

# Management “In between”: The Operative Manager in Governance Networks

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## Abstract

This article discusses operative management in public governance networks. Drawing on case studies from public governance networks in Norwegian city regions, the article investigates the political preconditions for operative management, by asking how the role of the operative manager in governance networks is structured and affected by the preconditions granted by public authorities. The study demonstrates that operative managers hold an “in-between” role, between network members as well as between the network and public authorities. This role is though affected by structural conditions granted, in both positive and negative ways. Arguing for a flexible public authority intervention in governance networks, the article also emphasizes the importance of transparency and continually evaluating of the operative network management. Operative managers can hold an important role in forging a common understanding among stakeholders, as well as coordinating resources. Important in this respect is time, adequate funding and administrative support, all of which will affect the conditions required for the operative manager and the governance network to perform effectively within the framework of democratic politics. Lessons from the Norwegian cases indicate that public authorities should be aware of the significance of the operative management role. This “in-between” manager can strongly affect network processes and network outcomes. The role an operative manager performs can provide a useful tool to use resources efficiently. It can also provide a key mechanism for finding the proper authority intervention and thereby balance network efficiency against the need to retain democratic influence and control.

**Keywords:** operative manager, metagovernance, governance networks, city regional development, efficient- and democratic governance

## 1. Introduction

The public sector’s active role in shaping and managing governance networks is becoming a major topic of research (e.g., Agranoff, 2007; Vangen & Huxam, 2003; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Sørensen, 2009; Herranz, 2010). Public governance networks are based on trust and negotiations between a set of public and private actors, who seek better solutions to public policy issues through collaboration (Agranoff, 2007; Skelcher & Sullivan, 2008; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009; Farsund & Leknes, 2010). The need for hands-on management in these situations is significant but challenging. First is the challenge of balancing diverse interests, and second is the challenge of balancing efficient performance within the framework of democratic politics (Agranoff, 2007; Head, 2008; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009).

This article addresses these challenges by focusing on preconditions for the balancing role of the *operative manager* in public governance networks. The operative management role reflects “hands-on” network management (Sørensen & Torfing, 2009; Head, 2008) and is referred to as the manager in action who coordinates daily activities (Hill & Hupe, 2007; Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002). The basic notion of this position is that the operative manager holds an “in-between role,” balancing public authorities and political strategies on one hand and diverse network participants on the other. Drawing on three case studies from development policy processes in Norwegian city-regions, the aim of this article is to investigate the structural conditions (“the playing field”) for operative network management and discuss impacts on the “in-between role” in balancing diverse interests toward efficient and democratic solutions. The research question posed is: “How is the operative manager’s role in governance networks structured and affected by the preconditions granted by public authorities?” The managers’ precondition and playing fields is understood as the

metagovernance strategies of public authorities and the basic characteristics and tasks at hand of the network to be managed (Sørensen, 2009).

In the last 10 years, studies of public network management have provided substantial knowledge of both process management and institutional design for public management (e.g. Vangen & Huxam, 2003; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Agranoff, 2007; Head, 2008; Sørensen, 2009; Herranz, 2010). The function of process management, understood here as hands-on management, has focused attention on strategies for coordinating and mediating interests, but also performance and outcomes. Still, less attention has been paid to the conditions surrounding the operative manager and the significance of the playing fields when coordinating different priorities toward wanted outcomes in governance networks. This article investigates conditions for the operative network manager applied by responsible public authorities (political leaders), and discusses affects on the operative network manager and the ability to balance different interests. Metagovernance strategies can be applied both with strong and weak interventions and with network characteristics and tasks at hand; indeed, it provides preconditions for the operative manager. Strong intervention by public authorities is argued to decrease the operative manager's latitude, whereas weaker intervention gives the operative manager a more autonomous role. Flexible intervention underpinned by continual communication and sufficient resources are found to provide some latitude for the operative manager and provide a bridge between network members and political leadership.

The "in between" role and the operative manager's performance in public governance networks relates not only to outcomes, but also must redeem the promise of democratic norms in order to be found acceptable. Provan and Kenis (2007) introduced three tensions with which networks must cope in order to balance outcomes and democratic norms: (1) the tensions between internal and external legitimacy; (2) efficiency and inclusiveness; and (3) flexibility and stability (Provan & Kenis, 2007). How managers and authorities cope with these tensions in the governance network is discussed in relation to the operative management role and the structural conditions granted by public authorities.

