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Governance?  
Managing the Performance  
of Networked Efforts  
to Fight Organized Crime**

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The **Tilburg Center for Regional Law and Governance (TiREG)** is a joint venture of the Departments of Public Law and Politics & Public Administration of Tilburg University and is supported by the Province of Noord-Brabant. Besides legal and public administration scholars, the Center brings together researchers from a variety of disciplines and institutes (also beyond Tilburg University) to conduct research and develop education in the field of regional law and governance. It focuses on exploring, explaining and evaluating the novel interactions between government, businesses, citizens and knowledge institutions that develop at the level of the region in response to complex societal challenges.

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# Catch 22s in Collaborative Governance? Managing the Performance of Networked Efforts to Fight Organized Crime

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**Abstract:** The emerging literature on collaborative performance management suggests that networked efforts typically face three types of challenges: substantive problem-solving challenges, collaborative process challenges and multi-relational accountability challenges. To investigate the nature and underlying reasons for these challenges, as well as possible responses to them, researchers immersed eight inter-agency collaborations in the Netherlands in an 18-month development trajectory, as they sought to tackle particular problems of organized crime. Collaborators' behavioral responses were analyzed, revealing that a set of paradoxical requirements imposed on collaborators underlay the challenges identified in the literature. For example, to innovate as a group, collaborators had to draw on traditional organizational strengths. Collaborations differed markedly in their responses to the paradoxical requirements and in their abilities to move forward despite ambiguity. This finding contributes to the building of more robust governance models and suggests a way forward for future research on collaborative performance management interventions.

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## Introduction

Public agencies increasingly seek to collaborate, realizing that no individual agency alone holds the key to cracking complex societal problems (Duit and Galaz 2008; Weber and Khademian 2008; Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006). These new collaborative efforts, however, produce new governance challenges unknown to the traditional public governance literature (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2015). In particular, the fact that these collaborations are set up to achieve results where prevailing approaches failed raises two important questions: What new types of performance management challenges do these collaborations face and how can these management challenges be effectively dealt with (Moynihan et al. 2011). For example, rather than inducing managers to obsess over achieving organizational outputs individually, the goal is to develop systems of collaborative performance management that favor accomplishment of desired social outcomes together (Moore 2013).

A case in point is public agencies' efforts to fight organized crime together. Indeed, the increasingly subversive effects of novel and complex forms of organized crime have spurred many law enforcement agencies to collaborate with other public and private organizations in activities that go beyond traditional law enforcement (Braga 2008; Garland 1996; Liddle and Gelsthorpe 1994). Collaborative approaches allow authorities to draw on the problem-solving capacities of all partners, combining conventional law enforcement instruments with preventive interventions. Collaboration may also expand political and administrative support and legitimacy among collaborators (Donahue and Moore 2012; Weber and Khademian 2008; Van Bueren, Klijn and Koppenjan 2003).

The nature of these collaborative crime-fighting initiatives raises new performance management challenges: How can the outcomes of preventive efforts be measured in the absence of traditional outputs, such as numbers of arrests and money confiscated? How can sufficient trust be built up with previously unknown partners, especially when sensitive crime-related data need to be shared? What performance accountability structures are required, both within the own organization and toward other partners as well as society at large?

This study sought a deeper and richer understanding of the performance management challenges that arise in collaborative efforts to fight crime. It also explored the reasons for these challenges as well as possible responses to them. Specifically, three research questions were addressed:

1. What particular performance management challenges do newly formed collaborative governance efforts face in the process of developing and rolling out new crime-fighting approaches?

2. What explanations are most plausible for the occurrence of performance management challenges in this specific context?
3. What characteristics are associated with the most promising responses for dealing with those challenges in practice?

To answer these questions, the study derived common collaborative performance management challenges from the existing academic literature and compared these to a set of real-life collaborative governance efforts. Researchers followed the formation, operationalization and evaluation of eight law enforcement collaborations in the Netherlands over an 18-month period. Each of these collaborations was immersed in the same development trajectory, involving a structured co-creation process, a physical collaboration space and a tailor-made accountability structure. A field action research approach enabled close observation of the collaborations and the responses within them to minute changes in the development trajectory.

The study advances the governance field by detailing the nature of collaborative performance management challenges real-life crime-fighting collaborations face and suggesting responses to deal with these common challenges. The results could provide valuable lessons for similar problem-oriented collaborative governance efforts in other domains facing complex societal problems, such as healthcare, energy and economic development.

This paper starts by exploring the collaborative performance management challenges documented in the literature. It then describes the action research approach taken. This is followed by a presentation of the results and a discussion of their implications, along with some limitations of the current research and suggestions for future work.

### **Analytical framework**

A literature review was conducted to capture initial insights into the performance management challenges faced by public professionals when working in problem-oriented collaborations. Synthesizing the literature, three main categories of performance management challenges appear to arise in collaborative governance settings: substantive problem-solving challenges, collaborative process challenges and multi-relational accountability challenges (Table 1).

