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Democratic Subjectivities in Network Governance:
A Q methodology study of English and Dutch public managers[1]

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Abstract

Network forms of governance offer public managers considerable agency in shaping the ways through which they engage with citizens, civil society organisations and other actors on matters of public policy and services. This Q methodology study of public managers in England and the Netherlands offers new insights into how public managers understand these relationships. It reveals five perspectives. Pragmatists have little concern for democracy, and see networks as a means to get on with their work. Realists regard networks as one of a number of arenas in which the politics of public policy is played out. Adaptors are committed to representative democracy, but think that network governance will sometimes offer advantages of greater inclusiveness and flexibility. Optimists are positive about the democratic benefits of network governance: progressive optimists think that it will fill the gap between the theory and practice of representative democracy, while radical optimists focus on its potential for enabling direct dialogue between citizens and public managers. Q methodology offers a valuable tool for enhancing the rigour and transparency of research into public administration, generating findings that contribute to the task of explaining the relationships between governance discourses, the agency of actors, and the production and reproduction of institutional forms.

INTRODUCTION

The development of post-bureaucratic institutional arrangements for public governance and management opens up the possibility for greater agency by public managers – but what understandings about democracy do they bring to this role, and how can these understanding be accessed? Research on the role of public managers under new public management and network governance regimes shows that they are certainly able to shape, and sometimes able to determine, the institutional designs through which public policy is negotiated and realised (Feldman and Khademian 2007; Newman 2005; Vangen and Huxham 2003). Significantly, this also includes the exercise of administrative discretion over aspects of the design that have consequences for democratic performance, including forms of interaction with citizens and publics, board composition, and structures for transparency and accountability (Barnes, Newman, Knops and Sullivan 2003; Skelcher, Mathur and Smith 2005). There is also a normative literature that promotes new forms of relationship between public managers and citizens (Bogason, Kensen and Miller 2002; Box 2002).

However there is a major gap in knowledge about how public managers themselves construct their role as actors in a democratic arena. For example, do they think that networks, partnerships and other extra-representative forms offer a way of enhancing

democracy by including citizens and special interests that would otherwise be excluded from the policy process? Or do public managers, drawing on their traditional role as servants of elected politicians, regard them as incompatible with the principle of the primacy of politics? And to what extent do these subjectivities reflect the different democratic milieu within which managers work?

This is an important issue for academics and for actors engaged in public governance. First, it problematises the role of public managers in the opaque world where public policy making and implementation takes place through public-private partnerships, citizen-centred governance, and interactive decision-making. To date, debate about the democratic impact of these new institutional designs has proceeded in the absence of rigorous research into the agency of public managers. Second, research into this issue helps to clarify the new territory of managerialism beyond mainstream NPM-type reforms. It can lead to a more informed debate about democratic practice when it occurs at arm's-length to representative government. This is important in a European context because it can promote more responsive policy design, through an understanding of the way in which the intersection of national and sectoral factors impact on public governance. And, third, it can help to stimulate a reflexive attitude by public managers to their own practice and its democratic implications as they negotiate accountability in a world of 'many hands' (Sullivan 2003).

Developing a knowledge base on the subjectivities of public managers offers a significant methodological challenge. Our earlier empirical work indicated that democratic reflection was tacit amongst managers (Skelcher, Mathur and Smith 2005). What strategies, then, should researchers use to probe this tacit inter-subjectivity in a way that is rigorous and generates replicable and non-trivial results? We employ Q methodology. This quantitative technique establishes, through an inverted factor analysis, the patterns of subjective perspective held within a group of respondents. It has been used widely in fields such as psychology and environmental politics, but as far as we know has not yet been utilised in the study of democracy and network governance. However there are a small group of scholars who have begun to deploy this approach in the analysis of democratic discourses of citizens, and we draw on their experience. We have also responded to the e-social science agenda by delivering the Q instrument in a web-enabled form.

This paper starts by outlining the debate about the relationship between democracy and network governance, and in the process explores the different implications for the role of public managers. We then set out the research design, and show how Q methodology provides a valuable tool for investigating public managers' subjectivities. We explain the process of constructing the statements to which participants are asked to respond, and the particular challenges of doing this when the research covers two countries. The paper then describes the web-enabled delivery of the Q tool. Results are presented, and conclusions about the democratic subjectivities of public managers in the two counties are developed. Finally the paper highlights the contribution of the empirical findings and the research design for the future study of the relationship between democracy and new forms of governance.

DEMOCRACY, NETWORK GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC MANAGERS

The nature of the field

This paper is concerned with the institutions for public policy that operate at arm's-length to the mainstream structures of representative government and involve interaction between government and civil society and/or business. The field is amorphous and perhaps more easily defined by what it is not (it is not elected representative government operating through politically-headed public bureaucracies, nor purely contractual mechanisms for private delivery of public services) than what it is. Our focus is on what is variously labelled 'partnership' (especially in the UK), networks, interactive decision-making, and collaborative public management (e.g. Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; Sullivan and Skelcher 2002). Essentially, these are structures through which government interacts with other social and economic partners to develop, determine and deliver public policy.

Over recent years there has been a major drive undertake research into the theoretical, empirical and normative connections between network governance and democracy, especially amongst scholars in Western Europe. Klijn and Skelcher (2007) propose that the interaction of democracy and network governance can be formulated in terms of four conjectures: complementary, incompatible, transitional, and instrumental. These conjectures provide a starting point for formulating our investigations.

