



The Performance of Performance Standards

James J. Heckman, Carolyn J. Heinrich, Pascal Courty, Gerald Marschke, Jeffrey Smith

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Incentives and accountability for government performance are central to contemporary government reform agendas across the globe. Still, the lessons on intended and unintended effects of incentive and performance management systems from several decades of research and practice do not appear to be reflected in the current design and implementation of these systems in the public sector.

This conundrum serves as motivation for the contributors to this volume. Led by Nobel laureate James J. Heckman, they use U.S. employment and training programs as their laboratory for investigation into the performance of performance standards. Drawing on a variety of superior data sources, they explore how performance standards and incentives influence the behavior of public managers and agency employees, their approaches to service delivery, and, ultimately, the outcomes for participants. In the process, they address the following questions:

What other lessons do we learn from the implementation of performance standards systems and the variation in rules and guidelines governing their administration over time? Demand on the part of policymakers and the public for greater accountability and a results-oriented government continues to grow. Therefore, the design and implementation of performance standards and incentive systems in the public sector will continue to be a dynamic pursuit. The lessons contained in this volume provide direction for policymakers seeking to shape and speed their evolution, as well as in ultimately improving government performance.

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