

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences

journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/kjss>

Examining progress in research on public value

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 May 2016

Received in revised form 4 August 2016

Accepted 12 August 2016

Available online xxxxx

Keywords:

examining progress,
public organization,
public value

ABSTRACT

This article reviews a new three-volume collection of previously published articles on how public or private organizations are operationalizing the principles of public value: firstly, 'Measuring the public value of e-government: A case study from Sri Lanka'; secondly, 'New Public Management to public value: Paradigmatic change and managerial implications', and lastly, 'Developing an understanding of result-based management through public value theory'. All three articles in this paper also explain how public value creates service, trust, and other positive outcomes, and how public organizations use public value in measuring the dimensions of public value generation in terms of e-government. Finally, an article on the idea of public value has been proposed as a way of understanding government activity, informing policy-making and constructing service delivery. Employing public value as a tool for result-based management through New Public Management, and achieving it through public organization is an essential recommendation of this article.

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Introduction

The number of articles in public administration, especially on public value, has been expanding. The trend has been for articles to become more specialized in public or private organizations in terms of measuring performance and encapsulating the multiple dimensions of productive processes. Most importantly, public services are characterized by claims of rights by citizens to services, and the most valuable factor in the service, public value, can maximize stakeholder value in the service, enhance management and make the service the best that it can be.

This paper reports on progress in research on public organizations and three articles are reviewed. The first is 'Measuring the public value of e-government: a case study from Sri Lanka' (Karunasena, Deng, & Singh, 2011). The second article is 'New Public Management to public value:

paradigmatic change and managerial implications (O'Flynn, 2007). The last article is an issue from the perspective of executives who engage public value theory in developing an understanding of executive managers' perceptions, behaviors, and responses to changes introduced by result-based management (Try & Radnor, 2007). In this paper, I shall investigate the progress of research on public value. Public value in public organizations can create service, quality, and trust. Organizations can sustain their performance and make citizens/customers satisfied with their process of work by using a public value approach, but how can public value be performed well? The managers in public organizations are the best sources of information to answer this question.

The article is organized as follows. The first section introduces public value theory. The second section reviews the three articles which employ public value as an approach. The third section reviews arguments on public value as a paradigmatic change. The fourth section concludes the article.

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Peer review under responsibility of Kasetsart University.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2017.12.005>

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Please cite this article in press as: Yotawut, M., Examining progress in research on public value, Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2017.12.005>

Public Value Theory

The theory of public value, developed by Professor Mark Moore at the Kennedy School of Government (Coats & Passmore, 2008), is an exploration of how public organizations are operationalizing the principles of public value. It focuses on the role of public engagement and amplifies the idea that public services are different from private competitive markets. The objective of public value is to offer public managers a simple instrument to articulate the goals of their organization. Moreover, public value is designed to get public managers to think about what is most valuable in the service that they run, and to consider how effective management can make the service the best it can be (Coats & Passmore, 2008).

Kavanagh (2014) also stated that public value asks public officials to consider the benefits and cost of public services not only in terms of dollars and cents, but also in terms of how government actions affect important civic and democratic principles such as equity, liberty, responsiveness, transparency, participation, and citizenship. In the same way, public value also seeks to provide public officials with the ability to talk about the net benefit of government actions, while overcoming the limitations inherent in attempting to create a “bottom line” that is analogous to that of the private sector.

In addition, an understanding of public value in greater detail is represented by the ‘strategic triangle’. The strategic triangle shows three goals that are related to each other (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 also shows that when a given strategy or action has legitimacy and support (for example, democratic legitimacy and community/governing board support) and when the government has the operational capacity (for example, financial and other resources are easier to obtain), the implementation of the strategy of action could be effective, and public value will be created.

However, Moore (as cited in Kavanagh, 2014) also proposed that to accomplish these three goals, we should review four key points about strategic management that underpin Moore’s approach:

- Attempts to import private sector strategic management techniques into the public sector are fundamentally

flawed because of fundamental differences in the purposes and nature of public and private organizations. Consequently, a distinctive approach to value creation is required for public sector organizations.

- According to Moore, “strategic management” in the public sector has generally entailed: (1) focusing on the long run over the short run; (2) attending to large issues with a big impact on performance, rather than small issues with impacts on productivity; and (3) concentrating on ultimate ends, rather than needs.
- Public managers often view performance management as a technical challenge rather than a political or philosophical one. Moore contends that the political and philosophical aspects of public performance management are at least as important as the technical aspects.
- To produce value, public officials must consider the entire “value chain”. The value chain starts with inputs and moves to the production processes (for example, policies, programs, and activities) used to transform the inputs into outputs, which then affect a client (for example, a citizen or beneficiary), which leads to the social outcome that was the intended aim of the activity. Public management is often focused on just one part of the value chain; for example, traditional line item budgeting is focused almost exclusively on the “inputs” aspect of the value chain.

Three Examples

The theory of public value is an approach that explores how public organizations operationalize the principles of public value by focusing on the role of public engagement which distinguishes public services from private competitive markets.

Before I begin to examine the three articles, I would like to review one of the researchers—Try (2006)—who used public value theory to examine the executive take-up of result-based management; “Mind the gap, please”. The purpose of his research was to analyze the contribution of public value theory in understanding executive adaption of result-based management in a public sector environment. He found that the elements of public value theory contribute to an enhanced understanding of the constraints in adopting result-based management. However, the

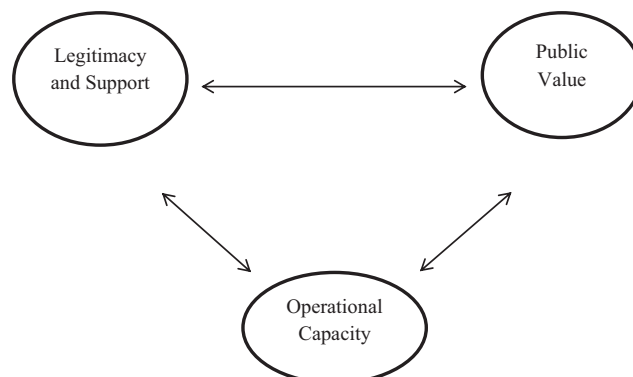


Figure 1 The strategic triangle

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