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Citizen Perceptions And Informed Performance Measurement: Focus On The One-Window Service Offices In Kampong Thom Province, Cambodia

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Abstract

The concepts of performance evaluation and citizen participation are fundamentally at odds with one another. Good governance and citizen input are important to district administration. Initiatives in this field are few because of the difficulties in integrating performance measurement with active citizen participation. This study examined district administration through the One-Window Services (OWSs) in Kampong Thom Province, Cambodia, utilizing a qualitative analysis to investigate the research issues. These services offered a rare chance to investigate whether citizen participation improves or impedes the ability to monitor district administration performance effectively. In the areas of organizational commitment and leadership, public management abilities, citizen participation, the use of performance measures, citizen outcomes, and organizational experience, the qualities required for implementing OWSs using Citizen Informed Performance Measurement (CIPM) that support democratic governance while maximizing efficiency. Three themes emerged from the study's findings: (1) collaboration; (2) performance metrics; and (3) citizen perspective. The results showed that the most significant factor in performance measurement was the citizen perspective, which was followed by cooperation. There was less consensus regarding the impact of citizen participation in performance evaluation of certain programs and services. The study found that public management interpersonal skills, elected officials' commitment, shared decision-making with citizens, the use of performance

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measures for services continuous improvement, increased accountability to citizens, and prior experience of districts actively involving citizens are all essential components of a successful CIPM.

Keywords: Citizen Perceptions, Informed Performance Measurement, One-Window Service Offices, Cambodia

INTRODUCTION

Although the idea of emphasizing government efficiency is not new, there has been a surge in interest in government performance over the past 20 years since the push to reinvent government (Khoem et al., 2026). Efficiency concepts from the commercial sector consequently acquired traction in the governmental sector. The public sector's approach to service delivery became based on the principles of customer satisfaction and responsiveness to citizens receiving services. As the government provided services, citizens quickly assumed the passive role of consumers, and the interaction with the government was one-way (Ouk et al., 2026).

The public sector's embrace of market-based concepts provided advantages, but it was constrained in its ability to tell individuals about outcomes that were important to them. The values of effectiveness and citizen satisfaction were also neglected. The risk that accountability would be jeopardized and the possibility of reduced democratic government arose. This led to a movement brought on by a lack of faith in the government and a need for greater accountability. Increased citizen involvement—where citizens actively cooperate with the government—emerged as a solution to these problems.

However, citizen perceptions in performance evaluation is still difficult and uncommon. The interest in this study of communities participating in citizen-informed performance evaluation stems from the issue of the lack of integration of these two notions. The ideas make sense in terms of administrative theory. Efficiency theory, however, asserts that they are incompatible. What piqued my interest was the ongoing battle to reconcile conflicting theories and the efforts of motivated communities to do so.

The idea behind the term "performance" is that the objective is to provide the public with effective and responsive services. In order to verify research claiming that citizen participation improves performance metrics and to ascertain whether participation can actually impede the process, the study collected data from districts administration. Since meaningful public participation necessitates some degree of relationship development and cooperation, citizen trust in elected politicians is also examined. Participation by citizens affects public trust in the

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government (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). Demonstrated responsibility for government operations is what citizens expect. According to Halachmi and Holzer (2011), increased public awareness of the organization's capacity and knowledge of challenges to become more effective, efficient, and responsible with resources boosts trust.

Literature covered a wide range of characteristics, all of which are worth taking into account in this study. However, the survey was designed with the intention of finding those characteristics that climbed to the top in terms of relevance and are thot to be crucial foundations for program success and sustainability in order to give a better sense of what is actually crucial.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

The public sector has seen an increase in performance measurement during the 1990s. In response to both internal and external efforts to gauge government performance and boost citizen accountability, this emphasis on performance assessment evolved. The government started implementing private sector principles and methods to increase productivity in response to the demands (Marshall et al., 1999). Government became increasingly results-oriented as a result of external pressures to privatize public services, cut spending, and raise public responsibility (Poister, 2003). The importance of performance measures and other management tools to provide baseline data and assess efficacy has increased due to internal pressures to provide cost-effective services and to supply data for strategic planning processes, quality improvement programs, and reengineering processes (Poister, 2003; Vinzant & Vinzant, 1996). However, this focus on efficiency raised questions about the intent behind government services. There was growing concern that the government would be more focused on production than on the methods used to create outcomes (Alford, 2002). For this reason, the movement for public engagement and performance measurement began at the same time. The idea that citizen participation increases the relevance of performance measurement (Yang & Hsieh, 2007) and strengthens democratic governance (Epstein et al., 2006) is the foundation of the movement for citizen involvement, which was sparked by mistrust of government and the desire for citizen involvement in governance (Ho & Coates, 2004).