**Table 1.** An overview of the challenges of collaborative performance management

Category	Collaborative performance management challenges
Substantive problem-solving challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying, diagnosing and defining the problem</li> <li>• Developing a sound theory of change</li> <li>• Measuring performance against the theory of change</li> </ul>
Collaborative process challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reaching a shared understanding on goals and approach</li> <li>• Building trust</li> <li>• Generating commitment to the process</li> </ul>
Multi-relational accountability challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing tension with parent organization accountability</li> <li>• Accounting to (new) external channels of accountability</li> <li>• Accounting to collaboration partners</li> </ul>

### Substantive Problem-Solving Challenges

The first category comprises the technical problem-solving challenges related to defining the problem, developing a collective approach and designing performance measures to determine whether the approach has been successful.

*Identifying, Diagnosing and Defining the Problem.* The process of identifying, diagnosing and defining the problem starts with selection of a characteristic undesirable behavior exhibited by certain individuals or in a certain location (Sparrow 2008; Sherman 1995; Goldstein 1990). From there, the collaboration defines the problem and its root causes. This, however, is notoriously difficult for the wicked problems many collaborations face, due their inherent non-routine, complex nature (Head and Alford 2015). Moreover, the different perspectives of the organizations around the table may make settling on one problem definition much harder (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000). Basadur et al. (2000) describe the collaborative problem-solving process as resembling a game of bargaining with different parties entrenched in their own perspectives and interests. Yet, this game must be played, as the very idea and value of collaborating is to combine partners' perspectives to redefine the problem at hand and find new inroads where none may have existed before (Sorenson and Torfing 2012).

*Developing a Sound Theory of Change.* Once the problem is defined, collaborators must develop a sound theory of change (Sparrow 2008; Poister 2003). Rogers et al. (2000) define this as "a causal model linking program inputs and activities to a chain of intended or observed outcomes."

In the law enforcement context, this involves developing an approach to prevent or fight crime, mobilizing adequate resources and deploying them in specific operational ways to achieve an intended outcome.

The wicked nature of the problems addressed by collaborative governance efforts makes developing a sound theory of change especially complex. This often leads to an inability to determine an access point for tackling the problem, and inaction as a result (Head and Alford 2015; Weber and Khademian 2008). In addition to this complexity, the fluid nature of policy networks and actors involved makes the process of developing a sound theory of change much less rigid and linear than it would be in non-networked settings. In fact, the process resembles policy games, “a series of [non-linear] interactions between actors concerning certain policy issues” (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004: 10).

*Measuring Performance against the Theory of Change.* Collaborators must define a method for gauging their performance against their theory of change. The collaborative process requires identification of new performance measures: indicators for evaluating whether partners are deploying resources in line with agreements, whether resources are being combined in such a way as to lead to desired interventions and outputs, and whether the outputs collectively pursued are actually yielding the envisioned public value outcomes for which the collaboration was called into existence. Individual contributions to collectively pursued activities and social outcomes are hard to isolate. Results will therefore seldom be attributable to individual efforts. In addition, measuring outcomes can be extremely challenging due to missing counterfactuals and problems in the conceptualization and enumeration of outcomes, due to their complex and multifaceted nature (Moynihan et al., 2011; Stoker 2006).

### **Collaborative Process Challenges**

The second category of collaborative performance management challenges introduced in the literature relates to the collaborative process. Collaborators are expected to work together with partners that may be unfamiliar. This requires reconciling the different perspectives and interests inherent in their respective parent organizations.

*Reaching a Shared Understanding on Goals and Approach.* One of the first steps in any endeavor is to determine and agree on its *raison d’ être*. Simultaneously, consensus on objectives represents one of the greatest collaborative process challenges that partners face. Usually, there is an underlying structure of interests that creates the context for collaboration around solving a particular problem. This context may consist of some overlapping values, goals and commitments and some widely disparate ones. Similarly, some of the partners’ operational activities may complement each other, while others may be in direct competition. Further complicating

matters, partners may experience status and power differences, leading to anxieties about who will take credit for successes in the collaborative process (Moynihan et al. 2011; Page 2004). These difficulties may be exacerbated by the scope of the collaboration (Provan and Kenis 2008): the more partners, the more difficult it tends to be to find common ground.

*Building Trust.* In tandem with the process of finding common ground, individual collaborators need to gain basic trust in each other. This can serve as a substitute for formal procedures for cooperation (Ring & Van De Ven 1994). Apprehensiveness about other collaborators' good intentions or capacity can be sources of considerable risk to the success of a strategic effort (Das & Teng 2001). In order to overcome this obstacle, the collaborators must generate reciprocal commitment to each other's good intentions (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2015; Ansell & Gash 2008; Bardach 1998). Given the sometimes arbitrary nature of how collaborative efforts come about and the possible prejudices about the other collaborators' way of working, this process of building trust is key in establishing effective partnerships (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006; Thomson & Perry 2006).

*Generating Commitment to the Process.* After initial trust has been built, the collaborators must generate primary commitment to the collaboration, resisting the competing commitments they experience from their parent organization. Stakeholders may be reluctant to get involved, because they are too busy, unsure of the results or anxious that the other collaborators will pay insufficient heed to their perspectives and interests (Ansell and Gash, 2008). To overcome these inhibitions, collaborators need to work together to create an environment with the prospect of mutual gain, both professional and personal (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Thomson and Perry, 2006).

