

Using Multiple Informants in Public Administration: Revisiting the Managerial Values and Actions Debate

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ABSTRACT

Evidence is presented from a large-*n* longitudinal survey of multiple informants to address some of the weaknesses of the extant literature, namely the use of “elite,” recall, and snapshot surveys together with the direction of causality in statistical models. These weaknesses are illustrated through a first time analysis of variations in management reform values and actions in local government. The empirical results indicate that management reform values and actions are contingent and vary between organizational members. In particular, service managers (first-line supervisors) responsible for implementing management reform actions offer more multifaceted explanations than senior executives. Prior research drawing evidence from single senior executive informants was unable to identify such variations; consequently, it is suggested that the results of this work need to be treated with caution. This study concludes that the empirical reality of management reform research is in need of further and more sophisticated methodologies.

Survey evidence in public administration research has typically been drawn from single informants. This is the case in the managerial values and actions debate that seeks to provide evidence on the extent of, and reasons for, the adoption of administrative reforms that have swept across governments in the USA and elsewhere in the world (Light 1997; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000). The main purpose of this article is to address some of the methodological limitations of prior research in this field (some method aspects were recently debated by Brudney and Wright [2002], Calista [2002], and Thompson [2002]) by presenting evidence from a multiple informant survey on the internal and external factors affecting the adoption and diffusion of management reform. While prior research has identified tensions between managerial values and actions, it has been unable to explicitly

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examine interrelationships. These methodological deficiencies are illustrated through an empirical exploration of organizational members who support management reform values and actions, together with an examination of previously untested relationships between different groups of organization members.

The article is structured as follows. In the following section we define management reform and discuss tensions between universal and contingent approaches to their study. Evidence on the adoption and diffusion of management reforms, together with some methodological limitations of past studies, are then discussed. The methods of data collection used in this study are then outlined. Discussion of the differences between values and actions follow in the next section. We then move on to discuss the dependent and independent variables employed in this study. Findings are subsequently reported and conclusions drawn. The conclusions highlight significant differences in values and actions within public organizations and draw attention to previously unidentified variations between different organizational members. This study was able to uncover these variations through a first time use, in management reform research, of a longitudinal multiple informant survey design.

UNIVERSALISM AND CONTINGENCY IN MANAGEMENT REFORMS

Management reforms are concerned with the deliberate introduction of innovative programs of reform, typically bundles of metrics rather than individual interventions, that could be new to one organization or one part of the public sector and that seek to change the arrangements for the delivery and design of services (Boyne et al. 2003). The hypothesis of this study is that management reform values and actions are contingent and will vary between organizational members.

This approach is adopted because—while a number of scholars have sought to define management reform, be it the North American model of reinvention or the version bottled in the UK and continental Europe as New Public Management, as changes to the internal and external characteristics of organizations (Hood 1991; Thompson and Riccucci 1998)—at its most extreme this approach to the study of management reform seeks a universal solution to the problems of public organizations (OECD 1995). If we take the example of the improvement metric total quality management (TQM), its proponents argue that its three central techniques (customer focus, continuous improvement, and team working) need to be fully and simultaneously implemented to deliver improvement in organizations; half-hearted approaches are likely to result in failure. Such universal approaches imply that there is only one right way to reform public service organizations. Research evidence, however, suggests otherwise. The prescriptions of management theory, including public management theory (O’Toole and Meier 1999), are often contingent rather than universal, arguing that the same organizational strategy may succeed or fail in different organizational contexts (Cotton et al. 1988). In seeking to explain management reform it is necessary to take account of the complexity, uncertainty, and munificence of the internal and external context (Benson, Saraph, and Schroeder 1991; Prescott 1986). Boyne and Walker’s (2002) review of the evidence on TQM comes to similar conclusions; it is not clear which parts of this improvement metric work in which conditions or what improvement is consistently achieved. On the basis of this evidence, universal approaches are problematic and the case for contingency perspectives strong.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON MANAGEMENT REFORMS

Evidence on Factors Influencing Values and Actions

To date there are only a limited number of studies that seek to empirically explain management reform. They examine the reinventing government movement in the USA at the state (Brudney, Herbert, and Wright 1999; Brudney and Wright 2002) and municipal level (Moon and deLeon 2001; Kearney, Feldman, and Scavo 2000; Kearney and Scavo 2002). The research by Brudney and colleagues explores actions, while the work of Kearney and others and Moon and deLeon examines values and actions. These studies broadly conclude that values are determined by the characteristics of administrators and size while action is explained by values (or the extent of reinvention actions), size, and economic growth.

