

Understanding Public Value Through its Instruments

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Abstract

The practical implementation of guidelines derived from public value theory is associated with activities performed in a certain way using certain means. Public managers seeking to create public value have to select the right tools for the right jobs, which raises the question of choosing the correct instrument. This may be informed by previous experience or knowledge or, more broadly, by educational and professional background. It is our view that the contexts of political science, public policy, public administration, management studies and place marketing are natural and obvious perspectives from which to understand public value. We argue that the home discipline influences the choice of instruments with which to pursue public value. To show this we apply a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach that includes multiple factor analysis performed on data collected from specialists working in the above disciplines. Multiple factor analysis was chosen for its usefulness in analysing surveys for which several groups of variables can be identified, or for which the same questions are asked at multiple time intervals. We began by investigating Moore's strategic triangle, which is the basic model for public value creation and covers public value (public services), legitimacy and support (environment), and operational capacity (results-based management). We then identified ten of its main sub-areas.

Next we asked the purposively chosen sample of respondents, who were specialists in one of the above disciplines, to enumerate the characteristics that management tools or instruments should possess if they are to enhance the creation of public value. Then we asked them to evaluate each group of tools assigned to the sub-areas identified around the corners of the strategic triangle. They were to do so applying the attributes formulated in a previous step and using a seven-point scale. The data sets were normalised by principal component analysis and combined in a data matrix onto which the principal components were projected. This made it possible to show differences in perceptions among representatives of major scientific disciplines associated with public value theory. The paper ends by drawing conclusions based on the variations in perceptions of the effectiveness of instruments deployed to deliver public value.

Points for Practitioners

The analysis demonstrates that professional background can influence perceptions of the effectiveness of instruments employed to deliver public value. Knowledge of professional background can make public managers aware of prejudices towards particular tools and helps identify the most effective tools for each dimension of public value. The use of multiple factor analysis enables global assessment of perceptions and preferences in studies involving a complex structure of attributes and multiple hidden dimensions of perception within a small group of respondents.

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