### **Multi-Relational Accountability Challenges**

The last category of collaborative performance management challenges in the literature pertains to multiple dimensions of accountability. Functioning in a collaboration opens new channels of accountability, and creates tension with old channels.

*Managing Tension with Parent Organization Accountability.* Collaborators will almost certainly experience tension between their collaborative activities and the accountability systems in their parent organization (Moynihan et al. 2011). Existing internal performance review structures and accountability arrangements may either not recognize the type or nature of the contributions made in the context of the collaboration or directly discourage them. As such, collaborators often face a conundrum: either they fulfill their organizational responsibilities, thereby failing to be accountable for their collaborative performance, or vice versa (Page et al. 2015; Page 2004; Ryan and Walsh 2004).

*Accountability to (New) External Channels of Accountability.* Nascent external channels of accountability pose new difficulties, particularly in collaborations to solve problems related to crime. These collaborations use flexibility and discretion to implement new approaches, which often do not fall under the mandates of any of the involved organizations. They therefore depend on the acceptance and support of the broader public and, for that, must be able to defend the outcomes they generate in the democratic arena (Gains and Stoker 2009; O'Flynn 2007; Klijn and Koppenjan 2000). In the new governance context, citizens become active participants and partners in the process of generating public value (Moore 1995). That means collaborations must ensure their democratic legitimacy (Page et al. 2015; Moynihan et al. 2011; Rogers and Weber 2010; Heinrich 2002).

*Accountability to Collaboration Partners.* The final challenge relates to the need for collaborators to account for their performance to partners they may not be used to working with. Some partners may be unwilling to be held accountable in this new authority setting, fearing the implications of an additional yardstick (Page 2004). Even if all collaborators accept accountability toward each other, it remains hard to delegate responsibilities and attribute contributions among partners in collaborations (Page et al. 2015; Sparrow 2008; Bardach and Lesser 1996). In consequence, shirking and gaming behavior can hinder collaborations' success (De Bruijn 2002).

## Method and data

Little empirical research is available concerning the real-life dynamics of performance management in collaborations involving heterogeneous organizations. The current study therefore adopted an action research method to investigate the collaborative performance management challenges synthesized from the literature in practice. The aim was to produce a deeper, richer and more dynamic understanding of the underlying causes of and responses to the challenges across a range of collaborations. Researchers immersed eight collaborations in an 18-month development trajectory, observing them closely along the way. This section describes the approach and its merits, alongside the process of case selection, the nature of the development trajectory and the way data was collected and codified.

### Action Research Methodology

Action research is rooted in the principle of learning while doing (Reason and Bradbury 2008). According to Stringer (2013: 1), "Unlike experimental or quantitative research that looks for generalizable explanations related to a small number of variables, action research seeks to engage the complex dynamics involved in any social context." Essentially, action research comprises an iterative approach, going through cycles of adjusting practice based on research, and building understanding based on the preceding research cycles. As such, it is much like the methodology engineers use to pilot consecutive versions of a model (Herr and Anderson 2014).

Action research allows one to quickly single out salient issues and potential interventions using limited resources, before committing to a large-scale experiment to test the most promising interventions (Lindblom 1990). The method heeds the call to go beyond case studies and embark on experimental research in the public governance domain (Margetts, 2011). It also provides a partial answer to the endogeneity problem in observational case studies, as discussed by Blom-Hansen, Morten and Serritzlew (2015). In fact, action research resembles small-scale quasi-field experiments in which interventions are introduced exogenously, but the treatment group is not comprised of entirely random individuals.

The action research design used here allowed development of preliminary hypotheses on the impact of interventions in similar cases, but left some internal validity issues unaddressed due to the small number of observations, the difference in treatment due to variations in the development trajectory for individual groups and potential selection bias. While the method provided a rich, contextualized picture of responses to interventions in specific collaborations, it is difficult to draw wider implications from this, beyond the cases under study.

Beyond these limitations, Herr and Anderson (2014) propose a number of validity criteria based on the type of action research being performed. In their taxonomy, the research methodology adopted here can best be described as “outsiders interacting with insiders” aimed at the generation of new knowledge. To safeguard internal validity in this type of research, Herr and Anderson emphasize the need for dialogic and process validity. To ensure dialogic validity, understood as peer review in action, continuous debriefing sessions were conducted between members of the research team and external academics, adapting the approach and research findings along the way. Extensive documentation served to ensure process validity, understood as identifying and solving problems to allow ongoing learning and looping back to refine earlier conclusions.

### **Embedded Case Selection**

To examine collaborative performance management challenges in more detail, a set of collaborations in the Netherlands were immersed in a development trajectory and studied as they sought to tackle an interconnected organized crime problem. In the southern Netherlands, criminal networks are increasingly entangled with legitimate society. Facilitators such as accountants, car rental companies and even public agencies may knowingly or unknowingly help sustain criminal networks (Clarke and Eck, 2005). Policymakers and individuals who refuse to cooperate may face blackmailing and threats from criminals (Janssen and Van Ophoven, 2015). Such displays of power and the failure to curb criminal networks undermine the legitimacy and authority of politicians and the government.