Kearney's studies with others conclude that the values of public managers are determined by two city manager characteristics (International City Managers Association [ICMA] membership and new appointees) and the organizational characteristic of size (measured by financial resources and number of full-time employees). Moon and deLeon (2001) note that while city managers hold reinvention values many still believe government to be distinctive and are concerned about the accountability and effectiveness impact of reinvention. The values of chief administrators are shown to influence actions (in the case of Brudney and colleagues, it is the level of reinvention across the state that influences actions), as is the size of the organization. Larger organizations are more likely to implement and take action on management reform. However, the evidence is unclear on other variables. For example, the studies offer contradictory evidence on the role of political ideology. The results in Brudney, Herbert, and Wright's state agency study indicate that conservatively minded administrator's are more likely to implement reforms, whereas Moon and deLeon's study noted that more liberal managers promoted reform ahead of their conservative counterparts. Moon and deLeon (2001) found that higher levels of unionization were likely to hinder the reinvention effort, whereas unionization was not significant in the other studies. Of the external variables explored in the studies economic conditions, growth regions, and/or areas with good economic health were significant predictors in the local government studies.

Methodological Issues

Methods for the research of management reform became a controversial issue following an edition of *Public Administration Review* in 2002. Brudney, Herbert, and Wright's (1999) methodology and their interpretation was taken to task by Calista (2002), retorted by Brudney and Wright (2002), and mediated by Thompson (2002). Calista's methods critique was focused upon sample selection, response rate by state, and anonymity and confidentiality issues. Brudney and Wright's (2002) response clearly addressed the methodological concerns, though Thompson's critique of their interpretation as the glass half empty rather than his of half full was both powerful and convincing. This debate raised a number of important issues in survey research and quantitative analysis. There remain, however, a number of critical points about the way in which the limited number of surveys of management reform have been designed and implemented. As a result, we present our concerns based upon the practice of "elite" surveys, the use of recall, the direction of causality, and the use of snapshot surveys before going on to outline the research strategy adopted for this study in the next section. An "elite" survey approach (collecting data from

single informants, usually state agency directors or city administrators/managers) was adopted in the existing empirical papers.¹

Elite surveying has been justified elsewhere on the grounds that chief executive officers possess the best vantage point for viewing the entire organization (Snow and Hrebiniak 1980) or because of the complexity of surveying multiple informants (Whittington et al. 1999). However, empirical evidence suggests that data collected from single informants may not be reliable (Phillips 1981) and that chief executive officers are better placed to discuss the future intentions of an organization (Bowman and Ambrosini 1997).

All the empirical papers ask administrators/respondents to recall implementation of, or recommendations for, action. Recall is, however, an unreliable instrument. Golden's (1992) analysis of strategy stance by hospital CEOs demonstrates that over a two-year period 58 percent were unable to correctly recall their prior assessment. Furthermore, these retrospective accounts varied by performance, degree of organizational change and financial circumstances, suggesting that such variables would need to be built into statistical models that use recall. Administrators/respondents in the reinvention studies are asked to comment on actions over the last four to five years. Yet readers are unaware of whether the chief administrator or agency head held this post during the period in question, and no evidence is presented to test for variation in executive succession.

The reliance upon recall also raises an interesting question about the direction of causality in the studies using the ICMA dataset. Values were recorded at the time of the snapshot survey (which was conducted during 1997 and 1998). City managers were asked about their actions over the previous five years. The use of values as an independent variable in the actions model implies a causal direction thus: values → actions. Given that actions were recorded prior to values, at worst the actual relationship is reversed or at best is uncertain. It is plausible to hypothesize this relationship as iterative and nonlinear. However, these ICMA studies did not set out to test this interesting hypothesis. Brudney, Hebert, and Wright's 1994 survey was repeated in 1998, and percentage support for the extent of the implementation of reinvention features was subsequently presented. However, no analysis of change over time was provided (Brudney and Wright 2002).

DATA COLLECTION

Given these methodological concerns, this study was designed using a longitudinal survey drawing upon responses from multiple informants within English local government. All councils operate in a specific local geographical area, have elected members, and employ professional career staff. The majority of councils operate a Westminster style cabinet system with scrutiny committees, though a very small number have elected mayors. English councils receive grants (which account for around three-quarters of their income) and guidance on the implementation of legislation from central government, though they have discretion in the scope of their service delivery. In urban areas authorities deliver education, housing management, leisure and culture, revenues and benefits, planning, social services, and waste management; while comprehensive they are not all-purpose (for example health is provided by health authorities). Rural areas operate a two-tier system

¹ Brudney, Herbert, and Wright (1999) and Moon and deLeon (2001) discuss administrators; Kearney, Feldman, and Scavo (2000) talk of respondents and managers. Respondents give information on themselves as individuals. Informants report their perceptions and judgments about particular organizational characteristics (Anderson 1987). In this study we use the term "informants."

with county councils administering education and social services and district councils providing environmental, welfare, and regulatory functions. Variation in purpose reflects variations in size: the smallest district authority serves a population of 25,000 and the largest, a county, 1.3 million. The mean is 187,000.

