

Cambridge Elements

Elements in Public and Nonprofit Administration

edited by

Andrew Whitford

University of Georgia

Robert Christensen

Brigham Young University

BEHAVIORAL PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

*How People Make Sense of
Government Metrics*

Oliver James

University of Exeter

Donald P. Moynihan

Georgetown University

Asmus Leth Olsen

University of Copenhagen

Gregg G. Van Ryzin

Rutgers University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-70807-4 — Behavioral Public Performance
Oliver James , Asmus Leth Olsen , Donald Moynihan , Gregg G. Van Ryzin
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108708074
DOI: 10.1017/9781108761338

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and Gregg G. Van Ryzin 2020

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First published 2020

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-70807-4 Paperback
ISSN 2515-429X (print)
ISSN 2515-4303 (online)

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Behavioral Public Performance

How People Make Sense of Government Metrics

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DOI: 10.1017/9781108761338
First published online: May 2020

Oliver James
University of Exeter

Donald P. Moynihan
Georgetown University

Asmus Leth Olsen
University of Copenhagen

Gregg G. Van Ryzin
Rutgers University

Author for correspondence: Oliver James, o.james@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract: A revolution in the measurement and reporting of government performance through the use of published metrics, rankings and reports has swept the globe at all levels of government. Performance metrics now inform important decisions by politicians, public managers and citizens. However, this performance movement has neglected a second revolution in behavioral science that has revealed cognitive limitations and biases in people's identification, perception, understanding and use of information. This Element introduces a new approach – behavioral public performance – that connects these two revolutions. Drawing especially on evidence from experiments, this approach examines the influence of characteristics of numbers, subtle framing of information, choice of benchmarks or comparisons, human motivation and information sources. These factors combine with the characteristics of information users and the political context to shape perceptions, judgment and decisions. Behavioral public performance suggests lessons to improve design and use of performance metrics in public management and democratic accountability.

Keywords: performance management; performance information; accountability; decision-making; cognitive biases; citizen–state interaction; behavioral public performance

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ISBNs: 9781108708074 (PB), 9781108761338 (OC)
ISSNs: 2515-429X (print), 2515-4303 (online)

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