

Theories of Performance: Organizational and Service Improvement in the Public Domain

By Colin Talbot

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How well do governments do in converting the resources they take from us, like taxes, into services that improve the well-being of individuals, groups, and society as a whole? In other words: how well do they perform?

This question has become increasingly prominent in public debates over the past couple of decades, especially in the developed world but also in developing countries. As the state has grown during the second half of the 20th century, so pressures to justify its role in producing public services have also increased. Governments across the world have implemented all sorts of policies aimed at improving performance.

But how much do we know about what actually improves performance of public organisations and services? On what theories, explicit or more often implicit, are these policies based? The answer is: too much and too little. There are dozens of theories, models, assumptions, and prescriptions about 'what works' in improving performance. But there's been very little attempt to 'join up' theories about performance and make some sense of the evidence we have within a coherent theoretical framework.

This ground-breaking book sets out to begin to fill this gap by creatively synthesising the various fragments and insights about performance into a framework for systematically exploring and understanding how public sector performance is shaped. It focuses on three key aspects: the external 'performance regime' that drives performance of public agencies; the multiple dimensions that drive performance from within; and the competing public values that frame both of these and shape what public expects from public services.

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Theories of Performance: Organizational and Service Improvement in the Public Domain By Colin Talbot Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1502390 in Books
- Published on: 2010-11-19
- Released on: 2010-11-19
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.10" h x .50" w x 9.10" l, .95 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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Editorial Review

Review
Review from previous edition: "Performance management has grown from a narrow technical suburb of public administration into a sprawling city of its own. Colin Talbot provides us with a much-needed A to Z - one which looks into the foundations as well as the superstructures, and which shows how the technicalities link to some of the perennial dilemmas of public policymaking."

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"Colin Talbot takes an issue that is usually buried in narrow administrative and political frameworks and provides the reader with a broader and provocative perspective. This book offers students and practitioners of performance a new and fresh orientation to an important issue."

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"Professor Talbot brings his aptitude for trenchant analysis of policy making and public management to the subject of public sector performance. The result is a compact comparative assessment of performance measurement and management that is a tour de force of theoretical breadth, political insight, practical wisdom, and good judgment. Academics and practitioners alike will find it invaluable."

--Laurence E. Lynn, Jr. University of Texas at Austin

About the Author
Colin Talbot is a recognised international expert on performance in the public sector who has worked with governments, public agencies across many countries including Canada, France, and Japan. He has recently been involved in two Prime Minister's seminars in the U.K. . He's been a specialist adviser to two select committees in Westminster (Treasury and Public Administration) and, uniquely, given expert evidence to committees of all four parliaments in the U.K. . He has advised the National Audit Office on all their major performance studies over the past decade. He is currently professor of public policy and management at Manchester Business School, where he founded the Herbert Simon Institute for public policy and management. He has authored or edited five previous books, numerous academic articles and is a regular media commentator including for the Financial Times, Guardian, and B.B.C. . He's also the author of the influential Whitehall Watch blog

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