The survey was designed to explore values, actions, and drivers of public service improvement. Data were collected in the summer of 2001 and 2002 among 101 of the 388 municipalities in England. This sample of municipalities was selected to be representative of all English local government by current performance, deprivation, geographical location, and authority type. The survey instrument was piloted in seventeen English municipalities representative of location and type and was sent to 378 informants. The pilot tested survey questions and methods of delivery. Three methods were used: a traditional postal survey, an Internet survey, and a survey sent by e-mail. Results indicated that an e-mail-based survey was the most acceptable method to informants (see Enticott 2003). E-mail addresses were collected from participating municipalities, and questionnaires were delivered as an Excel file attached to an e-mail. The electronic questionnaires were self-coding and converted to SPSS format for analysis. Informants had eight weeks to answer the questions within the file, save it, and return by e-mail. During the survey period, three reminders were sent to informants yet to complete it.² Confidentiality was emphasized in all electronic communication, as in the Brudney, Hebert, and Wright study.

In order to explain potential variations between different groups of organizational members, data were collected from corporate officers, chief officers, and service managers.³ Potential informants were, therefore, identified according to their level of management or role within each municipality. These roles were identified because they reflected critical positions that could influence the direction of management reform to embrace informants who were variously responsible for developing, translating, and implementing values and actions within their respective municipalities. (In the remainder of the article we refer to these role groups as *corporate*, *chief officer*, and *service manager*.)

In each municipality, questionnaires were sent to up to three corporate informants and chief officers and three service managers in the seven services discussed above. The total population in each year was 1,889 (2001) and 1,833 (2002) with a maximum of thirty questionnaires sent to municipalities in either year. The maximum number of responses received from any one municipality was twenty-three in 2001 and twenty-one in 2002. This variation can be attributed to a number of factors. First, in nonunitary municipalities (district and county councils), service functions are split between them. Second, in municipalities where whole service functions have been externalized (e.g., housing management), no response was received. Third, some municipalities have combined two or more services into one in which specific roles become indistinguishable. Response rates from individual informants in 2001 were 1,101 (response rate of 63.41 percent) and 1,198 in 2002 (response rate 65.36 percent).

Datasets from 2001 and 2002 were combined within SPSS for longitudinal analysis. Data were matched according to levels of management or roles. By combining individual

² There were no statistical differences between early and late informants.

³ Corporate officers included the chief executive officer, or head of paid service, and corporate policy directors with cross-organizational responsibilities for service improvement. Chief officers are the most senior officers with specific service delivery responsibility. They include Director of Social Services and Directors of Waste Management. Service officers are first-line supervisors and include Head of School Organization and Planning, Head of Business Efficiency, and Head of Benefits and Revenues.

Table 1
Matched Role Responses

	2001 Role Responses (<i>n</i>)	2002 Role Responses (<i>n</i>)	Combined 2001 and 2002 Data Role Responses (<i>n</i>)
Corporate	99	94	76
Chief officers	334	303	171
Service managers	366	392	241
Total	799	789	488

informants' responses into roles, the 2001 survey provided 789 cases and 799 were obtained in 2002 (table 1). In matching data from 2001 and 2002, the number of cases on which this analysis is based upon is 488 (table 1).⁴ Attrition can be attributed to losses incurred when matching data from the two years when there were responses in just one year and from missing data.

MEASURING VALUES AND ACTIONS

This study seeks to explain managerial values and actions and variations between them in English local government through the use of a multiple informant method. While the items used in the prior surveys conformed to the reinventing government project, ours reflect the UK Labour government's local government modernization agenda (LGMA) (DETR 1998). The overall objectives of the LGMA are to improve services, to increase the accountability of local government, and to increase public participation and confidence in it. The survey instrument focused on the service improvement branch of this reform strategy, a performance improvement regime that expects continuous improvement in cost effectiveness and service standards (DETR 1998). Improvement is to be achieved by internal organizational processes including corporate management; consultation with stakeholders, users, and citizens; establishing the competitiveness of services; comparisons through techniques including benchmarking; challenging and questioning service requirements; and strategic plans outlining routes to improved performance (DETR 1998).

