

**What Do Public Values Mean for Public Action?  
Putting Public Values in their Plural Place.**

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**Abstract**

The debate about public values is moving rapidly from a prime research concern to becoming embedded in policy discourse and management practice. There is, though, divergence in interpreting public values, in identifying their constructors and in their practical implication for public action. Reflection on research into public values suggests two distinct strands of thinking: a generative strand that sees public value emerging from processes of public action and deliberation; and an institutional interpretation that locates public values as the attributes of producers in the state and wider governance system. The Paper argues that neither perspective offers a persuasive account of how the public may gain from strengthening the coherence and force of values. Key propositions on public values are generated from a comparison and critique of influential texts. These are then used to develop a causal model of how values are captured and re-formed in governing contexts. The Paper argues specifically that conflicting discourses issue from dissimilar values universes and from values rooted in the objects of past labours. These conflicts are vital manifestations of plurality. The value propositions that issue from governing contexts are grouped into policy frames that then compete with other problem frames for citizens' limited cognitive resources. It is through this latter process that public values are distributed in an inherently plural system of contention.

## **Introduction – Why Public Values, Why Now?**

Public values are on a research ‘front-burner’. Kernaghan judges that there has been an ‘unprecedented emphasis on public service *values*’ since the 1980s (2003, p. 712, emphasis in original). Stoker (2006) portrays an ‘emerging public value management paradigm’ as offering ‘a fuller and rounder vision of humanity’ (p. 56). O’Flynn (2007) is persuaded of this strong claim and seeks to ‘articulate this new paradigm’ (p. 353). This turn to public values is undoubtedly rooted in practical pressures on public institutions. ‘Political-administrative scandals’ have, for Beck Jørgensen (2007), promoted the revival of judicial values in Denmark, while the ‘normative basis of the public sector’ has been challenged by the economism of New Public Management. Similarly, corruption in local government in France in the 1980s contributed to a re-evaluation of the values base of a long-standing approach to public/private partnerships (West, 2004). Deeper lines of change, including globalisation and a growing awareness of risks associated with ‘late modernity’ (Beck et al, 1994) may also be forcing a re-examination of the values base underpinning public action.

Public action encompasses and affects many categories of values: it is essentially polyvalent (Berg, 2001). Discourses on public values argue that this polyvalence qualifies economic interpretations of public management. Less widely recognised is the challenge that univalent measurement systems present to the private sector, too. Thus, Berg argues that private firms ‘meet the needs of the customer. Profit is the bottom line. Accountability is simple’ (2001, p. 44): is it? BT’s exploration of the model of stakeholder capitalism would suggest otherwise. ‘Profit is not the only financial measure of success used by investors’ (BT, 2003, pp. 14). Univalence is untenable. ‘It is impossible to reduce complex systems to one dominant measure of success, and absurd to try’ (p. 15). Thus, multiple values present a central challenge to all larger organisations. This complexity is equally manifest in language and meaning, where a ‘plurality of visions’ reflects a general condition of polysemy (Ben Ahmed and Yannou, 2003). Public value is cast as a ‘multi-dimensional construct’ (O’Flynn, 2007) that is explicitly framed

in recognition of this polyvalence. Bana e Costa (2001) argues for the use of techniques of multicriteria analysis in such polyvalent circumstances.

The challenge of multivalence is widely registered. The fact that public values have entered policy discourses with great rapidity reflects this perception that univalence is injurious to government practice. Rhodes and Wanna (2007) note this rapid dissemination into the practitioner world through educational programmes for public managers. Such indoctrination is widespread. To take the UK as an example, the then-National School of Government hosted Mark Moore in 2006 and proselytised on public values to senior civil servants through its courses and website. A foreword to a central government Cabinet Office paper entitled ‘Creating Public Value. An analytical framework for public service reform’, portrayed public values as a helpful adjunct to the modernisation of public administration (Kelly *et al*, 2002). Kernaghan notes that four Westminster-style governments (Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada) have seen efforts to make ‘values a persuasive influence on the decisions and actions of public servants’ (Kernaghan, 2003, p. 711). A ‘Canadian model’ that explicitly registers the importance of public values has been under construction since the early-1990s (Brodtrick, 1999). A cautionary note needs to be sounded here, though. If public values, in whatever guise, are to have the impact on public programmes and services that protagonists claim, it has not yet been made clear how this will happen – especially since ‘our understanding of public values seems to have progressed relatively little in recent times’ (Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman, 2007, p. 354). Neither has a convincing causal model yet to be articulated. This Paper builds on the current literature on public values in developing a model of how public values are produced and diffused through the governmental system.. In the two sections of the paper that follow, a selection of the current public values literature is critically examined. The selected examples are clearly emblematic of two distinct approaches to public values. The first approach is termed the generative approach and draws on the work of Moore (1995) and Stoker (2005). The second approach may be labelled institutional and features in the work of Bozeman (2002), Beck Jørgensen (2007), Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) and Kernaghan (2003). A number of propositions are then set out, based on the preferred institutional interpretation. These