The role of citizens in government performance was not taken seriously until the 1990s, despite growing interest in the movements (Ho & Coates, 2002). According to Marshall et al. (1999) and Peters (2001), imitating the private sector led to citizens adopting the passive position of consumers, entitled to the best services their taxes could purchase. Public administration was strongly impacted by the ongoing emphasis on economic theory. In today's culture, the battle to

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increase efficiency while integrating the public in service delivery is complicated (Kettl, 2002) and places the two movements in a dangerous balancing act. The market-based approach, which was reflected in aspects of New Public Management (NPM) (Kettl, 2002), shifted away from a collaborative model of public administration and did not encourage democratic self-determination (Marshall et al., 1999). Both meaningful citizen participation in performance evaluation (Marshall et al., 1999; Yates, 1982) and democratic government (Terry, 1998) were potentially threatened by the demand for efficient services. According to Wray and Hauer (1997), the outcome was a restricted approach to incorporate significant citizen participation in performance evaluation.

When deciding what to measure and what outcomes to disclose, communities decide whether or not to include citizens in the process. According to Marshall et al. (1999), a cooperative effort to gauge government performance must strike a balance with the force of efficiency from the private sector's point of view. Numerous nomenclatures, citizen metaphors, and engagement strategies characterize this kind of endeavor. Previously known as Citizen-Driven Government Performance and Citizen-Driven Performance Measurement, the National Center for Public Performance (NCPP) at Rutgers University offers a certificate program called Citizen-Driven Government Improvement. Citizen-Driven Performance Improvement is a word used in one of the program's courses, while Citizen-Driven Performance Measurement was the title of a prior course. The words "Citizen Engagement in Performance Management," "Citizen-Based Performance Measurement," "Citizen-Centered Performance Measurement," and "Citizen-Initiated Performance Assessment" are other names for these integrated principles.

There are disparities in the semantics of each, especially given the significant distinctions between performance management and performance measurement, even if one may argue over the applicability of the appropriate descriptive word. The former restricts citizen participation to performance metrics. However, budgeting, strategy planning, project execution, and performance analysis are all examples of citizen participation in performance management (Folz et al., 2009). The term "Citizen Informed Performance Measurement" (CIPM) refers to the process of measuring governmental performance and responsibility to the demands and desires of citizens thru their participation.

Because citizen participation is not included in the performance assessment process, there is a dearth of literature on citizen participation directly connected to performance measurement (Melkers & Willoughby, 2001). According to Poister and Streib's (1999) survey of cities, just 3% of citizen groups are involved in the creation of performance measurements. It is crucial to

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remember that the definition of "involve" differs. The spectrum of involvement is not clearly defined (Kinney, 2008), and it is up for debate how much citizen participation is appropriate.

According to a 2008 GFOA research referenced by Kinney (2008), reporting is the most prevalent type of passive, unidirectional citizen interaction. As governments get more experience, they start incorporating citizen input into the process, making information flow more bidirectionally. Less than 5% of GASB's survey results fall into the third stage, citizen informed performance measurement, which indicates a high degree of direct citizen involvement but is uncommon. Even more active participation is represented by the fourth step, citizen-informed performance-based decision-making, which is practiced by less than 1% of those polled. According to Kinney (2008), there is a sharp decline in the curve from basic performance reporting to genuine public participation, indicating the rarity of CIPM activities.

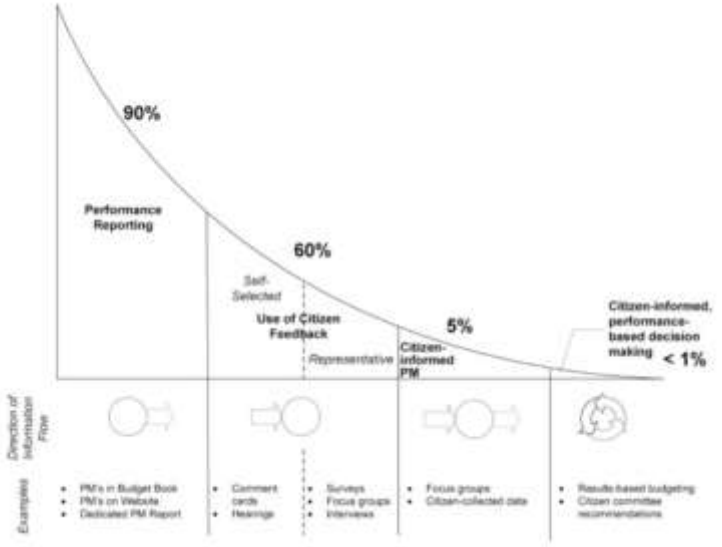


Figure 1. CIPM (Kinney, 2008)

Accountability, informing the public about government efficacy, and enhancing public trust are all topics covered in literature on government performance from an external viewpoint (Ammons, 1995; De Lancer & Holzer, 2001, Parr & Gates, 1989; Downs & Larkey, 1986; King & Stivers, 1998). The issue of maintaining democracy and defining the role of the citizen in a democratic society has attracted scholarly attention due to the rise of citizen involvement in government performance (Box et al., 2001; Gibson et al., 2005).