Combining the theoretical discussions of Sørensen (2009) and Provan and Kenis (2007) on public network management and performance, this case study contributes to the specific hands-on management role of the operative manager. Exploring the manager's conditions (metagovernance) and how it affects the operative management role and performance (effective and democratic), provides an opportunity to reflect on how public authorities, through this operative management role, can provide sustainable management conditions for governance network performance.

## 2. Theoretical Considerations

This study's theoretical point of departure is what Provan and Kenis (2007) called externally governed networks; more specifically, governance networks initiated or supported by public authorities (political leaders). These networks are established to create flexible and efficient solutions within the frameworks of democratic norms. Some coordination among diverse actors and resources is necessary to exploit the potentials of these governance networks (Agranoff, 2007; Klijn, 2007; Mandell & Keast, 2007; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009). The premise is to find a way to guide network members, but maintain flexibility to increase policy efficiency at the same time (Sørensen, 2009). Metagovernance is introduced as a tool or strategy that enables public authorities and politicians to mobilize the resources of public and private actors, while retaining their ability to influence the scope, process, and outcome of network-based policymaking. Sørensen and Torfing (2009) emphasized four main strategies, which also determine the latitude of the network manager:

1. Public authority involved in *network design*; that is, determining the scope, character, and institutional procedures of the network.
2. Public authority involved in *network framing*; that is, setting the political goals and objectives to be pursued by governance networks.
3. Public authority involved in *network facilitation*, which involves a mediator role and lower transaction costs by providing different kinds of material and immaterial resources.
4. Public authority as *network participants*, which aims to influence the network.

These strategies can be executed in combination or used in different phases of the policy process. They also vary according to the public authorities' level of intervention employed. *Weak interventions* are exercised through network framing and network facilitation, assuming a softer regulation mechanism. *Strong interventions* are exercised through network design and network participation, assuming a more powerful and direct way for public authorities to intervene (Löfgren & Sørensen, 2009).

Network facilitation, implying weak intervention but hands-on operative management, is normally combined

with other metagovernance strategies. The way public authorities choose to exert strategies of metagovernance is assumed to affect the conditions for the operative network manager, who holds this facilitating “in-between” role on a day-to-day basis.

The role of the operative network manager has been discussed in various studies and has been referred to as a boundary spanner (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002), network broker (Provan & Kenis, 2007), or facilitator (Sørensen & Torfing, 2009). By whatever label, these operative network managers coordinate interests in the zone between public authorities and other actors involved in governance networks. Operative managers should exhibit communication skills and collaborative strategies in order to bring together different resources (Agranoff, 2007; Klijn, Steijn & Edelenbos, 2010; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002). Still, operative managers can be considered both as a positive tool to improve relationships in networks, but also as a treat regarding external trust as well as internal trust. Head (2008) argues that operative managers must extensively consider ways to find the appropriate balance between strategic work drawn from internal discussions and external liaisons. Consideration is always related to balancing efficient and democratic performance. Provan and Kenis (2007) further elaborated this balance, claiming that networks must recognize and respond to three basic tensions. This article makes use of these tensions in order to discuss how this balance is coped with in relation to the operative management role and the structural conditions granted by public authorities.

*The first tension occurs between efficiency and inclusiveness. Network efficiency is referred to as:*

*.. the attainment of positive network level outcomes that could not normally be achieved by individual organizational participants acting independently (Provan & Kenis, 2007:230).*

In networks, the need for efficient administrative capacity is often difficult to square with members’ involvement and inclusive decision-making (Provan & Kenis, 2007). Still, this balance is essential in order to produce input and output legitimacy (Sharpf, 1997). Building trust and enthusiasm are argued to be important contributing factors to network processes running smoothly. Klijn (2007) argued that trust implies that actors more or less hold a stable perception of one another’s intentions. Trust can reduce the costs of cooperation by making actors more willing to invest in it, thereby improving the robustness of the cooperation. Still, building trust through collaboration takes time. Preconditions and the operative manager can thus affect the position to stabilize and manage interactions and expectations among public authorities and network members’ preferences (Provan & Kenis, 2007). Clarity in expectations, tasks, and the division of labour also provides a feeling of reciprocity. In this way, the perception of performance and mutual trust can grow and reduce the gap between efficiency and inclusiveness (Klijn et al., 2010).