Nonetheless, the service improvement reforms are not dissimilar to those used in the reinventing government movement in the USA. They emphasize changes in values by promoting new organizational cultures and actions by encouraging change to structure, process, and strategy content (Boyne, Martin, and Walker forthcoming). Analysis of the LGMA, and its service improvement facets in particular, reveals that a range of new activities and metrics for improvement are being explored (Boyne, Martin, and Walker forthcoming; Newman 2001). Changes to the internal organization include the development of performance management regimes and supportive information systems, the use of various quality techniques to promote continuous improvement, decentralization of decision making and structures, entrepreneurial behavior and new methods of raising income,

4 Eighteen value and action variables are used in the subsequent analysis. There were only two statistically significant variations ($p < .05$) between the 488 matched role responses and those obtained in the sample: (1) the service welcomes private sector involvement and partnership ($n = 488$ and mean = 4.1; $n = 229$ and mean = 4.4) and (2) the authority's mission, values, and objectives are clearly and widely understood and owned by all staff in the service ($n = 488$ and mean = 4.6; $n = 231$ and mean = 4.8). The cases used in analysis are broadly, rather than entirely, representative of all informants.

and cultural change programs associated with continuous improvement, innovation, risk taking, and public private partnerships. Changes to the external organization embrace working in partnership with users and stakeholders in the creation of strategy and a variety of partnership working to jointly provide services in conjunction with external agencies or to contract out or outsource service delivery to other providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors (DETR 2000a).

Table 2 presents the management reform categories together with the self-identified values and actions, the way in which values apply to actions, their means, and variations between means. (Informants completed seven point Likert scales for all questions 1 = disagree → 7 = agree). Table 2 clearly illustrates tensions between values and actions and uneven adoption (see Moon and deLeon 2001). While values are all above the mean, two of the nine action items have a mean score below four, and seven have a lower mean than their corresponding value. Indeed, the scores for values exceed actions in all but one case; role informants believe that they are more able to implement corporate approaches (5.4) than their values (4.6) would suggest. Scores for partnership values and actions are tied (5.3). T-tests results support these observations, revealing that in seven out of nine cases, values are statistically different from actions ($p < .05$).

EXPLAINING VARIATIONS IN ACTIONS AND VALUES

Dependent Variables

Two dependent variables are employed in this study. First, an index of management reform values was created based upon the nine statements listed in table 2 (model 1). The range for responses to the values index can run from a minimum of nine to a maximum score of 63 with a mid-point of 36. The second model employs the dependent variable action: the extent to which the actions form part of the informant roles' approach. The additive scale for the dependent variable range is the same as for model 1. In specifying two models with values data recorded in 2001 and actions in 2002, we thereby test values → actions causality.

These two models are first tested on the all informant datasets and seek to provide a more sophisticated analysis than that which was available through elite surveys. Table 3 confirms the positive attitude towards management reform values noted in table 2. A mean of 45.10 is reported for values, with a high point of 62 and a low of 24. (This model 1 variable is included as an independent variable in model 2.) The mean score for management reform actions (40.93) was below that for values in model 1, the maximum rises to 60. Unlike model 1, some role informants scored the minimum of 9.

A further set of statistical tests were undertaken to challenge the notion that lead administrators, as the key informants, are the best source of evidence on management reform. Models 1 and 2 were, therefore, run on the corporate, chief officer, and service manager datasets to examine the explanations offered by different role groups. The descriptive data presented in table 3 immediately draws attention to variations in values and actions between leaders and followers. Corporate officers display lower levels of values (42.56) than their counterparts. In contrast, service managers who are responsible for implementing actions express least support towards actions in models 2. Chief officers distinguish themselves by offering the highest means in models 1 and 2 (46.84 and 42.67 respectively). The results of an Anova test between corporate, chief officer, and service manager roles indicates that they were significant at $p < .001$ for each model.

Table 2
Management Reform Categories, Values, Actions, Means, and Variations

Management Reform Category	Value Statements (2001)	Applies	Action Statements (2002)	Values Mean	Actions Mean	T-test Significance
Competition	The service welcomes private-sector involvement and partnership	→	Contracting out or outsourcing	4.1	3.8	-.000
Continuous improvement	There is a strong focus on continuous improvement in our service	→	New approaches to improvement	5.6	4.7	-.000
Corporateness	The authority's mission, values, and objectives are clearly and widely understood and owned by all staff in the service	→	Enhanced coordination and joint working with other departments	4.6	5.4	.000
Customer focused	Most managers place the needs of users first and foremost when planning and delivering services	→	Working more closely with our users	5.5	5.3	-.011
Devolution to the front line	Control is devolved to service managers	→	Decentralization	5.1	3.1	-.000
Innovation	The authority/service is at the forefront of innovative approaches		Providing new services to new users	4.9	4.0	-.000
Entrepreneurial behavior	The service is prepared to take risks where appropriate	→	Developing new methods of raising income	4.7	4.2	-.000
Partnership	Strategy is made in consultation with our external stakeholders	→	Developing local strategic partnerships	5.3	5.3	-.634
Performance measurement	There is a well-developed framework of clear performance measurement and targets to drive what we do	→	The introduction of new management information systems	5.2	5.2	.509

Note: *N* = 488.