In the face of growing media attention and political pressure, government partners are looking for innovative solutions for this type of crime. Traditional law enforcement using the criminal justice system has reportedly failed to curb subversive forms of organized crime, given the justice system's limited means, its failure to leverage the capacity of all involved stakeholders and its tendency to fight symptoms instead of causes. The new collaborative approach seeks to use the full range of measures at the disposal of law enforcement partners, public as well as private (Todres, 2012). The aim is to look further than (but not sidestep) the criminal justice system, to frustrate criminal activities and erect economic and social barriers to the development of criminal networks (Spapens, 2010). The collaborations that have resulted from this strategy differ in their degrees of formalization, but all have been developed outside the traditional institutional boundaries of the involved organizations. They truly represent networked governance efforts in that no formal hierarchy or clear reporting structures exist to manage their activities.

We studied eight such collaborations, formed within the framework of the Task Force Brabant Zeeland, a regional initiative to stimulate collaborative efforts to fight subversive forms of organized crime. Table 2 summarizes the composition of these eight collaborations and the crime problems they addressed. A more detailed description of the collaborations, their approaches and results is provided in the online appendix.

*Team Selection and Composition.* The process of forming the eight collaborations started with identification of priority crime problems. Task Force Brabant Zeeland selected the eight most intricate and complicated subversive crime problems in the region, in collaboration with the police, the public prosecutor's office, the tax authority and local governments. The individual collaborators, with varying levels of seniority, were then selected by their superiors based on their supposed involvement and expertise in the respective crime problem and their interest and motivation in engaging in the collaborative effort. Collaborations were composed at minimum of police officers and public prosecutors, who often had a prior working relationship, at least at the institutional level. In most cases, however, local government representatives, tax officials and representatives of private parties were also included, depending on the nature of the crime problem addressed. Teams consisted of five to six members.

*Nature of the Crime Problem.* All crime problems constituted wicked problems. That is, they complied with the complexity, uncertainty and divergence criteria for wicked problems proposed by Head (2008): Earlier mono-disciplinary efforts had failed or were not considered successful in solving these multifaceted problems, no off-the-shelf solutions were available to halt the ever-evolving criminal networks, and different stakeholders had markedly different interests in these problems and different viewpoints about how to solve them. The crime problems, even though

they were tackled in the southern region of the Netherlands, and arguably were most prominent there, were not unique. Hence, lessons learned about how to deal with them could potentially have wider applicability.

**Table 2.** Overview of the eight selected crime problems

No.	Team composition	Crime problem
1	Public prosecutor, police, tax office, local government and iCOV*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deteriorating living conditions in trailer parks</li> <li>• Domiciles of large criminal families</li> </ul>
2	Public prosecutor, constabulary, local government, customs department and police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Porous transport hubs</li> <li>• Gateways for criminal activity</li> </ul>
3	Public prosecutor, police, local government, RIEC** and customs department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lawlessness in recreation parks</li> <li>• Safe havens for criminals</li> </ul>
4	Public prosecutor, police, tax office, provincial government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large-scale synthetic drug production</li> <li>• From labs to export, including illegal dumping of waste</li> </ul>
5	Public prosecutor, police, local government, tax office and RIEC**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth of criminal motorcycle gangs</li> <li>• Networks of criminals</li> </ul>
6	Public prosecutor, police, local government, tax office, TLN***	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lease and rental companies used to facilitate logistics for criminals</li> <li>• Money laundering</li> </ul>
7	Public prosecutor, police, tax office, local government, electricity distribution company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massive marijuana plantations in regular homes and neighborhoods</li> <li>• Blackmailing and threatening of citizens</li> </ul>
8	Public prosecutor, tax office, police, local government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of legal loopholes to circumvent taxes</li> <li>• Money laundering</li> </ul>

\* iCov is a tax authority-based initiative to shed light on large unexplained criminal assets

\*\* RIEC stands for Regional Information and Expertise Centre

\*\*\* TLN stands for Transport and Logistics Netherlands

*Population.* The embedded cases examined in this research were selected from a broader population of problem-oriented teams fighting subversive forms of crime in the Netherlands. That population can be described by four parameters:

1. Multi-agency collaborations, either public-public or public-private,
2. which go beyond the police and public prosecutor's office (as these usually have some form of prior working relationship),
3. which were established and exist primarily to fight a particular manifestation of subversive crime and
4. which are more or less organized or formalized; that is, they have a mandate and existence independent of their members and member organizations.

The collaborations studied sought to generate public value by working together to solve a complex, multifaceted issue. They can therefore be considered part of the wider population of collaborative governance efforts aiming to solve wicked problems. Beyond law enforcement, wicked problems are commonly faced in domains such as healthcare, energy and economic development. Though results of the current research should not be overgeneralized, the hypotheses generated by this initial cycle of action research may be relevant and testable within collaborative governance efforts in these other areas as well.