*The second tension occurs between internal and external legitimacy. Legitimizing interactions among network members is a critical function of network governance. This means building acceptable collaboration structures and processes among actors who might not normally work together. Still, any form of governance network must respond to external expectations and continually prove their purpose and utility through actual results but also through acceptable (legitimate) frames. The operative network manager and the preconditions given, holds the responsibility of this legitimacy, which is linked closely to democratic legitimacy. March and Olsen (1995) argued that empowerment drives legitimacy, which implies empowering network members by creating rights and developing competences through learning. Empowerment, according to March and Olsen (1995) can be the management tool to satisfy the need for democratic collective legitimacy. It may also help ensure effective output, such as meeting individual goals for participating in network activities. Democratic legitimacy processes internally provide arguments for credibility, which again affects external legitimacy.*

*The third tension occurs between flexibility and stability. Public authorities establish or support a governance network because it provides a flexible form in situations in which a diversity of actors works toward a common purpose. It is this flexibility that gives networks their advantages over hierarchical structures; that is, by being able to respond quickly and combine actors across sectors and authority levels. At the same time, some kind of stability is necessary. Stability is essential, as argued, to build trust and legitimacy (Provan & Kenis, 2007). Stability signals the network’s degree of formality and predictability and is essential in network governance where actors provide resources and take risks at some point. Governance networks established or supported by public authorities possess several factors of stability through public government and formal governance structures. Still, the operative network manager plays an important role in holding bureaucracy back in order to maintain flexible network structures. Several scholars have argued for establishing an accountability system for governance networks that can fill the gap between flexibility and stability (Aars & Fimreite, 2005; Head 2008; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009; Holmen, 2011). Notably, openness and transparency during the policy process, in addition to clear task responsibility, can compensate for the lack of a strong formal structure. The operative*

network manager can play a balancing role in this respect, acting as a broker between interests within such an accountability system.

The performance of public-initiated governance networks is measured by both actual output and their effect according to expectations within the framework of democratic norms. How different metagovernance conditions and the operative network manager cope with these tensions is assumed to affect the ability to balance these tensions.

### 3. Methodology

This article includes a case study with a sample size of three cases. All cases were identified and chosen through extensive mapping of policy processes in Norwegian urban areas (Note 1). All cases represented clearly demarcated strategic policy processes that affected future regional development policy priorities. In all cases, diverse autonomous actors were involved and were “metagoverned” by elected politicians. Furthermore, each network featured an operative network manager working in a mediating role. Managing governance networks meet similar challenges in balancing differing interests. Whether the cases are similar or different in certain statistics does not alter the fact that these networks must deal with the same challenges related to operative management. The conditions or “playing field” arranged for the manager varies and are assumed to provide different consequences on the balancing role of the operative manager. This implies that we can learn from all three of the case study experiences and show how management challenges are met in different regional settings, but share a common policy field and national conditions. The main goal is not generalization, but rather illustrating the different playing fields and challenging management role under such conditions. Figure 1 illustrates the demarcations, similarities, and differences in the conditions of the three Norwegian city regions: Tromsø, Stavanger, and Bergen. (Note 2)

<p><b>Case 1 (Tromsø)</b></p> <p><i>Policy output:</i> application for hosting winter olympics (2018)</p> <p><i>Policy process:</i> developing application</p> <p><i>Periode:</i> jan .2006 - march 2007</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Public authority responsible:</i> mayor of Tromsø</li> <li>• <i>Intervention public authority:</i> limited</li> <li>• <i>Primary actors involved:</i> network organization Tromsø 2018, local/regional politicians, private stakeholders and NGO's.</li> <li>• <i>Operative manager:</i> hired independent consultant - strong athonomy</li> <li>• <i>Operative management task:</i> Develop an "winning" application</li> </ul>
<p><b>Case 2 (Bergen)</b></p> <p><i>Policy output:</i> strategic businessplan for the municipality</p> <p><i>Policy process:</i> developing plan</p> <p><i>Periode:</i> jan. 2005 - sept. 2006</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Public authority responsible:</i> Commissioner for finance, Bergen municipality</li> <li>• <i>Intervention Public authority:</i> strong</li> <li>• <i>Primary actors involved:</i> steering committee, secretariat and reference groups in the planning process</li> <li>• <i>Operative manager:</i> Person in the Commissionaires administration - limited athonomy</li> <li>• <i>Operative management task:</i> Develop a strategic plan by bringing different actors together</li> </ul>
<p><b>Case 3 (Stavanger)</b></p> <p><i>Policy output:</i> strategic businessplan for the municipalities in the region</p> <p><i>Policy process:</i> developing plan</p> <p><i>Periode:</i> june 2004 - okt. 2005</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Public authority responsible:</i> Mayors of four municipalities represented in the board of ARNE</li> <li>• <i>Intervention Public authority:</i> Flexible</li> <li>• <i>Primary actors involved:</i> ARNE board, -secretariat and reference groups in the planning process.</li> <li>• <i>Operative manager:</i> Employed in the ARNE-project - flexible athonomy</li> <li>• <i>Operative management task:</i> Unite different interest towards a common regional strategy</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Characteristics of the three cases