Table 3
Descriptive Data for the Dependent Variables

	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Model 1: Values</i>					
Corporate	76	42.56	7.35	24.00	57.00
Chief officers	171	46.84	6.25	25.00	62.00
Service managers	241	44.66	8.53	24.00	59.00
All	488	45.10	6.66	24.00	62.00
<i>Model 2: Actions</i>					
Corporate	76	41.86	6.32	22.00	57.00
Chief officers	171	42.87	8.08	9.00	58.00
Service managers	241	39.26	8.53	14.00	60.00
All	488	40.93	8.23	9.00	60.00

Influences on Reform Values and Action

In illustrating the utility of a multiple informant methodology, our analysis seeks to explain management reform values and actions, and variations therein, by focusing upon six groups of explanatory variables, *leadership* (political and managerial), *external stakeholders* (placed on services by regulators and auditors and users), *learning and support* (opportunities offered by professional networks and the support offered by other agencies), *vertical influence* (the way in which government policies affect and drive services), *organizational factors* (resources and budget), and *context* (deprivation).

Leadership Characteristics

The role of leadership is frequently cited as a central factor driving organizational improvements (Boyne and Dahya 2002; Ingraham and Donahue 2000). Two variables have been used to identify leadership in this study. Ackroyd, Hughes, and Soothill (1989) defined managerial leadership in public organizations as “custodial management” where leaders seek to improve standards of service provision. This definition has clear parallels with the service improvement theme in the LGMA. Terry (1995) argues that the central role of managerial leadership in the public sector is to promote the public interest. One of the key findings of Brudney, Herbert, and Wright’s (1999, 27) study is that “leadership and management do make a difference” because they are able to influence the adoption of improvement strategies. Managerial leadership in local government is integrally linked to political leadership. Though fashion may promote the separation of policy formulation and implementation (Stewart 1996), Svava (1998, 57) concludes, “City managers can and should contribute to strengthening democratic leadership by a representative council, and elected officials can and should support professionalism in government.” Furthermore, in order to ensure that bureaucratic managers do not become egotists, seeking to enhance their own self-interest above the public interest, it is argued that managers and politicians need to work together (Boyne 1998). It is, therefore, hypothesized that the leadership function of both politicians and managers will have a positive impact on the adoption of management reforms values and actions. To answer these hypotheses, we asked informants to what extent they agreed that political leadership and managerial leadership were important in driving improvement. Data were collected on a 7-point Likert scale

(1 = disagree → 7 = agree). The mean for political leadership was 4.69 (SD = 1.43) and 5.78 for managerial leadership (SD = 0.96).

External Stakeholders

In this study we explore two groups of key external stakeholders who are likely to strongly influence the adoption of innovative programs of management reform, users and citizens and auditors and inspectors. Prior research in English local government cites the expectations of users and citizens as an important driver of innovation (Young 1996), a sentiment strongly emphasized in the LGMA. Current research shows how these expectations have been translated into practice through a range of new approaches including citizen's juries, citizen's panels, and select committees (Newman, Raine, and Skelcher 2001). These mechanisms ensure that the views of users' and citizens' are taken on board. To support the hypothesis that users' and citizens' views will positively affect management reform, values and actions data were collected from informants on their importance in driving improvement on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = disagree → 7 = agree). The mean for users' and citizens' demands was 5.24 (SD = 1.11).

As governments seek to ensure that public organizations remain accountable (Stone 1995) so audit and regulation have grown (Pollitt et al. 1999; Power 1997). Though regulation may in practice be plagued with problems that include resistance, compliance, capture, and performance ambiguity, the mechanisms open to regulators—which include the processes of audit and inspection together with plans, financial controls, and the use of performance indicators—mean that they are able to positively exert control over public organizations and influence their approaches to service delivery (Ashworth, Boyne, and Walker 2002). We, therefore, hypothesized that the role of auditors and inspectors will positively affect values and actions. The mean response of informants to the question on the role of auditors and inspectors was 4.78 (SD = 1.52).