### **Development Trajectory**

To study the eight collaborations in detail, the research team immersed them in and monitored their responses to an 18-month development trajectory, from March 2015 through August 2016. During the trajectory, the groups were coached to define their respective crime problems, to develop a theory of change and, ultimately, to take coordinated actions and manage their performance. The trajectory was designed both to drive progress in tackling unresolved crime problems and to create an opportunity to observe performance management challenges in collaborative governance efforts up close in order to study the nature of these challenges in detail.

The development trajectory consisted of three overarching interventions to help the collaborations deal with the three types of collaborative performance management challenges identified in the literature: a structured working process, a physical collaboration space and a tailor-made accountability structure.

*Structured Working Process.* The researchers designed a structured working process with milestones along the way to support the teams in tackling their substantive problem-solving challenges. At the start of the trajectory, all participants were handed a basic, preliminary case

description – drafted by the Task Force – with the particular subversive crime problem they would be responsible for tackling. Subsequently, at designated times, predetermined deliverables were to be handed in. These included different iterations of the crime problem definition (building on the initial paragraph handed to them) and development of an approach for tackling the problem. In the middle of the trajectory, a week-long workshop was held to allow participants to deepen their understanding, to learn from each other and to develop implementation plans. At the end of this workshop, the collaborators presented their implementation plans to the top management of their parent organizations. They committed to reporting their progress within four months and a year after the workshop during specially designed stock-taking meetings.

*Physical Collaboration Space.* The collaborations were provided a dedicated physical collaboration space. One month into the trajectory, participants gathered to get acquainted and receive guidance on the rest of the trajectory. Participants then gathered for the week-long workshop described above, working and spending social time together five days in a row. In the periods in between, and after the workshop, the collaborators met at will to work on their deliverables and perform collaborative actions.

*Tailor-Made Accountability Structure.* A tailor-made accountability structure was designed to help participants respond to collaborative accountability challenges, such as tension with their parent organizations' accountability structures. To ensure they could devote time to the trajectory, participants were selected and subsequently invited by their superiors to join the development trajectory, and promised flexibility and degree of autonomy. In addition, top management of the different participating organizations promised their commitment to the process during a preparatory gathering. Both the top management and the teams also committed take part in progress monitoring meetings shortly after the workshop as well as at the end of the trajectory.

In theory, each team was immersed in an identical development trajectory. In practice, however, there were differences in the starting conditions, as these could not be controlled for by the research design. Notably, some teams were, one may argue, advantaged by a more specific case description or a particular team composition. For example, at the start of the trajectory, some teams were handed a case file that described a wider crime problem, while others were handed a case that zoomed in on particular individuals. In addition, team selection was often driven by political considerations, sometimes at the cost of technocratic relevance. As a result, while the teams possessed the requisite support and authorization, not all team members always possessed the expected experience, expertise or familiarity with collaborative work.

The above factors may have resulted in variation in the collaborations' efficacy during the trajectory. Yet, this variation is not necessarily problematic. The aim of action research is to get

close to the data and interact with it to understand deep-seated responses to minor variations. The collaboration participants' responses to the described variations (either built-in or accidental) and the researchers' tracing of these responses along the development trajectory ultimately yielded a realistic picture of the nature of collaborative performance management challenges in practice.

### Data Collection

The action research generated a rich data set. The online appendix presents an extensive overview of the types of data collected. A brief enumeration is provided below.

- Observations in practice: The researchers' immersion in the process of each of the collaboration teams allowed real-time, participant-level observations.
- Single respondent and group interviews: The researchers interviewed the eight teams in their group settings on the performance management challenges they experienced. To gain a more complete picture, a subset of their superiors and other practice experts were also interviewed.
- Participant surveys: The participants in the eight collaborations were asked to complete a survey on the performance management challenges they experienced at two stages in the development trajectory.
- Development trajectory deliverables: To motivate the collaborations to innovate and monitor their progress, they were required to submit a range of deliverables, from problem definitions to fully developed implementation plans and progress dashboards. The researchers collected these deliverables as evidence of the development the different collaborations were undergoing.
- Archival documentation: Where possible, archival documentation was collected on the team process and the crime problems they were working on. Chief among these were emails between collaboration partners, revealing unspoken truths about their collaboration process.

## Data Analysis

Once all the case data was collected, grounded theory was used to interpret and make inferences from these data sources. In practice, the coding proceeded as follows: Individual researchers performed a systematic review of all data to derive labels for observed phenomena. These labels were then counter-coded to derive single definitions of the underlying phenomena. The counter-coding process included extraction of commonalities but, perhaps more importantly, also reconciliation of differences between individual coders. After individual phenomena were clearly defined, researchers began clustering the phenomena into relevant categories and proposed connections between different categories of phenomena. Though the above process may sound linear, the researchers viewed the “analysis not [as a] structured, static, or rigid process. Rather, [it was considered] a free-flowing and creative one in which [the researchers] moved quickly back and forth between types of coding” (Strauss and Corbin, 2015: 58).