The case studies are based on the research strategy of output-based, backwards mapping, starting with the specific policy outputs produced: two regional strategic plans and an application to host the Winter Olympics of 2018. By beginning with a certain policy output, and then unravelling the complex network of actors and actions

involved in its production, it was possible to capture relevant policy actors and explore their actions through the process (Torfing, 2007). Decisions, actions, relations, and discussions during the process were identified and documented for each case. Ten semi-structured interviews of actors in each case within the network and in relation to the network (politicians, public administration, network manager, board members, regional stakeholders representing private companies, newspapers, R&D and NGOs), in addition to documents related to the policy processes, comprised the key data sources. Documents were used in order to map and analyse the historical development of the process and the formality between actors involved. Analysis of interviews was based on content condensation where the goal is to develop descriptions which are loyal to the complexity of the context in each case.

The theoretical framework was operationalized and analysed through two main variables. First, conditions for the operational manager were recognized through the framework of metagovernance (Sørensen & Torfing, 2009). The ways public authorities used different metagovernance strategies and intervened in the network process were identified through documents (formal agreements) and interviews (actual intervention). Second, the operative managers' role (reporting routines, limitations, and latitude for independent decisions), as well as the network managers' ability to cope with different interests within the given playing fields, were identified. Formal and informal communication between network members and the operative manager, as well as communication among the operative network manager and public authorities during the process, were identified through documents and interviews.

#### **4. Operative Management Conditions in Three Regional Development Processes**

All three cases were public-purpose collaborations responding to a public policy objective, legitimized by political decisions of the city government(s) involved. They were all motivated by the idea of regional development and were horizontal and project oriented networks established in order hold the process towards a plan/application. Participation was time limited, voluntary and based on a selected group of members. A major difference between the three networks was formality in organization. The network of Tromsø was organized as a municipal Ltd that indicated a more autonomous role than the two other cases that were organized through a looser network. Looking at the in-between role, attention is in this section given to the metagovernance strategies chosen by public authorities (conditions) and the managers balancing role. The management role is here interpreted as; degree of management independence, contact and dialogue among the operative manager and the members, and contact and dialogue between the operative manager and the public authorities responsible for the network.

##### *4.1 Tromsø – The Olympic Development Network*

The organization “*Tromsø 2018 Ltd*” occupied the centre stage of all network activity related to Tromsø's application to host the Winter Olympic Games in 2018. Tromsø city was competing with two other cities for the Norwegian candidacy. The board and administration of Tromsø 2018 Ltd included several local business interests, regional and national level politicians, and national sports experts. The Tromsø municipal executive board was the primary “owner” of the network organization (municipal owned Ltd), with the mayor as the head of the constituted general meeting. The municipality of Tromsø initially applied its metagovernance role through network design by constituting the network organization, creating some initial frames (network framing) and conditions for further processes. The mayor and the municipal executive board minimally intervened directly in the network organization during the working process and were not represented on the board or in the administration. Tromsø municipality (and especially the mayor of Tromsø) applied limited intervention through administrative support, especially related to physically planning the arrangements and by accelerating political and administrative processes. Direct financial support from the municipality during the application period was symbolic and did not provide Tromsø 2018 with the needed economic and administrative capacity.

During the application period, both the board and the administration of Tromsø 2018 were replaced. A new organization was assembled based on specific competences and resources. Selecting a new board and administrative staff was completed through a closed process that involved the mayor and some of the board members from Tromsø 2018. The mayor launched a “headhunt” for a new operative manager (administrative leader) in order to push the network process forward. The operative managers competence and experience from similar projects were the main arguments for the selection. The operative manager was trusted as an expert and was given the task to “develop a ‘winning’ application in order to become the host of Winter Olympics in 2018.” He had a clear strategy and held a firm grip on the process toward the goal:

*Stensbøl (operative network manager) had the responsibility and was the leading hand of the application and the process. The document was in his hand at all time. He was the strategist and made the project*

*strategically realistic* (Board member, Tromsø 2018).

