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# Literature Review on *Best Practices* in Meta-organizational Governance

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# **Literature Review on Best Practices in Meta-organizational Governance**

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## **Abstract**

This focused review of the literatures on meta-organizations, whole-of-government approaches and governance provides definitions of these concepts, along with an overview key similarities and differences. A recognized framework used to understand the principles of good governance is applied to the unique structures of meta-organizations. This framework is used to develop potential indicators of governance quality in meta-organizational structures. This review will be useful for groups attempting to assess the extent to which specific meta-organizational structures have the necessary components to increase the likelihood of good governance to occur.

## **Résumé**

Cette étude a porté sur les littératures de la méta-organisations, les approches globales de l'administration et la gouvernance fournit des définitions de ces concepts, ainsi qu'un aperçu des similitudes et les différences clés. Un cadre reconnu utilisées pour comprendre les principes de bonne gouvernance est appliqué à des structures uniques de méta-organisations. Ce cadre est utilisé pour développer des indicateurs potentiels de la qualité de la gouvernance dans les structures de méta-organisation. Cet examen sera utile pour les groupes d'essayer d'évaluer la mesure dans laquelle les structures spécifiques de méta-organisation ont les éléments nécessaires pour accroître la probabilité d'une bonne gouvernance de se produire.

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# Literature Review in Meta-Organizational Governance

## Introduction

### *Review objective*

This focused review provides a brief overview of key best practices in the governance of meta-organizations and *whole-of-government* structures. The objective of the review is to provide a benchmark for comparison of results from recent joint initiatives involving multiple departments, agencies and organizations at various levels (federal, provincial, municipal) and from various sectors (public, private, not-for-profit).

### *Review method and literature sources*

The review incorporated literature from both peer-reviewed sources and grey literature such as project reports and policy briefs. Various academic and non-academic search engines and citation databases were employed to identify potentially relevant literature. Once a potentially relevant document had been identified, the abstract or summary was reviewed to determine the extent to which it covered the specific topics of this focused review. A full listing of the relevant articles and documents used for this review is contained in the reference list. The specific search strategies, search engines, and citation databases used are outlined in Appendix A.

### *Challenges and limitations*

As with any review, there were some challenges encountered which place limitations on the review results. The following should be considered when applying the results from this review:

- *Focused vs. extensive review* – Given the objective of the review, the challenge was to ensure that there were sufficient details on the key concepts (e.g., meta-organizations, whole-of-government, governance, best practices), while maintaining most emphasis on the development of a baseline for comparison of recent initiatives.
- *Paucity of evidence-based research on best practices* – From the searches, there was very little found specifically on research on best practices in governance of meta-organizations and/or whole-of-government initiatives. What little has been written is primarily based on observation or theory rather than actual research on comparative best practices used by these types of organizations.
- *Integration* – Given that there was a paucity of literature specifically on best practices in governance of meta-organizations, the review incorporates an integration of principles of good governance as outlined in the literature with the main characteristics and structures of meta-organizations and whole-of-government initiatives.

### *Overview of report structure*

In addition to this brief introduction, there are five main sections to the report. Section 2.0 presents the definitions of the primary concepts for this review, outlining how the concepts have been defined generally in the literature, and how they will be applied in this review. Section 3.0 provides a brief overview of the similarities and differences between the two main types of organizational structures represented in the current review, namely meta-organizations and whole-of-government approaches. Section 4.0 presents key considerations for meta-organization governance, while Section 5.0 provides an

outline of potential benchmark indicators for various components of governance in meta-organizations. Section 6.0 contains a brief summary and some broad conclusions.

## 2.0 Defining Concepts

The main concepts used in the review were: 1) meta-organization; 2) “whole-of-government” approach; 3) governance; and 4) best practices. Each of these is defined below.