## Results

This section describes the research results. First it discusses the difficulties experienced by the participants regarding the three types of collaborative performance management challenges identified in the literature. Next it explores the underlying mechanisms that led these challenges to manifest and how the different collaborations responded to them.

### Challenges Experienced by Collaborations

The participants in the development trajectory all struggled to some extent with the three categories of collaborative performance management challenges identified in the literature.

*Substantive Problem-Solving Challenges.* Invariably, whether through anonymous surveys or interviews, the collaborators clearly recognized defining the problem they were working on as their greatest challenge. They struggled to pinpoint exact reasons for this, but most of their responses indicate the presence of a wicked problem. A police officer explained, “If we were able to clearly define the issue, a solution would present itself.” Another participant said, “The reason that this issue has not been solved is that no one clearly understands the issue.”

*Collaborative Process Challenges.* Due to the seemingly unsurmountable substantive problem-solving challenges, collaborators developed resistance against working in the new, networked approach. Many of the collaborators resorted to the traditional boundaries of means at their organization’s disposal in an attempt to resolve the issue. For instance, one participant suggested, “Maybe we just need to make a few more arrests to get a grip on the situation.” Being stuck in their traditional professional frames of reference oftentimes limited participants’ ability to find common ground and innovative, cross-organizational solutions. The team working on

underground accounting recognized this as a prime challenge: “It is difficult to define common incentives, as everyone’s starting point is their own organization.”

Interestingly, whereas generating shared commitment to the collaborative process was generally considered a huge challenge, building trust was seen as much less of an issue, even between public and private parties. This might have been a result of the design of the development trajectory, which forced participants to physically meet and get to know each other.

*Multi-Relational Accountability Challenges.* Participants experienced considerable confusion about their role in the envisioned process and their accountability responsibilities during the development trajectory. Such confusion may be inherent in any new professional task, especially given that the task was – to some extent – externally imposed, but the complex nature of multi-agency collaborations aggravated their confusion.

This confusion manifested itself in various ways: Participants in some of the collaborations exhibited confusion about their group’s composition and the reason they were selected for the effort. For instance, in the synthetic drugs collaboration, participants complained that only one of them had worked on the issue before and that the real experts were not on the team. Besides attempts to cling to traditional roles and responsibilities, participants struggled to account for the time they spent on the development trajectory. Several attempted to dislodge themselves from the process or refused to contribute due to a perceived or purported lack of authorization from superiors in their parent organization. For example, one tax official repeatedly said that he was “not authorized or in a position to comment on the issue.” While some participants’ perceived lack of authorization from their immediate superiors, others experienced anxiety about the high expectations from the top. In a speech at the start of the trajectory, the Deputy Chief of the National Police asked participants to commit to the process “full-time.” This caused a flood of worried responses. How would they ever be able to commit themselves full-time next to their already busy “regular” jobs?

*Getting Stuck.* Unable to resolve the above challenges, participants felt stuck. During one working session, a police officer told his team partners, “We seem to be going back and forth without any progress.” As a result of this feeling, most collaborations retreated to the apparent safety of continuous brainstorming and problem analysis. Yet, this only brought to the surface new substantive problems and collaborative process challenges, which made them feel stuck again. In essence, many felt they were getting no closer to a solution. “It is one step forward and two steps back,” a public prosecutor said.

### **Paradoxes Underlying the Challenges**

In his satirical masterpiece *Catch 22*, Joseph Heller described a fundamental paradox faced by American air force pilots in Italy during World War II: Nobody insane was allowed to fly, but pleading insanity to avoid flying meant that one was sane and thus fit to fly. This paradox provides a metaphor for the seemingly unresolvable iterative circles in which the collaborators found themselves as they sought to respond to the problems they had been assigned to.

*Substantive Problem-Solving Paradoxes.* During the process of identifying and analyzing the problem, translating it into an approach and taking action, a number of paradoxes surfaced that were difficult for the collaborations to resolve. One paradox was that to determine an ideal approach for fighting a crime problem and to take subsequent action, the problem needed to be thoroughly analyzed and its root causes laid bare. This required data on the problem and an understanding of causal mechanisms. Yet, such data and understanding could be generated only by interacting with the data through interventions in the field first. One tax official was particularly conscious of this paradox between action and analysis: “To gather data and understand the problem in all its facets, collaborative action is needed,” yet such collaborative actions had not taken place until now because of insufficient data to support the development of a collaborative approach.

Besides this action-analysis paradox, the collaborations struggled to resolve the apparent paradox between solving a single problem and addressing a larger issue of which the problem was a subcomponent. Teams felt they had to choose between the two. For example, the team working on illegal activities related to car lease companies was uncertain about whether they were to solve one specific case, which their initial problem statement focused on, or the wider phenomenon of car lease companies facilitating organized crime. A participant in this collaboration expressed the predicament: “We are not really sure if we are searching for an answer to the broader problem or the specific case, and what our specific role should be.” Most teams initially failed to recognize that working on an emblematic case could provide an in-depth understanding of the larger issue and the root causes of the problem.

