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Citation

Akerboom, M. D. (2026, January 21). *Leadership beyond hierarchies, toward public value: exploring, explaining and enhancing leadership in public sector networks*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4287829>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



Leadership Beyond Hierarchies, Toward Public Value

Exploring, Explaining and Enhancing
Leadership in Public Sector Networks

Moniek Akerboom





This dissertation investigates how leadership is exercised, influenced, and can be developed within public sector interorganizational networks. As public challenges increasingly require collaboration across organizational boundaries, understanding leadership beyond hierarchical settings is critical.

The research addresses four central questions: how leadership in networks can be conceptualized; how internal organizational factors enable or constrain leadership behavior; how different leadership behaviors affect collaborative processes; and how leadership can be practically developed within networks. These questions are explored through an integrated research design comprising theoretical synthesis, multiple case studies, a mixed-methods study, and a design science intervention.

The dissertation contributes to theory by advancing a behavioral, relational, and contextualized understanding of leadership in public sector networks. It provides practical insights for strengthening leadership capacities among network members. In sum, leadership beyond hierarchies is shown to be essential for achieving effective collaboration and delivering public value in a public sector landscape that aims to tackle complex societal challenges.