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METHODS

This research paper was conducted using the qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews with survey participants who agreed to take part in a quick interview comprised the qualitative approach. This approach was selected to give participants the opportunity to articulate their thoughts and ideas in their own words (Esterberg, 2002). The six open-ended questions were the same for every interviewee. The respondents were able to elaborate on their answers regarding CIPM of the One-Window Services (OWSs) based on their own experiences because the questions were open-ended. Common themes that surfaced in the replies were used to categorize them (Creswell, 2003).

This study focused on 15 local people entities that took part in the OWSs. The study's target audience comprised public managers and elected officials who served as important informants for the participating communities. A performance evaluation method involving residents of the municipality they served was either approved by elected authorities or they took part in it. Public managers helped create, carry out, approve, or take part in the citizen-involved performance measurement process. Collected data were analyzed by using the thematic contents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three related themes that arose from the hypothesis statements, OWSs-CIPM characteristics, and interview responses will be woven together from the quantitative portion's data in this part. The three main themes are: (1) Citizen Perspective toward OWSs; (2) OWSs Measurement; and (3) OWSs Cooperation.

Results of the Theme of Citizen Perspective toward OWSs

As a result of citizen involvement in OWSs-CIPM, this theme offers analysis and comments on the idea of citizen perspective. Perception (impression) and perspective (point of view) are strongly associated, and as previously discussed in the literature, the principle of perception determines whether a government succeeds or fails (Schneider, 1995). This subject includes six hypothetical statements that were citizen-centric. By claiming that citizen participation leads to actions that: (1) represent a citizen's perspective on effective program or service delivery; (2) assess how satisfied citizens are with the caliber of government services and programs; (3) assess the services and programs that citizens value the most; (4) are citizens defined as those who gain the most out of their taxes?; (5) declare a communal benefit that is defined by citizens; and (6) they are explained in terms that citizens can easily understand.

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The relevance of the assertions in this subject was amply confirmed by the interview replies, and it was not unexpected that the measures created with public participation reflected the viewpoint of the citizens. Instead of emphasizing efficiency, a philosophy of democratic governance and the efficacy of policies and initiatives encourage the impact of the citizen perspective. The tale that follows illustrates how well the quantitative and qualitative data work together to achieve this goal.

From citizens creating performance metrics to citizens serving as the audience for performance reports, the citizen perspective was expressed in a number of ways. The criteria they used for reporting performance clearly informed the Cambodian district administrators that the citizen perspective would be an emphasis (Ouk et al., 2026). For instance, one participant acknowledged that in the past, people were the target audience, thus they were not really considering it from the viewpoint of the general people. Following the grant, another participant stated that the most memorable aspect of their involvement was that it prompted them to consider asking the people they serve what they would like to know, how we should report it, and what their experiences are.

Questioning the accuracy of district administration presumptions is another benefit of concentrating on public perception. According to participant, management had an idea of what residents valued, but in the end, they discovered they were wrong. Officials and management were similarly surprised by a contrasting response from another neighborhood. When asked citizens what they wanted to know, many were surprised. “Carry on with what you are doing, and do not ignore that when we do not say anything. If we are upset, we will let you know," they added. This aligns with Callahan’s (2007) assertion. Citizens desire less active participation in the deliberative process and are likely to be happy as clients and customers of government when they are satisfied with the public sector and the general execution of public policy” (p. 183).

When it comes to what people see in the city and what they read in the newspaper, citizens always have a different perspective than personnel, according to one of participant, confirming the potential variances in viewpoints. Literature cites an instance of how environmental influences have an impact on public perception (Stillman, 1996, Glaser & Denhardt, 2000). Another participant echoes this observation regarding representation, citing unfair public participation when participants are hand-selected for familiarity or convenience rather than being representative of the entire community. Focus groups should not consist of the typical suspects. Participants who answered the CIPM trait of citizen participation tended to have this mindset.

There is a propensity to think of representation in terms of the general public, but under

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CIPM, where all stakeholders ought to get a chance to offer their viewpoint, an elected official expressed disappointment by saying,

> We had no involvement. I do not believe the council was ever specifically requested to participate; instead, the administration handled the most of it without consulting us. I do not mean to come across as peakish, but when I heard that they were conducting focus groups with citizens.