Four conjectures on democracy and network governance

The first conjecture points to the complementarity between governance networks and representative democracy. It suggests that governance networks engage a wider range of actors in the policy process than is possible through representative democratic methods, and thus enhance representative democracy as it struggles to govern in a complex environment. It achieves this through the creation of quasi-governmental institutions within which civil society and business actors can interact with public servants and, potentially, elected politicians, thus engaging them more fully in the public policy process. This re-engages citizens with democratic practice, and also increases the quality of information available to government on citizens' needs and preferences. Public managers are constructed as active agents in the development of new forms of governance that will build stronger civil society engagement in the public policy process (Munro, Roberts and Skelcher 2008). They become the institutional designers, both in terms of formulating initial structures but also moderating these over time in response to learning by participants in the process of interactive decision-making and changing political conditions. This places them in more of a mediating role between civil society and elected politicians, and potentially undermining politicians' representative and aggregative role.

In contrast, the incompatibility conjecture posits that representative democracy and governance networks conflict because each is predicated on a different set of institutional rules (Papadopoulos 2003; Sørensen 2002). Governance networks lead to a multi-level system of shared sovereignty. In this system, political representation is transformed from an expression of the political will of the people mediated by

elected office-holders associated with territorially-defined jurisdictions to a fluid terrain contested between a multitude of public and private actors. This cuts across the idea found in traditional theories of representative democracy that government and civil society operate as distinct realms, with defined structures for interaction. The implication for public managers is that they operate in a world where there is a high degree of ambiguity. They are both part of a process of constructing governance networks and actively engaging with civil society actors, but also of serving their elected political principals in the familiar ways of public bureaucrats. This can be expected to generate accountability tensions and to expose public managers more to accusations of being political actors rather than neutral servants.

The transitional conjecture proposes that the relationship between representative democracy and governance networks is in a process of change as state-centric government gives way to a network form consisting of decentred, distributed nodes of authority. As a result, the public policy process is a complicated negotiation between plural constructions of policy problems, different modes of knowledge, and multiple institutional opportunities (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). This process of evolution generates frictions between one system of governance (representational democracy with vertical lines of accountability and power) and another (governance networks with more horizontal forms of accountability and power). From this perspective, the environment for public managers is similar to that of the incompatibility conjecture. It is ambiguous and full of tensions. However the difference is that, within the transitional conjecture, public managers are engaged in a normative project actively to transform the dominant system of governance. They are positioned as active players in the creation of new forms of governance and the demise of traditional representative government.

The final conjecture is the instrumental conjecture. This views governance networks as a medium through which powerful governmental actors can increase their capacity to shape and deliver public policy in a complex world. This perspective applies a more critical reading to the relationship between governance networks and representative democracy than is found in the approaches previously discussed. It starts from the premise that the interests of governmental actors are relatively immutable and exist prior to any wider engagement with stakeholders. Governance networks provide a means of reinforcing these dominant interests (through the input structure) and realising them (through the output structure). The instrumental conjecture locates public managers as the agents of political principals, but operating through institutional designs other than public bureaucracies. Thus, their role in public-private partnerships, community regeneration boards, and other forms of network governance is to enhance the delivery of politically desirable outcomes. In essence, they are playing the traditional role of public bureaucrats but through non-traditional institutional forms.

The analytical function of the conjectures

These *a priori* conjectures about the relationship between democracy and network governance provide a frame within which we can analyse the subjectivities of public managers. In other words, we take the working position that the complementarity, incompatibility, transitional and instrumental conjectures represent the universe of possibilities within which actors construct the relationship between democracy and

network governance within our field sites in north-western Europe. If we treat the conjectures as framing devices, then we are saying that they provide the sets of understandings on which actors draw – consciously or subconsciously - to construct meaning in specific empirical contexts.

These meanings are contextually located discourses. For example, consider a forum in which citizens and public managers have debated ideas about the regeneration of the neighbourhood and arrived at agreed proposals. Should this forum have the final say on these proposals? Or should they be passed to elected politicians to decide, even though they have not been involved in the debates? This question can be framed in terms of the tension between the incompatibility and complementarity conjectures. So in specific empirical situations, there will be contestation between discourses either at a latent level (for example, where one discourse is hegemonic), or in an overt form where actors mobilise around particular demands. Contestation will draw on the conjectures, but will be constructed in relation to the empirical context. This insight provides a way of structuring the research instrument, and in this we follow the approach adopted by Durning and Osuna (1994) in their study of the value orientations of policy analysts.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research task

We forego the traditional qualitative methods of semi-structured interview and case study, and instead employ Q methodology. Q methodology provides a well-established technique for identifying subjectivities and inter-subjectivities. It uses a survey instrument to generate quantitative data on actors' views of the research topic under investigation, supported by qualitative data collection to enable a more effective interpretation by the researcher. In brief, Q methodology involves each participant in the sample (the P sample) sorting a series of statements (a Q sample) representative of the breadth of debate on an issue (the concourse) into a distribution of preference (a Q sort) from which statistically significant factors are derived.

Advocates of Q methodology claim that it provides a rigorous measure of human subjectivity (Brown 1980). However unlike other forms of quantitative analysis, it does not seek to explain hypothesised causal relationships nor does it give the impression of a scientific method independent of the researcher's own interpretive skills. Q methodology, therefore, fits well with our interpretive ontology, our desire to make the empirical methods and analysis of network governance as transparent as possible, and the wider call for greater systematicity in interpretive methods (Mathur and Skelcher 2007; Yanow and Schwatz-Shea 2006).