### ***Defining meta-organization***

A *meta-organization* is an organization that is made up of other organizations. According to Ahrne and Brunsson (2008), the main characteristics of meta-organizations that define and separate them from other types of multi-organizations are:

- Meta-organizations are associations, and therefore;
  - Members keep most of their autonomy and identity as independent organizations;
- Membership is voluntary - members cannot be forced to become members or be purchased;
- Members are considered equals;
- Membership is based on some type of similarity<sup>1</sup> and a shared vision, mission or mandate;
- Meta-organizations are collaborative and emphasize a high degree of connectivity both vertically and horizontally; and
- Purpose of the meta-organization is to work in the interests of all its members.

These characteristics combined distinguish meta-organizations from other multi-organizational forms. For example, while organizations making up business conglomerates may share similarities and a shared vision, they do not have equal status members. A federated state is not usually characterized by voluntary membership. The United Nations is considered more as a supra-organization than a meta-organization because it is ruled within by one set of regulations and is a self-standing bureaucracy. Most other multi-organization networks are based on differences, and the participants complement one another based on these differences, whereas, meta-organizations often start with the base of similarity; they unify because of a common task.

Three key defining considerations with meta-organizations that have been outlined in the literature (Ahrne, 1994; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005) include:

- *Members’ affinity with purpose and goals* – Given that the membership is voluntary, identity and desire to belong to the organization are often the key incentives that draw members and keep the meta-organization intact. This desired identity is usually achieved through a member organization’s affinity with the meta-organization’s purpose, goals, and value of activities and results.
- *Presence of conflict* – Conflict may be common in meta-organizations due to a number of reasons including similarities leading to competition, or individual member organizations having more power, status and resources than the overall meta-organization.
- *Slow organizational change* – There is less likelihood of rapid change within meta-organizations. This may result in some ineffectiveness and inefficiencies in the short-term with improvement more likely to be seen in the longer term.

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<sup>1</sup> *Similarity* does not necessarily mean similar types of organizations; rather it can be interpreted as similarity of purpose and goals (e.g., shared vision), similarity of issues, similarity of mandates, etc.

### ***Defining “whole-of-government”***

The *whole-of-government* approach emphasizes horizontal integration, bridging the gap between departmental and agency “silos” that have a tendency to impede collaboration between government organizations (Tait, 1996). The approach is useful when addressing complex issues that are not easily solved by highly specialized, single purpose organizations located within bureaucratic structures (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007; McGuire, 2006). Recently, the Government of Canada has outlined in *The Whole of Government Framework* (2009) the need to use this approach in influencing broad changes in the areas of social, international, economic and government affairs. Examples of recent federal whole-of-government approaches include addressing diverse broad issues such as public security, homelessness, youth employment, or international aid. Inter-departmental tables and joint taskforce committees are vehicles to induce a cross-cutting horizontal ‘whole-of-government’ approach.

One should note that the expression ‘whole-of-government’ addresses ‘whole-of-federal-government’ and does not systematically involve ‘all of governments’ i.e. provincial, territorial, regional or municipal governments. Therefore, the approach may be short of what meets the ‘ear’.

### ***Defining governance***

*Governance* can be described by the process by which organizations make their important decisions, determine whom they involve in the process, and how they render account. Often the emphasis is on the *governance system* or *framework* which guides this process including components such as agreements, procedures, or policies as to who gets power, how decisions are taken, and how accountability is rendered (Graham, Amos & Plumtre, 2003). Paquet (2005; 2009) defines governance as effective coordination when power, information and resources are widely distributed.

### ***Defining best practices***

*Best practices* can be defined as the processes, practices, and systems identified in public and private organizations that performed exceptionally well and are widely recognized as improving an organization's performance and efficiency in specific areas (US-GAO, 2010). Often best practices are identified and confirmed through evaluation and research. While one seeks for evidence-based best practices, the reality of the field settles for ‘experience-informed’ best practices given the current gap in research.