The operative manager and Tromsø 2018 were given a high degree of autonomy, facing few demands for documentation, reporting, or consultations with elected representatives during the application period. Because of limited time and limited administrative and financial capacity available, the operative manager used his network strategically to accelerate the process. Diverse actors were unsystematically involved during the process to provide different resources as necessary. This also included political resources for decisions that normally had to pass through the bureaucratic system. The contact and dialogue between the operative manager and the mayor of Tromsø municipality was strong and continuous. Still, continuous contact and dialogue with relevant municipal administrative departments, such various industry and business interests and planning and other elected representatives was unsystematic and irregular.

Despite the broad net of contacts during the process, only a small select group worked on the application and made decisions on its content. This select group consisted of a few members of the administration in Tromsø 2018, some independent consultants, and some members of the board. Because of this, communication within the network, between all network members were at time limited. The operative manager “owned” the document and acted as the major decision maker of what to include in it:

*Time and efficiency were the leading drivers in this period, not inclusion, information, and anchorage. There were few internal routines and systems, only a focus on getting things done. We were so sure that this was a project everyone wanted to be a part of* (Working board member of Tromsø 2018).

To summarize, the operative manager was given a high degree of autonomy with weak intervention of public authorities in this demarcated process. Contact and communication between the network and public authorities were also limited and unsystematic. Although some informants also expressed limited information and communication within Tromsø 2018 during the process, members put these elements aside in favour of the common passion toward the same goal.

#### *4.2 Bergen – The Beginning of a Regional Network*

In Bergen, all activity related to a strategic business plan for Bergen 2006–2009 was concentrated around a steering committee led by the Commissioner for Finance, Culture and Business, and supported by his administration. The Commissioner initiated and founded the strategic process. His political goal was to launch a process and further establish a regional cooperative organization. The steering committee of the process, selected by the Commissioner, established strategic guidelines for the entire planning process and for all actors involved. In this way, metagovernance was applied through network framing, network design, and network participation. In addition, the Commissioner chose the administrative leader of his staff to function as the operative manager during the process. The operative manager was responsible for developing a strategic plan by bringing together different actors to create a strategic document based on regional interest. The operative manager and the Commissioner worked as “political/administrative shadows” during the process:

*I was asked to be the project manager during this process. This process was based on the Conservative party's policy, and we really wanted a conservative domination through this process* (Project manager of the strategic process)

The operative manager had a collaborative and open approach. Still, because of his strong political mandate, he had clear direction regarding whom to include in the process. Four working groups were formed, which also contained representatives from different sectors and public institutions. One group included the regional board, consisting of the mayors and administrative leaders from the 10 surrounding municipalities. The other three groups represented different thematically defined areas. Each group was tasked with developing ideas and strategies concerning their core area within the frames the steering committee established.

The operative manager was not involved directly in group meetings and relied on persons from the secretariat for supervision and documentation. Information from all group meetings was relayed to the operative manager and the steering committee. Despite the operative manager's continual supervision and attention to discussions in the working groups, the direct link between the operative manager and members was weak. Members of some working groups expressed a lack of enthusiasm and responsibility. Information was discussed and shared, but an anchor, engagement, and the actual responsibility for creating a common story in each group was impaired:

*I did not know why I was invited and what I especially could contribute to in this process. The lack of a clear individual mandate made it hard to engage in the way I could and should* (Member of working group).

Other working groups experienced better results in engaging and creating a constructive debate. Still, the operative manager did not initiate or stimulate such effort; rather, it was a result of a consortium of people in the

working group. The discussions and deliberations in the working group were relayed to the steering committee and the operative manager.

The strategic document was written by the secretariat, which was led by the operative manager. The working groups had no opportunities to review the document a final time or opportunities to provide comments. Despite the lack of direct dialogue and contact among the working groups and the operative manager, the strategic plan was positively received by the members of the working groups.

To summarize, in this continuous process task, the operative manager was given limited autonomy because of the strong political intervention of the Commissioner. The strong connection between the operative manager and the Commissioner weakened the operative manager's latitude and hampered his communication with other network members. Still, the communication between the steering committee, the operative manager and public authority was based on continuous information, dialogue and reflections.

#### *4.3 Stavanger – The Experienced Development Network*

In Stavanger, the ARNE project (Arena for Business Development in the Stavanger region established in 1999) functioned as the hub of a process toward developing a strategic business plan for the Stavanger region for the 2005–2020 period. ARNE was established by four municipalities aiming for continuous city-regional cooperation regarding development policy. The mayor of Stavanger was the board leader of ARNE. The board, including the mayors of the four municipalities, Rogaland County and eight regional private sector stakeholders, held the formal responsibility of this network-based policy process. The board executed this strategic process through the secretariat of ARNE. A significant part of the planning process was to include ten neighbouring municipalities and their mayors into this common development strategy. The mayors on the board of ARNE implemented several metagovernance tools during the entire process. They intervened, together with the other board members, strongly at the beginning of the process by initiating the policy process and by taking part in discussions with the secretariat regarding design. In addition, the four mayors initially discussed and deliberated with the “new” member mayors when they began the formal work in the beginning of the process. The role of the four mayors changed to a more limited intervention later in the process, when the secretariat of ARNE had a stronger position and independence. To formalize the strategic plan through all municipal councils, the four mayors assumed a stronger role at the end of the process.

