



Parliamentarians' Use of Healthcare Performance Metrics



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Background

The desire to capture performance in the form of metrics has been a defining feature of recent decades of public services governance. While metrics can enable transparency, which is generally seen as a key dimension of governance, it remains unclear whether in practice parliamentarians actively refer to this form of evidence in watching over government.

A parliamentary health committee should be a key receptor for performance metrics shedding light on the effectiveness of health policy. Accordingly, this study has measured levels of use by 28 individual members of the Scottish parliament (MSPs) and examined how the numbers played into the work of the committee over eight years.

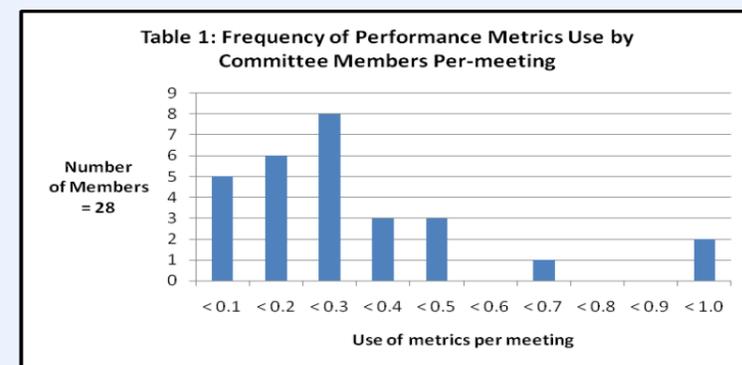


Table 1: Use of Performance Metrics by MSPs in Scottish Parliament Health and Community Care Committee meetings 1999-2007.

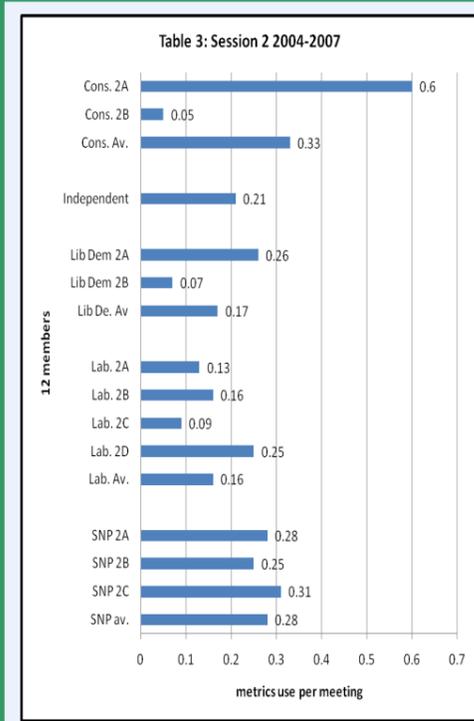
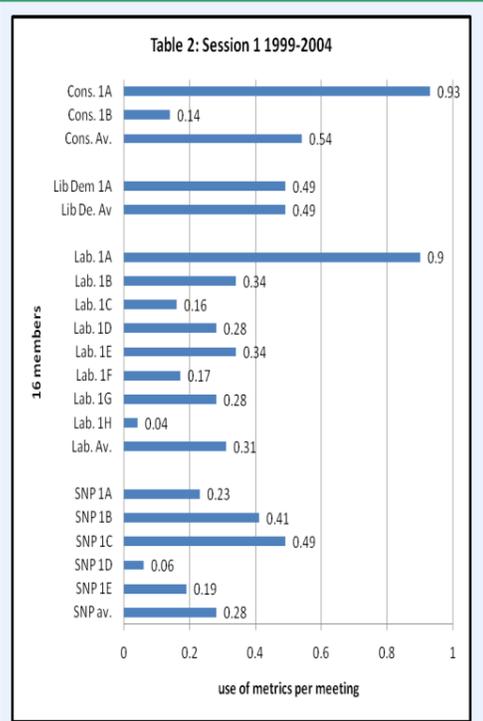
What I Did

- ❖ The study involved a content analysis of official records of 232 Scottish Parliament Health and Community Care Committee meetings between the years 1999-2007. A classification scheme was established to record data relating to the different ways in which MSPs used performance metrics.
- ❖ In-depth interviews with current and past members of the Committee explored what factors influenced user behaviour.
- ❖ Interviews were also conducted with officials in the Scottish Parliament, House of Commons and Welsh Assembly, audit agency staff and civil servants.

Aims

Four questions relating to the behaviour of individual MSPs and the oversight of public services were addressed:

- ❖ How often do MSPs use performance metrics in conducting oversight over health policy as committee members?
- ❖ Are rates of use changing?
- ❖ Are there identifiable reasons for use such as political party, pre-parliamentary background or length of experience on the committee?
- ❖ What sort of purpose lies behind the use of performance metrics by parliamentarians conducting committee business and does use signify a commitment to an evidence-based approach to oversight?



Tables 2 and 3: Use of performance metrics in committee meetings by individual members of the Scottish parliament

Findings

- ❖ Use of metrics in oversight is extremely variable. Of the 28 MSPs sampled, five averaged less than 0.1 uses of metrics per meeting, while at the other extreme, two MSPs averaged 0.9 to 1 uses.
- ❖ Metrics were used in 44% of meetings.
- ❖ Use of metrics declined in Session 2.
- ❖ The extensive effort spent defending majorities, pursuing personal advancement towards government appointments and committee time spent on scrutinising legislation, explains the low use.
- ❖ Parliamentarians used metrics in three ways – to make an intervention in which sets of metrics are used as evidence; as a basis for requesting more evidence; and to develop doubts about government competency through challenging the basis of metrics.

Find out more...

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