## **3.0 Comparison of meta-organizations and whole-of-government approach**

While there are some similarities between meta-organizations and organizations working within a whole-of-government approach, there are also some differences found within the literature. These are outlined in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Comparison between meta-organizations and whole-of-government approach** (Marcus, Dorn & Henderson, 2005; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; 2008; OECD, 2006; Rao, 1996)

Area of Comparison	Meta-organizations	Whole of Government Approach
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A common purpose that extends <u>across organizations</u></li> <li>• Shared vision</li> <li>• Collective ownership of processes to address complex issues and problems</li> <li>• Outcomes may be achieved that would not be possible using resources of single organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A common purpose that extends <b>across federal departments/agencies</b></li> <li>• Shared vision</li> <li>• Collective ownership of processes to address complex issues and problems</li> <li>• Outcomes may be achieved that would not be possible using resources of single department or agency</li> </ul>
<b>Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple <u>organizations</u></li> <li>• <u>Weaker</u> central authority</li> <li>• Horizontal collaborative connectivity</li> <li>• <u>Equal balance of power/influence</u> between participating organizations (for longevity)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple federal <b>departments and agencies</b></li> <li>• <b>Stronger central authority</b> (e.g., lead department/agency)</li> <li>• Horizontal collaborative connectivity</li> <li>• <b>Usually unequal balance of power/resources/influence</b> between participating departments/agencies</li> </ul>
<b>Membership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Voluntary</u> membership which may include incentives and pressure to join</li> <li>• <u>Degree of similarity</u> such as expertise, common concerns, client base, processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership is <b>generally not voluntary</b> in the same sense</li> <li>• <b>Externally viewed as similar</b> (e.g., all within federal government)</li> <li>• <b>Internally, may be quite dissimilar in approach, processes, client bases, expertise</b></li> </ul>
<b>Sectors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can include organizations from across <u>various sectors including private, public or not-for-profit.</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only involves <b>public sector</b></li> <li>• Usually involves <b>one level of government</b> (federal )</li> </ul>

## 4.0 Considerations in Meta-organizational Governance

As previously identified, there is a paucity of literature specifically on researched best practices in meta-organizational governance. As a result, the review team adapted a framework of principles of good governance that is widely applied in the governance literature, and integrated the results from the more general review of literature on meta-organizations.

While defining governance is challenging, assessment of “good governance” is an even more controversial area with much written on what it constitutes, what factors are involved, and what conditions are required (Hyden et al., 2004; Kaufmann, 2003; Hewitt de Alcántara, 1998). One framework that has been used frequently in the governance literature is that developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) that outlines nine *core characteristics of good governance* (UNDP, 1997). These nine characteristics were later categorized by the Institute on Governance into *five good governance principles* (Graham, Amos & Plumptre, 2003). Table 2 below outlines these five

principles and nine characteristics along with the analysis of potential considerations as outlined in the literature on meta-organizations.

**Table 2: Good Governance Principles and Characteristics (adapted) and Considerations for Meta-organizations**

(Adapted from Graham, Amos & Plumpre, 2003)

<p><b>1) Legitimacy and Voice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Participation</b> - All should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their intention.</li> <li>• <b>Consensus orientation</b> – Good governance mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is the best interest of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations for Meta-organizational Context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Challenges with collaboration and consensus building</i> - At times, collaborating in a meta-organization can be difficult as the process is non-linear and may evolve over time along with the nature of the problem or issue. As well, collaboration can be difficult as organizational work cultures are often different across organizations. (Rao,1996) A lack of similarity can often become a source of conflict and may cause a fracturing of meta-organizations (Oliver,1990).</li> <li>• <i>United voice</i> – Shared vision allows members to have a greater influence over their environment since the meta-organization is able to present a united voice (Ahrne &amp; Brunsson, 2008).</li> <li>• <i>Governed by persuasion</i> – Meta-organizations must be governed laterally by persuasion, bargaining and consensus building (Ahrne &amp; Brunsson, 2005; 2008).</li> </ul>
<p><b>2) Direction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strategic vision</b> – There is a broad and long term perspective on what is needed, and an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which that perspective is grounded.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations for Meta-organizational Context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Shared vision</i> – Meta-organizations have a common purpose that extends across organizations, resulting in a collective ownership of complex issues and problems (Ahrne &amp; Brunsson, 2008)</li> <li>• <i>Differences</i> – If the differences between organizations are too great, the formation of a meta-organization may not be possible (Ahrne &amp; Brunsson, 2008).</li> <li>• <i>Focus on membership retention</i> – Meta-organizations are dependent upon their members for longer term survival – goals are often focused on long term outcomes, therefore, retaining organizations’ memberships may help to exert influence over the long run, even if short term goals are not met (McIntyre, 2009).</li> <li>• <i>Cultivate similarities while recognizing uniqueness of members</i> – Shared values, beliefs, cultures and goals must be cultivated among members. These similarities in identity draw in members and help keep the group intact (McIntyre, 2009). Equally important is the assertion of each participating organization’s uniqueness. Difference may be asserted through branding, corporate culture, mission particular expertise or history (Ahrne &amp; Brunsson, 2008; Brunsson &amp; Sahlin-Anderson, 2000).</li> </ul>