The operative manager (project leader of the process) was a part of the ARNE secretariat, and was chosen by the board. He had followed the regional cooperation development since the late 1990s and had functioned as a network coordinator in several projects. Based on this background, he was given relative freedom and independence regarding how to proceed and complete the process. His connection to regional, political, administrative, and private actors was considerable. At the same time, he was well known by the actors:

*It was an open and inclusive process, where everyone had the ability to have a say or join in actively in one way or another during the strategy process (Participant on the opening conference).*

Through an open and inclusive process, the strategy was to work at different levels to create and anchor a common regional storyline. The process was implemented simultaneously with continuous meetings among politicians from all municipalities, between administration in different municipalities, and the broader private sector. Communication between the operative manager and other groups took place in small and practical settings during the process. This included actors involved in the governance network, but also the public authority responsible for the process. Seven working groups were established related to the various strategic areas in addition to two disciplinary groups. Leading participants for these groups were recruited through an open conference at which the new strategic process was launched. These leaders had the ability to choose members for their groups:

*Creating these groups was a good idea in order to collect information, but also in order to anchor values and strategies. The process was involving and engaging regional actors, which again produced trust to the final product and the idea of working together (Leader of working group).*

All groups had a clear mandate to create strategies related to their area of expertise. The operative manager was continuously in contact and dialogue with all groups, participating in meetings or inviting groups to common sessions. The operative manager acted as a mediator and facilitator among all members and gave additional attention to groups that were struggling. The inclusive and communicative approach used toward all the different groups, actors, and levels made him a trusted network manager.

To summarize, in this continuous process task, the operative manager was given high autonomy within the framework of a flexible intervention of the board. There was a strong dialogue throughout the process between

the operative manager and the board and with the political and administrative levels in the included municipalities. There was also a continually strong dialogue between the operative manager and the different working groups.

### 5. The Operative Management Role: Conditions for Balancing Significant Tensions?

The three stories constitute different conditions or playing fields for the operative manager, which again appeared to affect the manager's role. Politically initiated governance networks vary in their explicit specification of performance goals and expectations. Still, they are designed not only to improve efficiency, but democratic quality as well (Mandell & Keast, 2007; Herranz, 2010). For governance network and operative managers, expectations are related to both of these considerations. In addition the operative manager has to operate among different interests in order to use the resources available (Head, 2008; Klijn et al., 2010). How the operative manager executes this role within the given conditions are discussed in the following sections in relation to the three tensions of Provan and Kenis (2007): efficiency versus inclusiveness, internal versus external legitimacy, and flexibility versus stability. The tensions along with the main variables are summarized in table 5.1, and are further elaborated in the following text.

Table 1. Summary variables and analysis

	<b>Tromsø</b>	<b>Stavanger</b>	<b>Bergen</b>
<b><i>Variables: Conditions and role</i></b>			
Public authority intervention	Limited	Flexible	Strong
Operative manager autonomy	Strong	Flexible	Limited
Contact/communication in network	Limited	Strong	Strong
Contact/com. between network and public authority	Limited	Strong	Limited
<b><i>Analysis: balancing tensions</i></b>			
Efficiency/inclusion	Unbalanced	Balanced	Balanced/ Unbalanced
Internal/-external legitimacy	Unbalanced	Balanced	Balanced/ Unbalanced
Flexibility/Stability	Unbalanced	Balanced	Balanced

#### 5.1 Efficiency versus Inclusiveness

The three processes described in the case studies all reached their respective process goals: the team in Tromsø developed an application which led to the city winning the national competition for hosting the Winter Olympics in 2018. The groups in Bergen created a strategic plan that involved regional stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. In the wake of this process, a regional collaborative organization was established to follow up on regional development strategies and actions. In Stavanger, 10 new municipalities joined the planning process, leading to a common regional development platform for 14 municipalities.

