieve more efficiency and greater effectiveness in delivering human services, or as we might frame it, to improve their way of learning through a network.   Similar to the efforts being made in Seattle, these are alternatives of recent reforms in which the effects have yet to be measured, but they provide useful examples of how the OCS might try to conceptualize itself within a network in yet another way to reduce ambiguity in objectives, and improve learning.

Conclusions

To summarize we cite Moynihan: "The gap between dissemination and use occurs in part because of an absence of routines where data is examined and interpreted—learning forums."[32] In order for dialogue routines to be maximally effective, they must be focused on seeking solutions.   Our discussion of the OCS and performance information seeks to provide dialogue routines where OCS can participate in finding solutions, whether through a network of other NAOs in the community, directly working with funded community agencies, or in modifying the communication mechanism with the CSC.   In analyzing these concepts, we use examples from other human services agencies to illustrate their efforts in grappling with similar concerns of how

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[31] http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/community_collaborative/About%20CCWC
[32] Moynihan, p. 167

to effectively utilize performance information. The goal of this analysis was not to dictate how we felt the OCS could use performance management to radically alter decisions regarding resource allocation or to drastically change the role of OCS, but was to provide a mechanism to create learning forums. Obviously, we hope that performance information affects these at least partially, but the fact remains that a "plausible theory of performance budgeting rests on a realistic expectation that performance data informs dialogue but is not deterministic."[33] Ultimately, political concerns, budget constraints, public opinion, and other influences often supersede performance information. Despite this fact, we seek to provide this analysis to illustrate potential options the OCS could use to develop forums for interactive dialogue and modify them based on their expectations, in the pursuit of a means to best maximize the possibility that learning will occur, increasing the effectiveness of all agencies involved.

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[33] Moynihan, p.99

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Appendix A: Key Acronyms

CCWC: Community Collaborative of Washtenaw County
CDBG: Community Development Block Grant
CSC: Community Services Commission
CSD: Community Services Department
DCHS: Department of Community and Human Services
DOC: Department of Corrections
ECCEB: Early Childhood Care and Education Board
HRC: Human Relations Commission
NAO: Network Administrative Organization
OCD: Office of Community Development
OCS: Office of Community Services
OMB: Office of Management and Budget
PART: Program Assessment Rating Tool
SCAC: Senior Citizen's Advisory Committee
SSA: Social Security Administration
UWDC: United Way of Dane County
UWKC: United Way of King County