### 3) Performance

- **Responsiveness** – Processes try to serve all stakeholders.
- **Effectiveness and efficiency** – Processes produce results that meet the needs while making the best use of resources.

#### Considerations for Meta-organizational Context

- *Challenges in initial performance* - Power imbalances may inhibit collaboration and may make it difficult for a meta-organization to perform at the outset (Anand, 2008).
- *Outcomes* - Outcomes may be achieved that would not be possible using the resources of a single agency (March, Dorn & Henderson, 2005). Measurement of outcomes might be absent or limited and therefore missing critical achievements and successes.
- *Staffing requirements* – In order for meta-organizations to reach goals, they need to be appropriately staffed in terms of numbers and qualifications. Shared training or staff secondment programs may be effective in cultivating horizontality among members. (OECD, 2006).

### 4) Accountability

- **Accountability** – Decision makers are accountable to the public as well as to stakeholders.
- **Transparency** – Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them.

#### Considerations for Meta-organizational Context

- *Facilitate shared communication* – A constant flow of information is required to maintain the connectivity needed to sustain a functional meta-organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008).
- *Increasing meta-organizational memory* – Redundant or overlapping methods of communication may increase meta-organizational memory and are essential wherever critical data must be conveyed regularly (McIntyre, 2009).
- *Shared values and analysis* – Shared values across organizations and a shared analysis of issues will encourage common viewpoints and establish an atmosphere of trust (Rao, 1996).

### 5) Fairness

- **Equity** – All have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.
- **Rule of Law** – Frameworks and policies should be fair and enforced impartially.

#### Considerations for Meta-organizational Context

- *Equal balance of power* – Meta-organizations function best when members collaborate as equals (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). Meta-organizations with an obvious imbalance of power among members are more likely short lived or unstable. Filling key leadership positions within the meta-organization with persons of equal seniority is an effective measure in preventing such power imbalances (OECD, 2006).
- *Foster a shared trust among member organizations* – Creating a climate of trust among members will assist in accomplishing meta-organizational goals (Pasquero, 1991).
- *Décalage between organization worthiness and quality of its representative* - At times, issues arise from the individual un-collaborative posture or lack of competence of an organization's representative, while the overall value of the organization membership remains a high stake. Major effort and time are spent on managing the resultant tension and challenge the efficacy of the meta-organization; at times, up to its disintegration.
- *Standards rather than directives* – A higher level of cooperation may be achieved among

members if standards are issued rather than directives (McIntyre, 2009; Brunsson & Jacobson, 2000).

- *Respecting members' autonomy* – When faced with a decision that affects a member organization negatively, a deadlock may occur whereby the member organization threatens to leave if the policy is put into effect (Arhne & Brunsson, 2008; Oliver, 1990).

## 5.0 Potential Indicators for Meta-organizational Governance

Based on the findings from the analysis of the considerations in meta-organizational governance, the team developed potential indicators against which the governance of various meta-organizations could be assessed. These are presented according to the five governance principles previously outlined.