propositions build towards a causal model of the journey of plural public values through the governmental system.

### **Two Readings of the Public Value Literature:**

At the heart of the current turn towards public value is a fundamental concern with renewing the legitimacy of governing processes and outputs. From a public value perspective, the specification of public policy programmes in terms of the values that they represent and (re-)produce forms the centrepiece of a reinvigorated, and more direct, interpretation of democracy. The central argument is that the public interest cannot be reduced to singular, economistic measures. The values that inhere in the public realm in both government processes and outputs are irreducibly plural. These are, moreover, best defined by the public itself. This is a common leitmotif, but there are at least two discernable and partially divergent strands to the current public value literature. The first sees public value as the output of deliberative processes in which principled public servants (elected and unelected) seek mandates for action. This strand is hence termed the *generative perspective*. The works of Moore (1997) and Stoker (2006) embody this approach. The second, heroic, strand of work seeks to map constellations of values through the grouping of core and derivative values against the various institutions of government, their conduct and their mode of engagement with each other and their publics. This strand is termed the *institutional perspective*. This perspective is visible in the work of Bozeman (2002), Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2002; 2007) and, to a lesser extent, Kernaghan (2003). Each of these is now briefly critiqued in turn.

#### *The Generative Perspective*

The seminal work here, at least in terms of sparking academic and practitioner attention to public value, is undoubtedly that of Mark Moore (1995). Public values theorists are fond of describing their sets of values as a ‘universe’. A new universe erupts from a Big Bang. In retrospect, it was Moore’s work that provided the ‘cosmic egg’. Moore’s central argument is that public managers have a key role to play in creating public value, both in

terms of discerning what the public values and in building a constituency that values public programmes. Moore's basic hypothesis attracts wide support and dissenters are few. Among those dissenters, though, are Rhodes and Wanna (2007), who criticise the theoretical status of Moore's work and argue that as far as Westminster systems as concerned, his formulation gives far too much responsibility to, but demands insufficient accountability from, public managers. Rhodes and Wanna's observation that Moore's work has been taken up rather hastily and inappropriately generalised to governmental systems with quite alien organising principles is surely correct. To that, we would add that Moore's source metaphor of public value creation (or generation) has been inappropriately reinterpreted as a new management paradigm for a new mode of governing. Here, the work of Stoker (2006) is particularly noteworthy as a subtle extension of many of Moore's hypotheses. Stoker argues that a new context of networked governance prevails and that 'public value management' is more suited to networked governance than either traditional public administration or the new public management. The term, 'public value management' is not directly attributed to Moore's work, but nonetheless captures a similar, generative perspective. As Stoker opines, '(t)he public value management paradigm presents the achievement of public value as its core objective.' (p. 42).

Stoker's core argument is that new forms of governance have called forth a new public management paradigm and public value management is the appropriate response. 'In its definition of the public interest, approach to service delivery, and commitment to a public service ethos', Stoker asserts that:

'the new public value management paradigm does blend together features of traditional public administration and new public management. However, in its key objectives, attitude to democracy, and ideas about the role of public managers, it goes beyond either of the previous paradigms into territory that marks a clear break with past understandings of the way that governmental actors, both official and elected should behave' (Stoker, 2006, p. 43).