To our knowledge, Q methodology has not been employed in studies of network governance. However it has been used in the analysis of discourses of democracy amongst US citizens (Dryzek and Berijikian 1993); citizens in post-socialist countries (Dryzek and Holmes 2002); and in Europe (Robyn 2005). More broadly in the public policy field, Q has been used in studies of social justice (Salazar and Alper 2002), public service motivation (Brewer, Selden and Facer 2000), sustainability (Barry and Proops 1999), climate change (Dayton 2000), forestry management (Steelman and Maguire 1999), and airport expansion (Van Eeten 2000).

Implementing Q methodology

There are five widely recognised stages to conducting a Q study.[2] First, it involves establishing the concourse – the breadth of debate around a particular issue. This can be undertaken in various ways, including through interviews with relevant participants (Steelman and Maguire 1999), focus groups (Dryzek and Holmes 2002), analysis of academic, media and other texts (Dryzek and Berijikian 1993), or a combination of these. Second, the concourse is represented as a series of short statements. These could number into the hundreds. Where possible, the statements should be direct quotes from interviews in order that they capture the ways through which actors express the issue. However this is not always possible and so they may alternatively come from published sources or re-constructions from the researchers. The third step is then to narrow these statements down into the Q sample - a manageable number of between 30 and 80, but ensuring the sample of statements remains representative of the diversity of opinion within the concourse. Scholars use a range of methods to achieve this, including locating them within a grid where statements have different properties.

The fourth step is to sample from the population (the P sample) and ask them to sort these statements into order (the Q sort). The P sample might be a representative sample of a particular demographic or in a naturalistic study the informants whose opinions generated the statements. The Q sort is usually undertaken by requiring responses to each statement in a Likert scale. The responses are then analysed through a factor analysis that shows how actors cluster around particular statement combinations. The researcher interprets the cluster of statements within each factor in order to produce a statement of that set of respondents' overall perspective. Respondents are often asked to add their views having completed the Q sort, and these data will also be used in the interpretation.

We developed our concourse of over 300 statements from interview data collected in this and previous research projects and the academic literature on governance networks and democracy. Our approach, therefore, is somewhat different from the reconstructive method advocated by Dryzek and others, in which the concourse is solely constructed from the words of the population in question. Our rationale for adopting a mixed approach that utilised various sources for statements was that the discourses of democracy and network governance tend to be tacit and difficult to surface in interviews, as we discuss above.

We then systematically sorted the statements into a 3 x 3 grid.[3] One dimension followed the approach taken by Dryzek and Berejikian (1993), and consisted of the form of the statement – that is, the statements were sorted into those that were definitions, claims of fact/opinion, or prescriptions or normative claims. Along the other dimension we sorted statements in terms of the discursive qualities being described: that is, whether they referred to natural relationships between entities, degrees of agency, or clues to agents' underlying motivation, e.g. self-interest. All

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[2] For a full discussion of our methods, see Jeffares (2008)

[3] We originally sampled on a 4 x 4 grid using the same two dimensions, generating 64 statements. However piloting revealed that respondents were unwilling to sort this many statements. In addition, statements were not always as easily differentiable from one another as in the 3 x 3 grid.

cells were populated. We stripped out duplicates, and were left with three or four statements in each cell.

We selected the single statement for each cell by ensuring that across the whole grid there were statements that reflected each of the four conjectures suggested by Klijn and Skelcher. We took this approach because, as we propose above, we think that the conjectures offer an *a priori* position that broadly encompasses the universe of possibilities in terms of the relationship between democracy and network governance in the countries under study. Selecting statements to ensure a spread across the four conjectures minimised the bias that may have been introduced from the process of identifying and sorting the statements.

However it is important to realise that Q methodology does not set out to test this proposition, or to establish the extent to which respondents in our study agree with one or other of the conjectures. As we discuss above, the conjectures provide a way of capturing the high level contours of the debate; Q methodology enables us to access the clusters of meaning, the context specific discourses, within the specific context of public managers as one set of actors within this debate. This selection process left us with Q sample of 36 statements (table 1).

----- Table 1 about here -----

Methodological implications of multi-country research

We focus on public managers in England and the Netherlands. These countries are chosen for several reasons. First, both have undergone a process of change to their institutions and norms of public management and governance. Working across public, private and civil society boundaries is part of the approach taken in both countries over recent years (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; Sullivan and Skelcher 2002). This involves a variety of forms of civic and business participation in public policy making and delivery. Second, both countries have strong traditions and institutions of representative democracy at national and local level. Thus, while there has been a move towards forms of network governance, there is also the idea of the primacy of politics. Third, both countries have a strongly professionalised and politically neutral civil service (by which we mean public managers at both national, regional and local government levels). These public managers are located at the nexus between these two forces – to network governance and new forms of interactive decision-making; and to traditional representative democracy and the primacy of politics. However the two countries also have different democratic contexts. England has a unitary majoritarian form of government, based on an evolving set of conventions, while the Netherlands still retains strong elements of its pillarised and consociational approach.

Our use of Q methodology in this paper is not primarily comparative, despite the fact that we are examining the democratic subjectivities of public managers in two countries. We take the view that there is a broad debate about new forms of governance and their relationship to democracy occurring in Western Europe, and thus we have constructed the concourse from sources from both countries. In this respect we follow the approach adopted by Robyn (2005) where a single set of statements on national identity was applied in different European countries. Robyn justifies this approach on the grounds that there is a Europe-wide discourse on

national identify. Not all Q researchers would accept this approach (Dryzek and Holmes 2002). However, we concluded that the conditions in our two study countries were sufficiently common for us to take this approach in our initial study, and then to extend into country-specific and comparative analysis in later analysis and papers.