The national competition in Tromsø combined with lack of financial and administrative resources and a limited timeframe were the main arguments for closing the process for broad participation. The operative manager was the gatekeeper who chose who and what to include. This demarcated phase of the project featured few procedures, limited access to information, and little documentation of decisions. Interests among politicians, organizations, and the general public, which was not involved in the network directly, had little knowledge about the next step of the process. The lack of information led to suspicions of corruption and double roles, which was discussed frequently in local, regional, and national media. Notably, the lack of information was allowed by law based on the "sensitive information" of the competitive context. In this way, the operative manager worked within conditions, which gave him autonomy and a "winning mandate" and pushed efficiency priorities forward rather than priorities of inclusion and trust.

The mandate in Stavanger and Bergen was for the operative managers to create a common platform and anchorage among divergent interests. In this way, the operative management task differed strongly from the task in Tromsø. Facilitating involvement as part of a continuous process of building a city-regional platform was the highest priority; thus, the degree of involvement varied between these two cases. In Stavanger, the operative

manager experienced a higher degree of autonomy in organizing the process and whom to include. A step-by-step process was chosen that involved actors working simultaneously at different levels during the process. Responsibility followed involvement, and the output from every group was coupled closely to the strategy document. The operative manager worked closely with all groups and acted as the central node for all of the actors involved. This central node was not as visible in Bergen, where the Commissioner's political goals drove the operative manager's priorities. Yet, the operative manager had limited time and administrative capacities available and was forced to prioritize serving the Commissioner rather than working closely with other groups. The conditions presented to the operative manager in both Bergen and Stavanger made it possible to balance the tension between producing output and including a broad set of actors. Still, in Bergen the operative manager's conditions made it difficult to close the tension gap fully by creating trust and a feeling of reciprocity between network participants at all levels.

### *5.2 Internal versus External Legitimacy*

The three cases show that interaction and dialogue among the operative manager and the public authorities responsible for each project, combined with close contact among the operative manager and the network members, positively affected the balance between internal and the external legitimacy. The popular enthusiasm that the Olympic project generated in Tromsø elevated legitimacy to a question of getting things done, rather than one of spending time and resources reflecting on the "correct way" to accomplish a goal in terms of democratic norms and bureaucratic procedures. The lack of public information and transparency, however, weakened the external legitimacy of both the network and the project in the longer term. A significant group were sceptic to the thought of the Olympic idea, and were treated by the manager as a disturbing element instead of being included in the application process. The result was a heated public discussion following the whole process, questioning the project, the organization of the project and the process. Not only did it weaken the operative manager's legitimacy, but it weakened the whole network and the project. According to the interviews, a more active intervention by public authorities combined with a more inclusive and transparent operative management role would have strengthened the balancing role between internal and external legitimacy.

In Bergen and Stavanger, the operative management task was part of a continuous regionalization and planning process. Focusing on legitimacy was an essential policy strategy to create a regional plan that the majority of stakeholders would accept. It was also necessary to use the strategic plan as a working document. Storytelling through opening conferences and broad working groups also generated a common understanding of collaboration as the right way (the only way) to develop the region. Developing the city region as a whole was communicated strongly as beneficial for all actors, including private stakeholders, municipal administrations, and politicians. Significant contrast of interests was because of this hard to identify. The operative manager's key role in the two cases was to encourage different sectors, municipalities, and other stakeholders to interact, leading to broad acceptance of the "working together" storyline. The operative manager in Stavanger performed strongly within the given conditions on this point by communicating with and empowering network members; indeed, he demanded collective responsibility. This collective empowerment was not fully balanced in Bergen. Members of some working groups expressed a lack of enthusiasm and a clear responsibility given by the operative manager.

### *5.3 Flexibility versus Stability*

All three processes exemplify networks established to create flexible processes within a system of stability. Bergen represented a development process directly altered in the representative political system, a fact that explains the limited autonomy of the operative manager. Including the regional board as a working group in creating a plan for the Bergen municipality marked the beginning of regional collaboration. Opting for transparency and flexibility was a strategic choice that also carried symbolic significance. This approach affected the operative manager's conditions in the process of building a new regional network organization based on regional industry and municipalities in the city region, leading to new forms of stability in regional cooperation. Today this stability is expressed through the regional organization "Business region Bergen". Stability was also a motive in Stavanger and in Tromsø. Tromsø 2018 constituted a considerably flexible frame for developing the process toward submitting an application. Still, the initial idea in Tromsø municipality was to "upgrade" the organization of Tromsø 2018 for future development purposes. The Olympic project was thus intended as the first task of the organization. In Stavanger, the flexible ARNE-project had been evaluated based on its performance during the previous four years. The evaluation strongly recommended a continuing this regional cooperative arrangement. The planning process was thus an opportunity to develop these flexible frames to a more stable arrangement.

