Stephen Goldsmith and William D. Eggers.
Governing by Network: The New Shape of the Public Sector.
The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 2004.
Reviewed by Dumisani Mphalala

The Brookings Institution Is a private non profit organization devoted to research, education, and publication on important issues of domestic and foreign policy. Its principal purpose is to bring knowledge to bear on current and emerging policy problems. The Institution maintains a position of neutrality on issues of public policy.

The book discusses transformation of public service delivery in local and national governments. It argues that there is a rise of governing by network, particularly in the United States of America. As you read the book you can't help to wonder about the extent to which South Africa's public service is networked. Networked government in South Africa? Of course there is! The problem is that as ordinary citizens we do not realize the extent of networked government. Only the executive managers in government are aware of this networked government. This book comes to the rescue of those ignorant about governing by network.

What is "governing by network"?
Goldsmith and Eggers argue that Government agencies, divisions and offices are becoming less important as direct service providers but more important as generators of public value within the web of multi-organizational, multi-governmental, and multi-sectoral relationships that increasingly characterize modern government.

This is a movement away from hierarchical government bureaucracy of the twentieth century which was a predominant organizational model used to deliver public services and fulfill public policy goals.

This is the twenty first century solution to numerous and complex challenges of public service delivery and fulfillment of public policy goals.

This network creates a marketplace of new ideas inside a bureaucracy and fosters cooperation between colleagues.

They argue that governance by network represents the confluence of four influential trends.
1.   **Third-party government**: use of private firms and non-profit organizations as opposed to government employees to deliver services and fulfill policy goals.

They discuss examples such as:
- schools in US, Netherlands and United Kingdom that were contracted out with private sector to build and modernize their schools and operate them on behalf of schools authorities. They say delivering education services and managing schools has, as a result, become big business.
- third-party prison administration which have soured in the US;

⬜ private contractors that have become an integral component of the military (e.g. in the Gulf war of 1991 there was one contractor for every sixty soldiers; but, in the Iraq War the contractors now outnumber the soldiers in a ratio of five to four.

2.   **Joined-up government:** increasing tendency for multiple government agencies, sometime even at multiple levels of government to join together to provide integrated service.
This is similar to our own example of the *Thusong Service Centres*. In America they bill it "No Wrong Door" to mean that citizen seeking state-level human services should be able to access help from the first point of government contact – regardless of which agency they contact.

3.   **The digital revolution**: technological advances that enable organizations to collaborate in real time with external partners in ways previously not possible.
Goldsmith and Eggers discuss how this deals a heavy blow to traditional costs of partnering such as travel, meetings, document exchange, etc.

4.   **Consumer demand**: increased citizen demand for more control over their own lives and more choices and varieties in their government services.
The authors argue that people in need of social services want the ability to configure how and when they secure help**.**

To hammer their point home the authors say "indeed, discussion about government innovation rarely center on outsourcing versus bureaucracy anymore. The pressing question has become how to manage diverse webs of relationships in order to create value" (p. 21).

Governing by network has advantages and challenges, however.

Somebody might say this discussion is an antithesis to the developmental state. Well, I recommend this book to be read by the Executive and Senior Management in government.

A**bout the author:**
Dumisani Mphalala is Manager, Enabling Environment, Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI), South Africa.