We chose to deliver the statements in English because public managers in the Netherlands tend to have a high level of familiarity with this language. However language is also a question of conceptual translation, and in piloting the Q sort at workshops with public managers and academics in the two countries it became evident that concepts were neither universal nor necessarily had equivalent meanings. The main example was 'partnership', which has a different meaning in England than in the Netherlands. We found that 'network' could be used in a broadly equivalent way, and thus employed this as the key term to describe the type of governance with which we were interested.

Sampling and data collection

The P sample composed public managers who were involved in networks/partnerships. Our sample consisted of approximately 100 public managers who were studying part-time for masters' degrees at the University of Birmingham and Erasmus University respectively. We chose this sample for two reasons. First, it provides a definable sample of sufficient number. Q methodology requires a smaller response n than other forms of quantitative analysis, with 40-60 being regarded as sufficient (Stenner and Watts 2006). We had responses from 49 managers, of whom 22 were from England and 27 from the Netherlands. Secondly, the samples were easy to access. Our collaborators in each university briefed the participants and encouraged them to respond. They also forwarded our e-mail invitation to participate, which included a web link to the Q sort software, directly to each individual through their masters' programme e-mail list.

The Q sort was web-enabled. This is quicker for all involved, it allows the participant to complete the Q-sort in their own time, and the novelty factor is likely to increase the response rate. We employed FlashQ software.[4] This enables respondents to sort the statements on-line like a game of solitaire. In our piloting of Q software we found this the most intuitive and easy to use. The software delivers a two-stage sort. Initially, cards are sorted into agree-disagree-neither piles. Each pile is then force-sorted into a quasi-normal distribution grid. In other words, the 'agree' pile must be sorted such that one card must be placed in the 'most agree' cell, two cards must be placed in the 'next most agree' cells, and so on. Selections can be changed at any point until the respondent is satisfied with their choices. The partipant is largely unaware of why the piles are restricted, but the process resembles an on-line game.

Having completed the on-line sort, the respondent was then automatically presented with an analysis of their responses, drawing attention to those statements with which they had most strongly agreed and disagreed. We then asked the respondent why they had chosen their most and least favourable statements. This frequently generated lengthy qualitative data that we were subsequently able to use to assist the

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[4] Available at http://www.hackert.biz/flashq/demo/

interpretation and contextualisation of the Q sort. Finally, we asked about their age, gender, country, professional speciality, and average time spent working in networks.

ANALYSIS

We undertook a centroid factor analysis and a varimax rotation, using PQMethod software. There are different schools of thought about the cut-off point beyond which new factors should not be included in the analysis. One approach is to include as many factors as possible, regardless of the number of sorts that load significantly on each factor, provided they reveal something of interest to the researcher. An alternative approach, and one that we follow in order to increase the statistical robustness of the analysis, is only to include 'solid' factors and therefore to get as many sorts as possible loading significantly on one factor or another. This might mean reducing the number of factors, a consequence of which is that the number of sorts that load significantly on more than one factor will increase (this is termed a confounded factor loading).

To resolve this problem, we raise the degree of significance required for a sort to load on a factor so that the least possible number of Q sorts loaded either insignificantly or across factors. The most satisfactory solution was 5 factors (table 2). Each of the five factors had eigenvalues well in excess of one (6.37, 2.94, 5.39, 3.92 and 4.41 respectively). With a Q sample of 36 statements, a significant loading was considered to be 0.43 or above, significant to $P>0.001$. Two statements were statistically significant consensus statements (statements 17 and 34) as all five factors placed them towards the centre of the distribution. In addition, statement 30 discussing the importance of trust for the success of a partnership was placed in an agreeable position by all five factors, although not significantly so.

We now set out our interpretation of the perspective of the actors clusters in each factor, based on the item scores (table 3). We followed the approach recommended by Watts and Stenner (2005) for producing accounts from a careful reading of the item scores in each factor. This involved examining the statements receiving strong positive and negative scores, as well as those which were more neutral. Watts and Stenner comment that neutral scores can be as illuminating as those at the poles, and this was the case in our study.

----- table 2 about here -----

----- table 3 about here -----

Factor 1 – Pragmatists

Pragmatists view networks as a means to get on with the job, and are not concerned with their democratic anchorage, or with wider issues of democracy. Their view is

that networks should be a flexible instrument for problem solving (s19 +4)[5] and accept that they will not be inclusive (s35 +3). They think that trust is essential for a successful network (s30 +5), but also recognise that conflict is inevitable (s18 +4). A UK public manager commented: 'There will always be conflicting priorities from the parties involved in any network. The objective is to be able to compromise and work together' (UK18, 18 +5, f1)[6], while a Dutch respondent suggested conflict was an indicator of good stakeholder selection: 'If there's no conflict you probably don't have the right actors in your network' (NL 15, s18 +5, f1). However, rather than concentrating on involving elected politicians (s22 +3) or worrying about whether networks are undemocratic, they think that the priority is to improve their functioning (s32 +3).

Pragmatists are neutral about the role of elected politicians and representative democracy more generally. 'There is not a type of democracy that's more important than another' said a Dutch respondent. 'Direct democracy can also be an important form of democracy' (N24, s10 -5, f1). They are not concerned about whether networks enable greater interaction between citizens and public managers (s25 0), whether networks offer the opportunity for all participants to have their say (s24 0) or politicians attitudes to networks or their wider role (s5 0; s29 0). They think that the public are uninterested in how networks operate, instead judging them on their achievements (s13 -1*).