**Table 3: Potential Indicators for Meta-organizational Governance**

1) Legitimacy and Voice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Participation</b> - All should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their intention.</li> <li>• <b>Consensus orientation</b> – Good governance mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is the best interest of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures.</li> </ul>	
Potential indicators	Benchmark & measurement considerations
1.1 Level and type of participation of each member organization in the following processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in shaping the vision/mandate of the group</li> <li>• Participation in developing the group's policies, procedures and standards</li> <li>• Participation in deciding group's activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Level of participation</i> – Frequent participation meaning invited to and attended most meetings, consultations, etc.</li> <li>• <i>Type of participation</i> – Active, direct participation such as having space to speak at meetings, sufficient time to prepare responses to draft documents, and able to communicate in the preferred official language.</li> </ul>
1.2 Proportion of key decisions that were arrived at through consensus from the members. (These include decisions on: the vision/mandate, policies, standards, procedures and activities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 75-100% of key decisions are arrived at through consensus.</li> <li>• It will be important in assessing this to identify <i>key</i> decisions. These are generally decisions that are likely to have a significant impact on individual members, or the meta-organization's operations, strategic direction, or definition.</li> </ul>
1.3 Evidence of persuasion, negotiation and bargaining to obtain consensus (rather than authority)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rather than reverting to various authorities outside of the meta-organization to endorse a specific decision, the group attempts to get consensus from members on key decisions through persuasion and bargaining.</li> </ul>

2) Direction	
Potential indicators	
Benchmark & measurement considerations	
<p><b>2) Direction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strategic vision</b> – There is a broad and long term perspective on what is needed, and an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which that perspective is grounded.</li> </ul>	
2.1 Presence of a vision statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a clearly defined vision statement (may be called something similar) that has been written down.</li> </ul>
2.2 Vision statement contains the following components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer-term timeframe</li> <li>• Incorporates perspectives from different organizations</li> <li>• Distinguishes common goal from respective mandates and roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer term perspective would refer to a timeframe beyond the immediate start-up period and short-term objectives – pointing toward longer-term outcomes ideally.</li> <li>• The unique membership of the meta-organization should be reflected in the vision statement such that one member organization's perspective does not dominate the vision.</li> </ul>
2.3 Common understanding of vision statement across organizations and respective mandates and roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All member organizations should be able to explain their understanding of the vision statement and the explanations should be similar across member organizations.</li> </ul>
2.4 Support for vision statement across organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In keeping with the practice of having a shared vision, all meta-organization members should be able to express support for the vision.</li> </ul>
2.5 Proportion of member organizations that have removed themselves from group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively</li> <li>• Passively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very few (less than 20%) of member organizations should remove themselves from the meta-organization. Active removal is likely easier to track, but also important will be those who passively remove themselves through actions such as avoiding meetings, not responding to consultations, etc.</li> </ul>
2.6 Proportion of member organizations that can see key similarities between their organizations and other members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All member organizations should be able to identify how they are similar to other organizations in the meta-organization. It could include similarities in goals, purpose, processes, resources, clients, etc.</li> </ul>

<b>2) Direction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strategic vision</b> – There is a broad and long term perspective on what is needed, and an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which that perspective is grounded.</li> </ul>	
Potential indicators	Benchmark & measurement considerations
2.7 Proportion of member organizations that can identify how their organization is unique compared to other members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideally, each member organization should also be able to identify how it is unique in at least one or two ways from any other organization members in the meta-organization.</li> </ul>

<b>3) Performance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Responsiveness</b> – Processes try to serve all stakeholders.</li> <li>• <b>Effectiveness and efficiency</b> – Processes produce results that meet the needs while making the best use of resources.</li> </ul>	
Potential indicators	Benchmark & measurement considerations
3.1 List of key stakeholders identified (with list of representatives, substitutes and their contact coordinates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This should be a comprehensive written list that has had input and received consensus from member organizations with respect to who are the key internal and external stakeholders involved with the meta-organization.</li> </ul>
3.2 Identification of stakeholder needs (Existence of Terms of Reference or Agreement in Principle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beyond just a list of stakeholders, there should be some systematic process that has been undertaken (e.g., consultations, research) to ensure that stakeholder needs have been understood. This should all be documented.</li> </ul>
3.3 Increased levels of cooperation and collaboration over time within the meta-organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Levels of cooperation and collaboration</i> – going beyond a coordination level of sharing only information to cooperation (sharing activities and resources) to collaboration (sharing power)</li> <li>• Recognizing the non-linear aspect of collaboration and the initial challenges in collaborating in new meta-organizations, there is the expectation that cooperation and collaboration should improve as the organization matures.</li> </ul>