*Collaborative Process Paradoxes.* The collaborations also struggled to resolve paradoxes inherent in the collaborative process. One of these pertained to trust and working together. In order to build trust, participants needed to collaborate and get to know each other. However, in order to start collaborating, the officials needed to trust each other sufficiently to work together and share sensitive crime data. A participant in one group felt that “trust comes from success, [but] collaboration is about building trust.” As noted, the trajectory itself “forced” partners to collaborate, which was helpful in overcoming the initial distrust mentioned in much of the literature.

The collaborators also experienced confusion about the new, networked way of working and its requirements. They noted a paradox between the requirement to innovate beyond their job descriptions and the simultaneous need to draw on the strengths of their traditional roles and means at the disposal of their parent organizations. It seemed difficult for the collaborators to keep one foot in each world. A public prosecutor lamented, “Isn’t the point of this [program] to innovate? What we have now is just a mix of old approaches in a new configuration.”

*Multi-Relational Accountability Paradoxes.* Participants noted a tension between old channels of accountability and the new way of working. First, to work together effectively, the collaborators needed to get more space and autonomy to innovate from their immediate superiors. Yet, these superiors were often (rightfully) apprehensive about providing such flexibility. They felt a need to monitor and judge their employees’ new role and achievements more closely, in order to ensure success. This paradox remained a challenge for some collaborations throughout the trajectory. For example, in the collaboration working on porous transport hubs, superiors from the customs department terminated their officials’ participation, as they did not perceive any clear short-term return on the investment. This, however, was a major obstacle to effective collaboration.

Second, the collaborators were confused by the seemingly paradoxical requirement to report their progress directly to top management while retaining their old hierarchical accountability requirements. “It’s nice that the top requires us to work on this full time, but I still have my normal job to do. Should I ask top management to tell my direct boss that I can’t do my job because I am working on this,” a tax official wondered.

### **Variation in Responses to Apparent Catch 22s**

The collaborations varied in their ability to overcome the paradoxes and tensions identified. A possible reason for this variation was the exogenous differences in starting conditions, particularly, the varying logics of the organizations taking part in the collaborations and the different crime problem definitions, as well as the broader historical, institutional and political settings in which the specific problems had to be solved. Findings from this research, however, indicate that there were also endogenous differences in the team process that allowed some to transcend the observed paradoxes. Some of the teams were able to get out of the paradoxical loop by adopting an “and” mindset instead of remaining fixed in an “either-or” mindset. Using the “and” mindset enabled them to find an access point to address the issue they were trying to solve and then spiral from there toward an actionable approach rather than circling around the issue.

*Trailer Parks.* The collaboration working on the deteriorating conditions in the trailer parks was initially unsuccessful in gaining a bird's eye view of the problem. The group was unable to decide whether to focus on the larger problem of lawlessness at trailer parks or intervene in a particular trailer park (substantive problem-solving challenge). They also failed to build sufficient trust to obtain critical data from a key partner, a city council which had been involved in a pivotal case involving trailer parks (collaborative process challenge). Generating more data to understand the nature of the issue would have required either getting the city council on board or performing targeted enforcement activities in an actual trailer park. But the team seemed somewhat paralyzed by their confusion about the problem scope and their struggle to get the right partners on board. Only toward the end of the development trajectory did the team overcome this paralysis. It decided to focus on intervening at one particular trailer park, providing a clear access point to the problem, to pilot potential approaches for tackling the wider social issue of lawlessness at trailer parks.

*Porous Transport Hubs.* Like the trailer park collaboration, the collaboration working on porous transport hubs was at first unable to bring on board the support of necessary partners, including the customs department and border control. However, in this case it was due to these partners' initial opposition to investing in the program. They saw no immediate benefit in terms of their own organizational output targets and did not want to be held accountable for their participation (multi-dimensional accountability challenge). This collaboration, too, struggled to define an adequate approach due to a relative scarcity of information on the crime problem they were assigned and as a result of the missing, critical partners (substantive problem-solving challenge).

Yet, the collaborators thought of an innovative way to overcome this initial paralysis and gather data, which they could then use to define a suitable approach. To prove the gravity of the issue, they filmed an undercover agent passing through a small local airport with a rocket launcher without difficulty. This raised all stakeholders' awareness of the potential for illegal smuggling via these transport hubs. With the missing partners now on board, the partners were able to analyze dubious flight patterns and implement targeted enforcement activities against suspects at these hubs. The undercover operation thus provided a point of access to simultaneously gather data on the gravity of the problem and advance toward its resolution.

*Marijuana Plantations.* Like the others, the collaboration focusing on marijuana production struggled to define an adequate theory of change to intervene on this broad social issue (substantive problem-solving challenge). Indeed, how could the small team make a dent in the problem, as there were certainly thousands of marijuana plantations spread across the country? To move ahead, they took a leap of faith and narrowed their problem definition to domestic marijuana plantations and the safety and security hazards related to these. Use of electricity

network data enabled them to identify the location of marijuana plantations that were stealing electricity to a precision of about a dozen households. Thereafter, the police, municipal agents and electrical company went door to door, raising awareness among residents of the dangers of marijuana production at home, including fire hazards and extortion by criminal networks. This strategy, combining analysis and action, provided an access point for raising a barrier in criminal networks' opportunity structure. Their approach drew on existing data from the electricity distributor, but the door-to-door visits also generated new data regarding the prevalence of illegal plantations to inform further action. This "and" mindset helped the collaboration move out of its action-analysis paralysis.