The idea of representative democracy is not one to which pragmatists are committed (s10 –3**). A Dutch manager said: 'Not everything in policy making involves governmental actions. I think it is a good development [when] people outside political parties and government take action into societal problems' (NL25, s9 +5, f1). So pragmatists do not think that network governance poses a fundamental threat to local government (s11 -4) or that networks become legitimate when they are controlled by elected politicians (s31 –5**). In the words of a Dutch manager: 'Legitimacy doesn't always concern politicians. It is about people representing other people without political involvement' (NL25, S31 -5, f1). Nevertheless they think that politicians have a role in steering the way networks deliver political goals (s28 -3) and do not agree with the view that decision-making takes place in closed arenas (s1 -3).

Factor 2 – Realists

Realists take the view that governance networks are an inherent part of the political process; they are one of several arenas where political activity takes place. They strongly disagree with the view that networks deal with managerial rather than political issues (s14 –5). Consequently realists are not inclined to regard networks as a threat to local government, although this is not a particularly strong view (s11 -2). Because networks are a focus for political activity, they see conflict in them as inevitable (s18 +5). A UK manager commented: 'People come to the table with

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[5] The descriptors give the statement number and ranking in this factor, thus: (s19 +4) = statement 19 ranked +4. * after the ranking indicates that this is a distinguishing statement in this factor with significance $P < .05$, and ** at $P < .01$

[6] Quotes from respondents give country, the statement number on which they are commenting, their ranking of this statement, and the factor they loaded significantly on. Thus: (UK 18, 18 +5, f1) = UK respondent number 18, statement 18 rated at +5, significant on factor 1 .

completely different agendas that they feel are incompatible. People are there because they now HAVE TO, not because they choose to.' (UK15, s18 +5, f2, emphasis in original). However realists are strongly of the view that the operation of networks can be assisted by building trust (s30 +4).

Although realists broadly support the idea that representative democracy should be the main way of making public policy decisions, this is not a particularly strong view (s10 +2). They are also broadly neutral towards the representative role of politicians (s27 0) and their use of networks to supplement traditional forms of government (s5 0). And although they think that networks can assist new forms of democracy to develop (s12 +3), they are restrained in their view about this potential. For example, they do not think that everyone in a network should be able to have their say in whatever way they think is best (s24 –3**). They do not think networks create direct democratic involvement by people outside political parties and government (s9 –3**), nor open up the policy making process by being more inclusive (s36 –3**). And neither do they think people are interested in the way they make decisions (s13 +3**).

Because networks are part of a bigger political game, and engage a variety of actors, realists recognise very explicitly that there may not be a clear view of what they are expected to achieve (s21 –4) and neither do they provide a means to cut through red tape (s6 –4). A UK manager put it this way: "The problem of partnerships is that they tend to have too many members to work effectively…. Huge amount of time just taken up by briefs, bringing people up to date, pointless reading out of endless reports - new performance management processes need to be put in place for partnership to monitor and evaluate projects. Central government keeps control through PSAs, National Indicator Set, and extended audit culture' (UK15, s6 -5, f2). Despite this, realists have a strong view that transparency is important and that people should be able to find out about networks (s3 +4).

Factor 4 – Adaptors

Adaptors think that representative government should be the main way of making public policy decisions (s10 +4*), but under certain conditions networks may offer advantages. A UK manager stated: 'Local government remains dominant. Some partnerships take on the role of governing in certain areas of policy, but in the main, it remains in the hands of elected local government' (UK9, s11 –5). The advantages of networks come in their flexibility and inclusiveness. Adaptors think that networks should have a flexible approach to problem solving (s19 +3) and be inclusive of people responsible for delivering public programmes (s7 +3). "Without flexibility" said one Dutch respondent "there will be no problem solving in a network". (NL03, s19+5, f4). Their orientation, therefore, is rather more towards the idea of networks as a managerial device to improve delivery than as a means for new forms of participative democracy. Thus they are neutral about networks as a means to create direct democratic involvement by people outside political parties and government (s9 0), or helping new forms of democracy to develop (s12 +1)

Because networks provide an adaptation to the prevailing system, they do not offer a threat to local government (s11 –5). A Dutch manager, faced with the statement 'Networks pose a fundamental threat to local government', stated: 'I believe in the opposite, networks are a chance for local government to achieve their goals together

with the public [and] get in contact with the public. Be aware, it is a chance and networks don't mean automatically better contact with the public' (NL20, s11 -5, f4). However adaptors are strongly against the view that networks can be democratic without involving elected politicians (s22 –4**): 'Without elected members, partnerships lack legitimacy and therefore they must include elected politicians' (UK29, s22 -5, f4).

Adaptors recognise that networks will inevitably exclude some people (s35 –3) and, given their prevailing attitude towards representative government, this leads them to disagree with the view that the public are only concerned with what networks achieve rather than with how they make decisions (s13 –3**). Overall, however, adaptors are not particularly concerned with whether people can find out about networks (s3 0*) or the internal democracy of networks (s24 0), reflecting the primacy they give to elected politicians being involved and taking care of these aspects.

Factors 3 and 5 – Progressive optimists and radical optimists

Although the statistical analysis identified two discrete factors, they are closely related. They have a rank correlation of 0.73, and 4 of the 6 'most agree' statements are the same, as are 3 of the 6 'least agree' statements. Because of this similarity, and the interpretive method being employed, we treat them here as one group with a common overall orientation, but comprising two separate strands – progressive optimists and radical optimists.