The given conditions in the three cases affected the operative managers' role in different ways in relation to the

tension between flexibility and stability. Keeping the process primarily “closed” with a tight-knit group in Tromsø resulted from both organizational conditions and the operative manager’s autonomy. This combination led to critical questions about the process and the integrity of the persons involved. The independent role of the operative manager made it difficult for Tromsø 2018 to create a trustworthy image and fulfil the conditions required to sustain a more permanent and stable structure. In Bergen and Stavanger, the operative manager had a significant role in creating the storyline that presented the project as a common regional platform. The balance between flexibility and stability was maintained through the regional organizations established in the following months, in which the two operative managers also held central positions in creating an accountability system based on openness and transparency.

## 6. Conclusions

This article has contributed to the scholarly debate on the significance of hands-on management in public governance networks. Each case study focused on the “in-between” challenges inherent to operative network management where political strategies and a diversity of network participants must be balanced. In addition, the operative manager had to meet the demands of improved efficiency and democratic quality. The aim of the article was to discuss the role of the operative manager as “the manager in between interests” and how this role is affected by metagovernance strategies of public authorities and, more generally, the basic characteristics and task-at-hand nature of the network to be managed.

The operative manager is in this article argued to be a useful and powerful tool in politically initiated governance networks. Still, it must be considered as one of many instruments that can improve and ensure network objectives. Other significant mechanism that affects network output which has not been treated here, but in another article, is the previous institutionalized environment, culture for cooperation and earlier experience in working together. These factors affect abilities for the operative manager’s level of intervention (Holmen 2011).

This study of three development processes in Norwegian urban areas supports the initial assumption posed. Public authorities can provide structural conditions through meta-governance that affect the operative network manager in both positive and negative ways. The “in between” role can develop into a key factor in forging a common understanding among different stakeholders, to inspire and to secure an anchorage of process objects. Still, the operative managers’ ability to balance diverse interests can jeopardize situations in which the intervention of public authorities remains strong. Operative management ‘coloured’ by strong political strategies and indistinct motives can affect internal legitimacy. In such cases legitimacy among network members can be undermined, leading to impaired communications, less engagement, and diminishing output. On the other hand, less intervention by public authorities may lead to vagueness, lack of democratic control, and loss of external legitimacy.

This leads to the argument that *flexible* intervention motivated by continuous communication provides demarcated latitude for the operative manager. Flexible intervention emphasizes public authorities’ responsible taking a continuous active role in evaluating the need for network intervention. The study shows that the “in-between” operative manager can contribute to pinpointing the appropriate intervention. The operative role can complement the lack of more formal structures, though this depends on an advocating, inclusive and transparent management. This may create the required bridge among public authorities (political leaders) and other stakeholders involved in network governance and provide predictable governance processes for all actors. The political preconditions that the operative manager adopts affect the interplay among the operative manager and the political leaders responsible, which is crucial for efficient network managerial performance. By adopting a flexible approach to political intervention, public authorities can facilitate better communication with network members and other stakeholders through the operative network manager. Sufficient resources are also necessary to clarify in the relation between the operative manager and the political leaders responsible. Time is essential in order for the operative manager to gain trust, while funding-/ administrative support is essential in order to create a process based on transparency, inclusion and real involvement. Empowering members during the process can provide a more accountable collaboration leading to sustainable solutions.

Lessons from the Norwegian cases indicate that public authorities should be aware of the significance of the operative management role as the “in-between” manager, which can affect network processes and policies. The operative manager’s hands-on approach can provide a useful tool for bridging resources and interests efficiently. It can also be a key mechanism for establishing the appropriate level of political intervention and balancing the quest for network efficiency against the need for democratic influence and control.

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### Notes

Note 1. Selecting the cases was based on data from the project “The new regional Norway” (IRIS), which is part of the Norwegian Research Council program DEMOSREG. Mapping policy processes occurred at a city-regional level within different policy fields. Case selection is based on identified metagoverned networks within strategic business /development policy in three city-regions in Norway.

Note 2. The Tromsø municipality is located in northern Norway and is home to 65 000 inhabitants. The city-region of Tromsø includes 75 000 inhabitants in 2 municipalities. The Bergen municipality is located on the west coast of Norway and has 247 000 inhabitants. The city-region of Bergen is home to 360 000 in 14 municipalities. The Stavanger municipality is located on the west coast of Norway and has 120 000 inhabitants. The city-region of Stavanger has 300 000 inhabitants in 14 municipalities.

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