## Conclusion and discussions

### Conclusion

The current research confirmed that collaborative governance efforts indeed encountered the three categories of collaborative performance management challenges identified in the literature. The collaborators invariably struggled to dissect the crime problem assigned to them and to develop appropriate ways to counter it. These substantive problem-solving challenges led participants to emphasize their organizational differences and develop inertia and resistance against taking further steps in the collaboration. In addition, many participants in the collaborations questioned their authority or mandate and were reluctant to be held accountable for their work in the context of the collaboration. The challenges, moreover, were found to be closely related, suggesting that, for instance, multi-relational accountability issues must be dealt with hand in hand with substantive problem-solving challenges and collaborative process challenges. This confirms findings of previous research such as Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2012), Ansell and Gash (2008), Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006), and Thomson and Perry (2006).

Using the grounded theory approach, the current research developed a theory on the drivers underlying the collaborative performance management challenges and variations in responses to them. One of the driving forces underlying the identified challenges seemed to be collaborators' inability to find an access point to start working on the wicked crime problems they were assigned to and to resolve the more deeply seated paradoxes. Confronted with a multifaceted problem, most of the collaborators had no idea where to begin. Some feared involvement in an insoluble problem and were apprehensive about putting in a lot of effort without results. In response, many collaborators preferred to observe the problem from a distance. Sometimes, participants would offer an idea to move forward, but soon after, as one participant put it, they would hear "a voice in their head, saying that it would simply not work". In this way, they kept going in circles without spiraling closer to results.

Yet, some teams were eventually able to resolve the identified challenges and move ahead. Instead of using an “either-or” approach, they got into an “and” mindset, becoming comfortable with marching ahead despite uncertainty about the exact path or destination. This pragmatist approach allowed them to identify an access point for intervening in the chronology of the wicked problems they were tackling. For example, the collaboration working on marijuana plantations combined action and data gathering, using information from the electricity network to locate illegal marijuana plantations and raise awareness in neighborhood surroundings.

### **Contribution to the Governance Literature**

This research sheds light on the dynamics underlying performance management challenges in collaborative governance efforts, while exploring what has helped some in dealing with these challenges more effectively. As such, it provides a partial explanation for the tenaciousness of the typical collaborative performance management challenges identified in the literature by authors such as Moynihan (2011) and summarized by Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2015). It also builds on such previous work to suggest what distinguishes some problem-focused collaborations to deal with these challenges more effectively than other ones.

### **Implications for Practice**

We took the first steps in exploring why some teams were able to change their mindsets while others remained stuck. One reason may be a certain path-dependency inherent in the starting conditions of the collaborations. Some teams had the right partners on board and a clearer objective from the start. Yet, there also seems to have been something inherently different about the way some of the collaborations managed their team process after the initial condition-setting stage. The teams that proved able to change their mindset were willing to dive into the deep and move forward even in the face of some unresolved questions. This suggests that future development trajectories should seek to push law enforcement officials to engage with, rather than avoid, the iterative work of spiraling toward a solution. Pre-structuring such an iterative process for collaborators, allowing them to go back and forth between the drawing board and piloting ideas in practice, might thus be a promising approach to advance practice.

### **Research Limitations and Avenues for Further Research**

The starting conditions of the development trajectory, including the crime problems assigned and team participants chosen, varied markedly between the collaborations. Due to this heterogeneity in starting conditions, this research did not provide an experimental setting. The results rather must be viewed as a rich single case study of performance management challenges in crime-fighting collaborations. In addition, the mandatory nature of the trajectory produced more or less artificially constructed teams working on problems that were more or less clearly defined. Because these initial conditions were fixed in the research design, it was impossible to

study effects of collaborators' interactions surrounding these initial conditions on the collaborations' outcomes. Finally, this study did not explore in-depth what factors led to the shift in mindset that enabled some teams to move ahead in the face of uncertainty and collaborative paradoxes.

Nevertheless, the action research design enabled observation of the collaborations' responses to minute variations in their development following the initial condition-setting stage, allowing rich implications to be drawn. New action research could build on the research presented here to further explore reasons for the shift in mindset observed in some teams and to pilot or prototype potential interventions to mitigate the impediments to collaboration. Such action research could be followed by further, more standardized empirical experimentation, through for example randomization of problems and team participants across a larger number of samples, to confirm the results' internal validity (Herr and Anderson 2014).

In addition, longitudinal research may provide insight into the development of collaborative performance management challenges over time, extending even beyond the 18-month time frame of the current study. Finally, cross-case analysis between similar collaborations in different domains or different countries may lead to identification of variables and development of an analytical framework that is more sensitive to culture, history, policy area and institutional context.

These new avenues of inquiry will contribute actionable knowledge to help collaborating law enforcement partners effectively and legitimately tackle some of society's priority crime issues.

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