The common feature of optimists' view of the world is that network governance has considerable potential to enhance democracy. Networks help new forms of democracy to develop (s12 +3[3] +5[5])[7]. They do this by opening up policy making to groups who would otherwise not have a voice (s36 +4[3] +3[5]) and by building trust so that networks are successful (s30 +4[3] +3[5]). However optimists recognise there are constraints on the potential of networks to engage citizens, and so are vary supportive of the need for special steps to ensure the inclusion of disadvantaged groups (s26 +3[3] +4[5]).

Because optimists are so positive about the democratic potential of networks, they strongly disagree with the view that this forms of governance presents a threat to local democracy (s11 –4[3] –5[5]); network pose 'no threat, but an opportunity' (NL22, s11 –5) because 'networks can help close the gap between politics and the people' (N19, s12+5, f5). A UK respondent put it thus: 'Networks should bring richness to the process not hinder it' (UK27, s11-5, f5). As a result, optimists are neutral about the idea that conflict is inevitable in networks (s18 +1[3] 0[5]), in stark contrast to pragmatists, realists, and adaptors who all are strongly of the view that conflict is inevitable. Overall, optimists disagree with the idea that networks are about management rather than politics (s14 –3[3] –4[5]).

Within this general orientation, progressive optimists (factor 3) retain a belief in the importance of the principal of representative democracy (s10 +2) but think that it has limitations that networks can help overcome. It is a 'direct, albeit imperfect, line of legitimacy and accountability' (UK13, s10+5, f3). In this respect they are like

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[7] Numbers in square parenthesis refer to factor 3 or factor 5.

adaptors, but with a stronger orientation to democratic possibilities. Progressive optimists are quite sceptical about the commitment of elected politicians to the wider public interest (s29 –3) or their role in bringing the ideas of the people into networks (s27 –2). They see a gap between representative democracy and the role of elected politicians that networks can fill, and in the process create new opportunities: 'local government needs to tap into networks to enhance consultation processes, learning from best practice, adding democratic legitimacy. The two must work together to run effectively and in tandem, not be in competition with one another' (UK22, s11 -5, f5).

As a result progressive optimists disagree that networks are only legitimate when they are controlled by elected politicians (s31 –4). However they think that networks will loose legitimacy with citizens if they are unable to improve the level of debate between their members (s23 +2). In order to achieve this potential for legitimacy, it is essential that networks help people to become involved in influencing how services are delivered (s2 +5**) and enable everyone to have a say in whatever way they think is best (s24 +3**). A Dutch public manager commented: 'The more opinions, the better the picture of the situation, the better the discussion, the better the solution' (NL10, s24 +5, f3).

On the other hand, radical optimists (factor 5) are much more equivocal about proposing representative democracy as the principal way of making public policy decisions (s10 –1**): 'The public and partners should all be involved in making decisions which effect people, and democracy should be encouraged. Democracy is not just [party] political' (UK30: s10+5, f5). This perspective is reflected also in their neutral view about the role of elected politicians in bringing the ideas of people into networks (s27 –1) or their commitment to the public interest (s29 –1). Instead, they see the value of networks as being the opportunity they provide for citizens and managers to come into direct contact and talk face to face (s25 +4**) so that people become involved in influencing how services are delivered (s2 +2). A UK manager commented: 'The interaction is essential to develop bottom up policy or to legitimise top down solutions' (UK27, s25 +5, f5). As a result, people should be able to find out about networks (s3 +3) and networks should include people who deliver public programmes (s7 +2). Radical optimists see networks from a pluralist perspective. They disagree strongly that networks give community leaders more power and make it difficult for ordinary people to get involved (s16 –3*), that decision-making takes place in closed networks that are not accountable to elected politicians (s1 –4*), or that most of the decisions made by networks will involve only a few people (s15 – 3**).

CONCLUSION

This study provides a more detailed analysis of public manager attitudes to democracy in network governance than has previously been available. The study shows that there are a number of distinct sets of attitudes held by public managers towards representative democracy and elected politicians in general, and the prospects for enhancing democracy and inclusion through governance networks. Pragmatists have least interest in questions of democracy and regard networks as another way through which to perform their duties, while radical optimists are highly engaged by the possibilities for new forms of democracy to emerge from network governance. Progressive optimists are also oriented to strengthen democracy, but see networks as

filling a significant gap between the principles and practices of representative democracy. Realists take the view that political activity is intrinsic to public policy, and networks are yet another space where this occurs. Like pragmatists they do not have particularly positive attitudes towards representative democracy or the capacity of networks to facilitate greater inclusion, but unlike them they have a stronger awareness of the way in which politics engages with networks. Adaptors have the same understanding as progressive radicals that networks can fill the gaps in representative democracy, but unlike them think that this form of democracy should be the main way of making public policy decisions. For adaptors, networks offer a tool to improve the functioning of the existing system of representative democracy, rather than the opportunity to develop new democratic practices.

The interpretive and empirically grounded approach used in this study provides a contrast to the theoretically derived conjectures, and their implications for public managers, set out at the start of the paper. The analysis reveals something of the complex constructions of public managers working under conditions of network governance. The mutually exclusive nature of the theoretical conjectures is complemented by the subtler and less clearly differentiated sets of actors' views (table 4). The relationships between the initial theoretical conjectures and the empirical findings is similar in form to those of During and Osuna (1994), who found a degree of relationship between their clusters and the four ideal typical roles of policy analysts within which they framed their Q study, but also a more complex set of relationships than theory suggested.