Learning and Support

The innovation literature presents cogent arguments on the role of supportive or learning networks to facilitate the adoption of new ways of working as organizations borrow from one another. The borrowing of ideas and learning from others may occur for two reasons (Berry and Berry 1999). First, borrowing offers decision makers shortcuts. Second, taking ideas from elsewhere allows organizational strategies that have proven effective elsewhere to be selected. Professional networks across agencies in the voluntary, public, and private sectors offer opportunities to develop new ideas and to spread new practices among peers. This study examines two aspects of this. The first hypothesis is that professional networks will have a positive effect on values and actions, and the second that the level of support offered by external agencies will also have a positive effect on values and actions. Informants were asked to indicate their responses on a 7-point Likert scale. The mean score for networks was 4.24 (SD = 1.39) and 3.99 for support from other agencies (SD = 1.41).

Vertical Influence

In a unitary political system, such as that in England, where legislation is developed requiring management reforms to be implemented, it would be expected that the adoption of management reform actions would be high (Boyne and Walker 2002) and thus relatively uninteresting (Berry and Berry 1999). While there is widespread evidence to indicate that the policies of government are not automatically adopted and are on occasion rejected

(Young 1996), the available evidence on the LGMA in England suggests that it received widespread political support and was pragmatically supported by Labour, Liberal, and Conservative municipalities alike (Newman 2001; Newman, Raine, and Skelcher 2001). Consequently, it is hypothesized that the vertical influence of government and its policies are a major positive factor affecting values and actions. Each informant assessed the influence of central government policies as a driver of improvement (1 = disagree → 7 = agree). Informants' assessment of the influence of government policies indicates that they are quite important drivers of improvement (mean 5.43, SD = 1.26).

Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity, including variables such as fiscal health and size, has long been established as having influences on organizations. Resources allow an organization to afford to purchase innovations, absorb failure, bear the costs of instituting the innovation, and explore new ideas in advance of an actual need (Rosner 1968). Indeed, new ways of working often require additional staff and extra resources (Cyert and March 1963). In relation to the adoption of one improvement metric, Berry (1994) suggests that organizations with abundant resources are more likely to adopt innovative practices than cash-strapped ones who have no resources for innovation. Similarly we hypothesize that financial resources will positively affect management reform values and action. We use expenditure, rather than budget, to explore this hypothesis because it is a more accurate measure of financial resources. Mean expenditure was £309.929 million (in 2001–02) and the SD was £249.041 million (minimum = £5.838 million; maximum = £1,535.418 million; CIPFA 2002).

Our second measure of capacity is organizational resources. Some literature claims that there is no relationship between organizational size and innovation (Utterbeck 1974). In contrast, empirical studies have noted the importance of organizational size where large organizations are more likely to adopt new ways of working than smaller ones (Damanpour 1991). This is typically because large organizations have greater opportunity for cross-fertilization of ideas and a range of skills, which facilitates the adoption of new ways of working (e.g., Meyer and Goes 1988; Rogers 1995). Organizational resources are hypothesized to affect positively the adoption of values and actions. English local government is provided by either unitary municipalities or a two-tier system. In the two-tier system education and social services are the primary services provided by the upper-tier counties, with lower tier districts providing services including housing, planning, environmental health, leisure, and benefits and revenues. Unitary authorities provide the range. The two types of organization are therefore associated with a different range of internal resources and skills. Organizational resource is measured by a dummy variable (0 = not unitary/1 = unitary).

Context

Extensive prior research has examined the influence of external factors over the behavior of public organization (Pettigrew, Ferlie, and McKee 1992; Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). One central issue to emerge time and time again is the level of deprivation faced by a public organization. It is hypothesized and demonstrated in the international literature that the more demanding the circumstances an organization faces the harder it will be for it to achieve its objectives and in turn to improve services (Davies and Ferlie 1982). The prior research on the adoption of management reform in municipalities indicated that growth

regions or economic prosperity was associated with the adoption of management reform actions (Kearney, Feldman, and Scavo 2000; Kearney and Scavo 2001; Moon and deLeon 2001). In this study the “degree of difficulty” is hypothesized to affect negatively the values and actions of municipalities. The measure adopted in this study is the Index of Multiple Deprivation (DETR 2000b). This combines six factors (employment, income, health deprivation and disability, education skills and learning, housing, and geographical access to services) to provide an index of deprivation. The least deprived municipality scored 4.89 and the most deprived 58.22 (mean 27.21; SD = 11.84).

FINDINGS

The statistical results of the OLS multiple-regression for the all informants dataset are presented in table 4. The table indicates that different factors explain values and actions. Model 1 accounts for 27.7 percent (R^2) of the variation in values. Values are explained by managerial leadership, the demands of users, professional networks (though weakly at $p < .10$), support from other agencies, and the organizational capacity measures of organizational and financial resources together with deprivation (through weakly at $p < .10$).