3) Performance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Responsiveness</b> – Processes try to serve all stakeholders.</li> <li>• <b>Effectiveness and efficiency</b> – Processes produce results that meet the needs while making the best use of resources.</li> </ul>	
Potential indicators	Benchmark & measurement considerations
<p>3.4 Identified outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorter term (immediate, intermediate)</li> <li>• Longer term (ultimate)</li> <li>• Unique outcomes for meta-organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcomes should be identified at various stages including shorter term outcomes and longer term outcomes. There should be some indication or evidence that these outcomes are shared (the result of the meta-organization and not just individual organizations), and that they are agreed upon (consensus).</li> </ul>
<p>3.5 Common performance monitoring/measurement strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A common performance monitoring or measurement strategy should be a written document that outlines which performance data will be collected, by whom, and how often. There should be some indication or evidence that this is a consensually agreed upon strategy.</li> </ul>
<p>3.6 Common monitoring/measurement data and information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following a common performance monitoring strategy, there should be common monitoring/measurement data that is collected across member organizations in a systematic, standard fashion.</li> </ul>
<p>3.7 Evaluation results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand effectiveness and efficiency of the meta-organization, an evaluation of the various processes (activities and outputs) and results (outcomes) should be planned and implemented.</li> </ul>

4) Accountability	
Potential indicators	
Benchmark & measurement considerations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Accountability</b> – Decision makers are accountable to the public as well as to stakeholders.</li> <li>• <b>Transparency</b> – Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them.</li> </ul>	
4.1 Processes in place for the distribution of meta-organization's results to key stakeholders and public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be scheduled processes in place to ensure that the meta-organization's results are made available to key stakeholders and public at specific points in time.</li> </ul>
4.2 Distribution of meta-organization's results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The distribution of results should take into account the needs of the stakeholders and public (what type of information, level of language, official languages, mode of distribution).</li> </ul>
4.3 Information within the meta-organization is shared between members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This should include key information such as:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact lists</li> <li>• Procedures/policies/standards</li> <li>• Planning documents and information</li> <li>• Operations information (budgets, expenditures, monitoring, activities)</li> <li>• Activities of other member organizations as they relate to the meta-organization</li> <li>• Minutes from meetings</li> <li>• Communications internal and external to the meta-organization</li> <li>• Information on results and performance</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4.4 Methods of communication are sufficient to maintain meta-organizational memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methods of communication should be assessed to determine the extent to which they are likely to maintain and even increase meta-organizational memory. This could include things such as presence of redundant and overlapping methods of communication, and documenting key pieces of information and data.</li> </ul>

4) Accountability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Accountability</b> – Decision makers are accountable to the public as well as to stakeholders.</li> <li>• <b>Transparency</b> – Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them.</li> </ul>	
Potential indicators	Benchmark & measurement considerations
4.5 Level of trust between organization members in the meta-organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ways to address functioning of individual representative of organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This could be measured through determining the perceptions of inter-member trust via key informant interviews, the extent to which information or data are withheld between members of the meta-organization, extent to which there is a shared analysis of issues, extent to which there are shared values across member organizations.</li> </ul>