----- table 4 about here -----

So, for example, pragmatists can be associated with the idea of public managers as agents implementing political goals as well as having to accommodate the role tensions between representative democracy and network governance. They thus overlap to some extent with the realists for whom ambiguity and role tensions are all part of working in the public service. However the analysis also reveals that the pragmatists have little interest in questions of democracy (shown by a dotted line in table 4). They stand outside our conjectures, symbolising the more classic functional role of public servants with their disinterest in wider political questions. This group is important, since it draws attention to the continuity of historical traditions from the creation of a modernist public bureaucracy in our two case study countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It shows that those public managers operating in network governance may bring logics and rules from earlier reforms into these new arenas, thus maintaining continuity. This is rather different from some of the other groups of managers we identify, who seek to create new ways of interactive decision-making and democratic involvement.

Our presentation of the variety and complexities of public manager views adds to the small but growing literature that opens up the black box on their interactions with citizens and other actors in institutions that are beyond the normal structures of representative government and public bureaucracies. For example, Feldman and Khademian (2007) have shown that inclusion in public policy processes require public managers to develop a community of participation that draws together actors from the political and technical domains with those from the specific spatial or policy context. They propose that public managers should give attention to facilitating

interaction across the boundaries between these domains. Our research shows that public managers will come to this task with different attitudes towards the possibilities for democracy and inclusion. Selection of the managers who will undertake this task would be facilitated by considering their attitudes to democracy and network governance as well as the skills or competencies they require to undertake their tasks. Similarly, Edelenbos' (2005) study of interactive decision-making concludes that it is necessary to redesign existing institutions to create space for enhanced democratic engagement. He regards public managers as the main players in this task, but notes that they need to be properly prepared. Our research shows that institutional redesign may not be sufficient if the public managers working on this task align with pragmatic or realist perspectives. At the minimum, we should be looking for contribution by adaptors, and if possible optimists of either variety.

Besides these practical conclusions, this paper opens up theoretical questions about the relationship between the discursive world within which public managers operate and the actions they take in producing, reproducing and evolving the institutional arenas and rules through which public policy is shaped, determined and realised beyond representative government. The five clusters of views we have identified through Q methodology offer a starting point for understanding the subjective and intersubjective constructions of public managers in relation to democracy and networks. But we need to develop further theoretical and empirical studies in order to understand more about how these constructions connect out to the wider discourses of governance, and connect in to the actions of these powerful actors as they affect the institutions of governance. Q methodology has a considerable potential to enable more systematic and transparent research in a field dominated by qualitative research through case study and interview, in which the relationships between data collection, analysis, and interpretation are frequently opaque.

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Table 1: Sampling grid for 36 statements

	Entity/Relationship	Agency	Motivation
Definition	**1** (132) Decision making takes place in closed networks that are not accountable to elected politicians **22** (095) Networks can be democratic without involving elected politicians **8** (001) In networks, accountability involves reporting to people who are not my managers **33** (177) Government controls networks to make sure that what they do fits with their policy	**31** (091) Networks have legitimacy when they are controlled by elected politicians **24** (034) Everyone in a network should be able to have their say in whatever way they think is best **4** (302) Networks allow managers to get things done **21** (306) Networks have a very clear view of what they are expected to achieve	**27** (181) The politicians' role is to bring the ideas of people into networks **2** (126) Governance networks help people to become involved in influencing how services are delivered **17** (057) Democracy in networks has to be created on a day to day basis **35** (081) It is inevitable that networks will exclude some people
Fact/Opinion	**29** (179) Politicians are committed to the wider public interest **12** (148) Networks can help new forms of democracy to develop **23** (186) If networks can't improve the level of debate between their members, they will lose legitimacy with citizens **14** (114) Networks deal with managerial, not political issues	**11** (120) Networks pose a fundamental threat to local government **36** (157) Networks help to open up policy making to groups who would otherwise not have a voice **13** (303) The public are concerned with what networks achieve, not how they make decisions **16** (304) Networks give community leaders more power and make it difficult for ordinary people to get involved	**6** (301) The value of networks is that they cut through the usual red tape **9** (116) Networks are creating direct democratic involvement by people outside political parties and government **25** (305) The value of networks is that citizens and managers get to talk face to face **15** (066) Most of the decisions made by networks will involve only a few people and take place behind close doors
Prescription	**3** (073) People should be able to find out about networks and make a contribution to decisions **18** (043) Conflict is inevitable in networks **32** (058) Instead of treating networks as undemocratic, we should try to improve their functioning **30** (308) Building trust is the key to a successful network	**10** (129) Representative democracy should be the main way of making public policy decisions **26** (109) Special steps need to be taken to include disadvantaged groups in networks **19** (026) Networks should have a flexible approach to problem solving **20** (067) Networks need to contain strong members who can challenge things which with they don't agree	**34** (013) In networks people can influence elected politicians and make a difference to their community **7** (161) Networks should include people who deliver public programmes as well as those who benefit from them **28** (103) Networks should be free to implement overall political goals in the way they think is best **5** (040) Politicians turn to networks when traditional forms of government are ineffective

n.b. Numbers in parenthesis relate to statement numbers in the concourse from which Q sample (bold numbers) selected