Two of the hypothesized relationships are not in the predicted direction—government policy (which is not significant) and the action of auditors and inspectors. Contrary to our expectations the actions of auditors and inspectors do not positively affect values; rather they work against their attitudes. A number of possible explanations of this finding present themselves. First, managers may be hostile to the intervention of outside bodies, preferring to be seen to choose their own values. Second, the ability of the regulator may be in doubt, particularly if informants perceive their expertise to improve services above that of the regulator (Boyne, Day, and Walker 2002). Third, there are a growing number of regulators with an interest in local government in England. It is, therefore, possible to hypothesize that they may offer different prescriptions, thereby confusing managers. In short, better-resourced organizations, in more deprived areas who listen to their users (but not their inspectors), network with their peers, and identify strong managerial leadership are more likely to express stronger management reform values.

The second column of table 4 shows the results for the actions model. The R^2 in this model is a little more modest at 12.6 percent. All relationships are in the hypothesized direction except networks and deprivation. Only the latter variable is significant, suggesting that the more affluent a municipality the more likely it is to implement management reform actions. Financial resources are weakly significant ($p < .10$). The strongest explanation of action is provided by values. The direction for government policies is positive in model 2 and significant in explaining actions. Taken together these results indicate that management reforms are most likely to be turned into practice where strong management reform values are expressed in more deprived municipalities and where the municipality is attuned to the expectations of government.

To explore variations between values and actions among different groups of organizational members, table 5 presents the results of models 1 and 2 for corporate, chief officer, and service manager roles. The results demonstrate that variations exist between the factors that drive management reform values and actions and offer different explanations for different categories of informant. These findings present a further level of subtlety not previously available.

Table 4
Explaining Management Reform Values and Actions: All Informants Dataset

	Model 1 Values	Model 2 Actions
Political leadership	.016 (0.368)	.066 (1.425)
Managerial leadership	.349*** (8.091)	.037 (0.729)
Actions of inspectors and auditors	-.136*** (-3.264)	.010 (0.222)
Demands of users	.242*** (5.532)	.059 (1.196)
Networks	.074* (1.709)	-.003 (-0.590)
Support from other agencies	.117** (2.875)	.073 (1.625)
Government policies	-.070 (-1.636)	.107** (2.256)
Organizational resources	.105** (2.415)	.016 (0.328)
Financial resources	.098** (2.476)	.72* (1.650)
Deprivation	-.81* (-1.842)	.149** (3.076)
Values (model 1 dependent variable)		.166*** (3.295)
Adjusted R^2	.277	.126
N	488	488

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Managerial leadership and the demands of users were statistically significant factors influencing the values of all roles in model 1 (table 5). For corporate officers, these were the only factors. If these results were the only ones obtained from this group of informants (as in prior research) the evidence base would indicate that management reform values in municipalities are based upon listening to users and managerial leadership. However, chief officer roles ($b = .379$) and service manager roles ($b = .325$) attach greater importance to managerial leadership than corporate officers ($b = .318$) though the demands of users are felt most by corporate officers ($b = .361$).

In moving down one tier of the organizational hierarchy to chief officers, a more complex picture of the factors affecting values emerges. In addition to managerial leadership and users' demands, management reform values are more cogently expressed in affluent authorities (financial resources and deprivation; $p < .10$) that work in supportive external environments (support from other agencies) and reject the influence of government policies ($p < .10$). Service managers' responses offer similar results but do not report statistical significance for government policies or deprivation (though the results run in the predicted direction); they do for both the learning and support variables. Though the direction for the actions of auditors and inspectors runs in the opposite direction for all service groups, it is only significant among service managers.

Explanations of actions similarly vary between groups of managers. Model 2 gives a moderate R^2 of 18.9 percent for corporate officers, 15.4 percent for chief officers, and 9.1 percent for service managers. For corporate officers, none of the independent variables is statistically significant. Notable is the lack of significance accorded to values, and a similar result is reported in the chief officer model. Chief officers' actions are influenced by the external environment, support from other agencies, and levels of deprivation. The results of service managers, in contrast, are statistically significant for values. Their actions are also based upon government policies (weakly significant at $p < .10$) and lower levels of deprivation. These findings suggest that the nearer to the front line, where the strategies and policies of organizations are implemented, the more likely are the policies of central