5) Fairness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Equity</b> – All have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.</li> <li>• <b>Rule of Law</b> – Frameworks and policies should be fair and enforced impartially.</li> </ul>	
Potential indicators	Benchmark & measurement considerations
5.1 The member organizations perceive <u>themselves</u> as equal (or equitable given their relative assets) to the other members according to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• capacity to influence decision making</li> <li>• capacity to influence development of policies/standards/procedures</li> <li>• capacity to negotiate and persuade other organizations</li> <li>• capacity to influence the direction of the meta-organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each member organization reports that it perceives itself as equal to the other organizations in the group in its capacity to influence in various areas of meta-organization functions.</li> </ul>
5.2 The member organizations perceive other <u>members</u> as equal (or equitable given their relative assets) to each other according to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• capacity to impact decision making</li> <li>• capacity to influence development of policies/standards/procedures</li> <li>• capacity to negotiate and persuade other organizations</li> <li>• capacity to influence the direction of the meta-organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each member organization reports that it perceives that the other members are essentially equal to one another in capacity to influence in various areas of meta-organization functions.</li> </ul>

5) Fairness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Equity</b> – All have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.</li> <li>• <b>Rule of Law</b> – Frameworks and policies should be fair and enforced impartially.</li> </ul>	
Potential indicators	Benchmark & measurement considerations
5.3 Representatives from member organizations in leadership positions in the meta-organization are of similar status/seniority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power inequality can occur when member organizations are represented by leaders significantly different in status and seniority within their own organizations. This potential contributing factor to power imbalance can be rectified by ensuring that there is not a large power imbalance across member organizations' representatives</li> </ul>
5.4 Policies/standards/procedures are implemented similarly across member organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality among member organizations can be demonstrated through the implementation of meta-organizational policies, standards, and procedures in a uniform manner across member organizations.</li> </ul>

## 6.0 Summary and Conclusions

This focused review of the literatures on meta-organizations, whole-of-government approaches and governance provides definitions of these concepts, along with an overview key similarities and differences. A recognized framework used to understand the principles of good governance is applied to the unique structures of meta-organizations. This framework is used to develop potential indicators of governance quality in meta-organizational structures.

This review will be useful for groups attempting to assess the extent to which specific meta-organizational structures have the necessary components to increase the likelihood of good governance to occur.

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## **Appendix A – Search Terms and Databases**

The literature identification and retrieval process consisted of searching with the following terms within the databases and search engines listed below:

### *Search terms*

- “Meta-organization governance”
- “Meta-organization government”
- “Whole of government framework”
- “Whole of government framework” + “Government of Canada”
- “Whole of government framework” + Canada
- “Whole of government”
- Best + practice + meta-organization
- Globalization + organization
- Governance
- Governance + structure
- Meta-organization
- Meta-organizations
- Organization + environment

### *Databases*

- Blackwell Publishing
- ebrary
- Emerald FullText
- Google
- Google Scholar
- informaworld
- IngentaConnect
- JSTOR
- Pro-Quest
- PubMed
- SAGE
- Science Direct
- University of Ottawa Library Catalogue
- Wiley-InterScience

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13. ABSTRACT This focused review of the literatures on meta-organizations, whole-of-government approaches and governance provides definitions of these concepts, along with an overview key similarities and differences. A recognized framework used to understand the principles of good governance is applied to the unique structures of meta-organizations. This framework is used to develop potential indicators of governance quality in meta-organizational structures. This review will be useful for groups attempting to assess the extent to which specific meta-organizational structures have the necessary components to increase the likelihood of good governance to occur. Cette étude a porté sur les littératures de la méta-organisations, les approches globales de l'administration et la gouvernance fournit des définitions de ces concepts, ainsi qu'un aperçu des similitudes et les différences clés. Un cadre reconnu utilisées pour comprendre les principes de bonne gouvernance est appliqué à des structures uniques de méta-organisations. Ce cadre est utilisé pour développer des indicateurs potentiels de la qualité de la gouvernance dans les structures de méta-organisation. Cet examen sera utile pour les groupes d'essayer d'évaluer la mesure dans laquelle les structures spécifiques de méta-organisation ont les éléments nécessaires pour accroître la probabilité d'une bonne gouvernance de se produire.		
4. KEYWORDS, DESCRIPTORS or IDENTIFIERS Meta-organizations; Whole-of-government; Governance		