Results of the Theme of OWSs Measurement

Performance metrics are instruments that are useless unless they are put to a particular use. These tools offer government data for program management and ongoing improvement (Callahan, 2007) as well as program evaluation (Poister, 2003). The quantitative analysis, backed by a qualitative narrative, is presented in the following context of the theme. Three hypothetical claims about program assessment metrics that arise from citizen participation in performance measurement are included in this theme: (1) they increase the amount of data collected; (2) of services and programs with a track record of poor performance; and (3) of programs and services with significant budget costs.

The assertions are indicators of program efficiency (high cost, responsiveness, low performance) compared to effectiveness outcomes. Since some OWSs-CIPM initiatives recruit civilians to gather data, this also includes citizen data gathering. Measures of efficiency were rarely discussed during the interviews in this segment because the emphasis was on the citizen's perspective and informing them of the effectiveness of the programs. Since the purpose of the interviews was to provide context for the survey instrument responses, there were no questions that expressly addressed this issue. Therefore, even if efficiency measures are crucial, the lack of discussion on this topic is not surprising.

There is no one ideal method for creating a performance management system, nor is it simple to develop and administer measures. The majority of communities' lack CIPM-specific personnel, and those assigned to oversee the program do so while holding a role that is not solely focused on this task. Prior to applying for the award, a number of answers indicated that an established performance measuring system was in place. According to one elected official, it was simpler to include citizens in an established structure since it is important to understand internal affairs before engaging in meaningful public discourse. According to one of participant,

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it is ineffective to try to increase citizen participation without an established true performance metric system. Your internal system must be perfect before you can go public. You must have a true vision of what you are looking at from the inside before you get feedback from anyone else.

Results of the Theme of OWSs Collaboration

In OWSs-CIPM, collaboration entails working together with public managers, elected authorities, and citizens. Because of accountability and openness, it suggests that stakeholders have developed constructive relationships based on trust. In OWSs-CIPM, collaborative partnerships entail pursuing shared objectives and reaching a consensus on morality. The following three hypothetical claims, arranged according to citizen outcomes and collaboration, illustrate this theme: Participation of citizens in performance evaluation: (1) increases participant agreement with the goal of performance measurements; (2) increases public trust in elected officials; and (3) increases public trust in government managers.

OWSs-CIPM aims to collaborate with citizens. Impressions of a more substantial outreach to citizens were astonishingly positive, despite possible reluctance due to fear, time commitment, or difficulties. Goals and expectations are also the foundation of cooperation and trust. Managing expectations to the extent that the OWS goals and objectives can be widely publicized and clearly articulated before the program begins is an area of ongoing improvement with OWSs-CIPM.

One participant acknowledged that participation was restricted to give approval. As long as staff felt strongly enough to present it to council and there would be no financial cost. He acknowledged that the council did not devote much effort to it and relied on the recommendation of the expert staff in order to secure the financing. This person, who was also well-versed in performance metrics, went on to say that he attempted to advocate for dashboards and metrics for a number of years without success since the council could not comprehend them.

It appears that a tangent collaboration—one of networking with peers in similar programs—affects citizen trust, relationship-building, and teamwork to make OWSs-CIPM the best it can be. For participants, networking was the most instructive and fulfilling aspect. This was training that indirectly improved public manager skills in OWSs-CIPM thru the sharing of ideas. This comment demonstrated how crucial it is to expand public management expertise thru peer contact. In fact, the most crucial public management ability was found to be interpersonal abilities to build and maintain citizen relationships, followed by meeting facilitation that is productive, organized, and respectful of time.

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The district administration has had difficulty striking a balance between the growing influence of economic theory in response to fiscal shortages (Kettl, 2002) and the demands of the public involvement movement in response to citizen mistrust in government (Ho & Coates, 2004). Districts administration are put to the test by the conflict between democracy and efficiency in the face of dwindling resources and rising demands. According to Marshall et al. (1999), public Informed Performance Measurement (CIPM) is a way to handle market-oriented pressures to provide services while enhancing accountability thru more direct public involvement.

CONCLUSION

The study provides a comprehensive response to the main research issue, which is that citizens improve the efficiency of measuring district administration performance. With the exception of the fact that public involvement takes longer and has no effect on measures for expensive or problematic programs, survey results and interviews unequivocally corroborate this position. There are advantages and disadvantages to involving citizens in the creation and reporting of performance metrics. Although public Informed Performance Measurement promotes genuine public participation, it is acknowledged that staff and financial resources are limited. The community must pledge to uphold democratic governance and balance its advantages to society with efficiency requirements. This study strengthened the idea that economics and democracy are equally vital and that there is no need for competition between the two ideologies.

The findings of this study offer prospects for additional investigation. It is advised that future studies of Trailblazer Program participants or comparable initiatives be carried out using case studies. This would give the timeliness needed to get the viewpoint of the public on the procedure. If feedback was obtained during or after the citizen involvement, future study might be similar to this one but include the viewpoint of the citizen.

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