Table 5
Exploring Variations in Values and Actions Among Organizational Members

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Corporate	Chief Officer	Service Officer	Corporate	Chief Officer	Service Officer
Political leadership	.027 (-0.203)	.054 (0.729)	.008 (0.136)	.172 (1.248)	.077 (-0.975)	.106 (1.567)
Managerial leadership	.318* (2.871)	.379*** (5.072)	.325*** (4.895)	.016 (0.126)	.134 (1.560)	.010 (0.126)
Actions of inspectors and auditors	-.148 (-1.320)	-.087 (-1.195)	-.152** (-2.380)	.096 (0.800)	.092 (1.185)	-.073 (-1.035)
Demands of users	.361*** (2.977)	.179** (2.310)	.219*** (3.489)	.150 (1.103)	.027 (0.324)	.058 (0.814)
Networks	.120 (0.935)	-.017 (-0.223)	.134** (2.186)	.028 (0.203)	.051 (0.622)	-.005 (-0.079)
Support from other agencies	-.005 (-0.049)	.233** (3.219)	.104* (1.748)	.104 (0.958)	.171** (2.152)	.042 (0.637)
Government policies	-.110 (-0.999)	-.143* (-1.726)	-.024 (-0.403)	.122 (1.048)	.070 (0.787)	.112* (1.690)
Organizational resources	.062 (0.501)	.121 (1.599)	.069 (1.091)	.118 (0.901)	-.009 (-.112)	.013 (0.193)
Financial resources	.072 (0.696)	.119* (1.730)	.104* (1.815)	.054 (0.496)	.112 (1.649)	.068 (1.074)
Deprivation	.041 (0.361)	-.148* (-1.914)	-.065 (-1.013)	.120 (0.990)	.171** (2.053)	.172** (2.457)
Values (model 1 dependent variable)				.112 (0.858)	.109 (1.299)	.181** (2.509)
Adjusted R ²	.272	.254	.245	.189	.154	.091
N	76	171	241	76	171	241

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

government and low levels of deprivation to influence the adoption of management reform actions.

In sum, different factors explain managerial values and actions at different levels within public organizations. The results support our hypothesis that managerial values and action are contingent and vary between organizational members. In model 1 two coefficients were statistically significant for the corporate role and six for each of the chief officer and service manager. In model 2 no coefficients were significant for corporate officers, two for chief officers, and three for service managers. The substantial variation offered as one descends the organizational hierarchy is hypothesized to be a product of rhetoric. Managers may promote management reforms—their values were consistently higher than their actions (tables 2 and 3)—but quite clearly they do not act as they preach, perhaps encouraging others to implement reforms that do not express congruence with the espoused values. Or senior managers may be more pragmatic, promoting actions that do not strongly relate to their values. Institutional theory offers a possible explanation for these results. In seeking to maintain legitimacy, municipalities may deliberately create inconsistencies between values and actions to satisfy a variety of stakeholders. Brunsson (1989, 7) argues, “The way management presents the organization and its goals to the outside world need not agree with the signals conveyed to the workforce.” In short, municipalities may be good at talking the management reform talk but not acting the management reform action.

CONCLUSIONS

While governments have been promoting programs of management reform to change the outlook of public servants and improve services, their activities have not been informed by empirical tests indicating the extent of, and reasons for, adoption. This is the first longitudinal evaluation of management reform values and actions, and it builds upon the concerns of scholars in the field that more direct studies with more valid and reliable datasets are undertaken (Moon and deLeon 2001, 347). This study sought to improve upon the quality of the data presented in prior research by surveying multiple informants through real time, thereby overcoming problems in recall and causality and by making explicit links between values and actions. The study has, therefore, contributed to methodological debates and empirically illustrated the limitations of prior work in this field.

The study confirmed the findings of earlier research that management reform values are more widely held than implemented. It found that when we seek to explain values, they are likely to be higher in municipalities that are (1) deprived, (2) better resourced, (3) user responsive, (4) networked, and (5) influenced by strong managerial leadership. Management reform actions are seen in municipalities that (1) are less deprived, (2) are better resourced, (3) display high levels of management reform values, and (4) respond to government policy. The inference is that public organizations simultaneously hold values that differ from their actions in the process of maintaining and securing organizational legitimacy. This evidence did not emerge in prior research because of the reliance on elite surveys using cross-sectional techniques. Our examination of different groups of organizational members supported this conclusion and our hypothesis that management reform values and actions vary by organizational member. Service managers responsible for implementing management reform actions offer more multifaceted explanations than higher levels of managers. The implication is that the empirical management reform

evidence previously presented needs to be treated with caution—it does not necessarily paint an accurate picture, and if researchers persist in using elite cross-sectional surveys, they will deliver overly simplistic conclusions.

Though we have presented new empirical evidence on the complex ways that management reform values and actions are adopted within municipalities, the approach of this study needs to be replicated in other situations. Additional work is needed to explore other contingency effects (e.g., types of public services, regulatory regimes, and external contexts) and in different settings (government institutions, levels of government, and countries). Actual evidence of management reform actions, which was beyond the scope of this illustrative paper, is required in others studies. The major challenge remains to develop more sophisticated methodologies to study the empirical realities of management reform.

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