Table 2: Statement Scores on each factor

		Factors				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1.	Decision making takes place in closed networks that are not accountable to elected politicians	-3	-2	-2	-2	-4
2.	Networks help people to become involved in influencing how services are delivered	1	-1	5	2	2
3.	People should be able to find out about networks and make a contribution to decisions	0	4	2	0	3
4.	Networks allow managers to get things done	-2	-1	-2	1	-2
5.	Politicians turn to networks when traditional forms of government are ineffective	0	0	-1	0	-2
6.	The value of networks is that they cut through the usual red tape	-1	-4	-3	-1	-3
7.	Networks should include people who deliver public programmes as well as those who benefit from them	2	2	0	3	2
8.	In networks, accountability involves reporting to people who are not my managers	1	3	-1	1	-1
9.	Networks are creating direct democratic involvement by people outside political parties and government	1	-3	-1	0	1
10.	Representative democracy should be the main way of making public policy decisions	-3	2	2	4	-1
11.	Networks pose a fundamental threat to local government	-4	-2	-4	-5	-5
12.	Networks can help new forms of democracy to develop	2	3	3	1	5
13.	The public are concerned with what networks achieve, not how they make decisions	-1	3	0	-3	1
14.	Networks deal with managerial, not political issues	-1	-5	-3	-3	-4
15.	Most of the decisions made by networks will involve only a few people and take place behind close doors	1	-1	-1	0	-3
16.	Networks give community leaders more power and make it difficult for ordinary people to get involved	-1	1	-1	-2	-3
17.	Democracy in networks has to be created on a day to day basis	0	-2	0	0	0
18.	Conflict is inevitable in networks	4	5	1	4	0
19.	Networks should have a flexible approach to problem solving	4	0	0	3	2
20.	Networks need to contain strong members who can challenge things which with they don't agree	-2	1	1	1	1
21.	Networks have a very clear view of what they are expected to achieve	-4	-4	-2	-4	-2
22.	Networks can be democratic without involving elected politicians	3	0	1	-4	1
23.	If networks can't improve the level of debate between their members, they will lose legitimacy with citizens	-1	2	2	-1	0
24.	Everyone in a network should be able to have their say in whatever way they think is best	0	-3	3	0	0
25.	The value of networks is that citizens and managers get to talk face to face	0	-1	0	-1	4
26.	Special steps need to be taken to include disadvantaged groups in networks	2	1	3	-2	4
27.	The politicians' role is to bring the ideas of people into networks	-2	0	-2	-1	-1
28.	Networks should be free to implement overall political goals in the way they think is best	-3	-1	1	-2	-2
29.	Politicians are committed to the wider public interest	0	1	-3	2	-1
30.	Building trust is the key to a successful network	5	4	4	5	3
31.	Networks have legitimacy when they are controlled by	-5	-2	-4	-1	1

	elected politicians					
32.	Instead of treating networks as undemocratic, we should try to improve their functioning	3	0	2	2	0
33.	Government controls networks to make sure that what they do fits with their policy	-2	1	-5	-3	-1
34.	In networks people can influence elected politicians and make a difference to their community	1	2	1	2	0
35.	It is inevitable that networks will exclude some people	3	0	0	3	2
36.	Networks help to open up policy making to groups who would otherwise not have a voice	2	-3	4	1	3

Table 3: Participants' factor loadings

		Factors				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	UK09	25	37	-0	21	-2
2	UK10	38	-6	65	0	12
3	UK11	7	29	28	-24	-13
4	UK12	48	14	21	2	48
5	UK13	21	51	9	25	7
6	UK14	26	18	69	22	15
7	UK15	1	51	-25	39	12
8	UK16	3	72	16	6	17
9	UK17	30	0	66	11	24
10	UK18	63	15	15	09	-9
11	UK19	8	22	51	17	39
12	UK20	6	8	43	37	12
13	UK21	2	3	15	47	9
14	UK22	21	11	-4	33	53
15	UK23	38	5	36	24	43
16	UK24	25	-1	58	-1	7
17	UK25	64	28	2	18	17
19	UK26	16	34	20	-26	48
20	UK28	35	2	54	-13	60
21	UK29	27	-4	30	65	16
22	UK30	-27	29	46	14	67
23	NL01	69	4	7	19	35
24	NL02	49	16	24	6	33
25	NL03	39	22	15	43	41
26	NL04	36	12	42	30	32
27	NL05	4	5	54	36	37
28	NL06	-21	-7	-20	16	29
29	NL07	12	17	31	55	8
30	NL08	21	32	40	-9	20
31	NL09	14	52	36	25	18
32	NL10	19	15	58	13	1
33	NL11	32	6	3	41	4
34	NL12	50	26	24	18	31
35	NL13	7	10	0	56	12
36	NL14	-14	30	40	15	20
37	NL15	60	34	15	6	6
38	NL16	50	-4	33	27	10
39	NL17	28	14	20	23	34
40	NL18	35	-12	2	33	10
41	NL19	39	19	11	16	69
42	NL20	45	33	22	43	-5
43	NL21	8	6	22	26	50
44	NL22	70	-4	26	-4	20
45	NL23	44	09	35	38	26

46	NL24	57	5	19	31	2
47	NL25	59	-14	35	11	11
48	NL26	9	-33	12	11	6
49	NL27	21	9	-23	44	11

Table 4: Conjectures, implications for public managers, and relationships to Q analysis r

Compatible	Incompatible	Transitional	Instrumental
Support development of network governance where it adds value to representative democracy	Role tensions and ambiguity	Actively promote new forms of democracy through network governance	Implementation of political goals through networks, public bureaucracies, and other means

Adaptors

Progressive optimists

Realists

Pragmatists

Radical optimists