This interpretation of public value management is, then, avowedly normative in ambition. It is also contended here that this conception is flawed, in at least two ways. These problems render Stoker's propositions incomplete as an understanding of the way in which public values (in the plural) inform public endeavours, decision-making and outputs. The first criticism is that there is a strong presumption, to be found also in Moore's work, that those involved in the generation of public value (as an output) are motivated by their desire to achieve common goals. This means people working within organisations, networks and partnerships. It is a default assumption that their behaviour is generally guided by 'a public service ethos'. The evidence base on behaviours in networked governance is simply not robust enough to support such a claim. It is, moreover, symptomatic that the interface between public and private sectors to be found in many networks is explained by factors of uncertain provenance. The five apparently indispensable elements of a public service ethos are: 'a performance culture'; 'a commitment to accountability'; the guarantee of universal access; 'responsible employment practices'; and 'a contribution to community wellbeing' (pp. 48-49). Where do these elements (or maybe, values) originate from? If the model of public value management is to convince, then these factors need to be endogenous to the system. In actuality, their status remains unclear: they may or may not be generated from inside the cooperative milieu, but they are nonetheless indispensable to the public interest. It is quite possible to envisage a situation in which a network of people and organisations are intrinsically motivated by the production of public value, but circumstances force them, or they otherwise lapse into, the appropriation of private value and pursuit of selfish interest. This corrupt outcome can only be avoided by the intercession of the public value ethos, re-setting the rules from outside of the relational system. It may therefore be argued that public value (as a singular output) requires public values (as plural inputs). What then is added by the networking that occurs in between? Moreover, as Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) observe, in their brief critique of Moore, generative perspectives on public value pay only the briefest attention to these input values.

The second, and related, criticism of Stoker's generative perspective concerns his assumptions about the open nature of the public decision-making process. The

authorisation environment, as Moore terms it, or the theatre of accountability, is a remarkably open and inclusive domain and central to Stoker's vision.

'The judgement of what is public value is collectively built through deliberation involving elected and appointed government officials and key stakeholders. The achievement of public value, in turn, depends on actions chosen in a reflexive manner from a range of intervention options that rely extensively on building and maintaining networks of provision. Networks of deliberation and delivery are central features of this governance approach' (2006, p. 42).

The picture that Stoker paints here is of a large, amorphous deliberative space in which all relevant decisions and actions are open to challenge and justification. It is difficult to challenge Stoker's assertion of the benefits of opening up decision-making to a broader public. This kind of argument has been made many times before by those who argue for deliberative democracy as a response to the inadequacies of rational policy making in contexts of uncertainty and values pluralism (see for example Warren, 2002). While these benefits are indisputable, the feasibility and desirability of the proposition of openness to deliberation at all decision points is far more contestable. In practice, some decisions are likely to be 'black-boxed': first, at the point of production, where ideals meet the world of interests and concrete, material objects (a point which is discussed further below); second, at the point of arbitration between the production, distribution and consumption of outputs. Pragmatically, some privacy, some of the time, is vital to relationship-building and also necessary in respect of individual rights. These are all circumstances in which untrammelled openness could readily destroy public - and personal - value. Against this, arbitration between often polarised citizen constituencies, guided by robust (and publicly tested) input values, is far more in keeping with a universalist conception of the public interest than intense deliberation within narrowly defined communities.

Public value is then, in Stoker's view, the product of the dialogical endeavours of ethical people working both within networks and partnerships and with the wider communities to which they relate. The critique of this approach indicates that it is neither realistic or

desirable to regard public value as the product of (presumably local) dialogue: certain aspects of the deliberative space will be ruled out of bounds and regulated by input values drawn from outside of that deliberative space. Those values, though, still require scrutiny within the broader polity. It is to these input values and their constitution that discussion turns, in a brief critique of the institutional perspective on values.

### *The Institutional Perspective*

The institutional strand of the public values literature has been far more concerned with defining, classifying and ordering public values – now conceived emphatically in the plural form. Building on earlier work on definitions of publicness (Bozeman, 1987; see also Haque, 2001) as a desirable condition for governance systems, Bozeman (2002) set about developing through public values a conceptual framework for articulating the public interest to counter a pervasive market failure paradigm. Together with Beck Jørgensen, this work has recently culminated in an inventory of public values gleaned from an examination of research published in the leading public administration periodicals in the US, UK and Scandinavian countries between 1990 and 2003 (Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman, 2007). Beck Jørgensen's (2007) research was grounded in a large-scale survey of Danish senior public managers and takes their subjective appraisals as his base of evidence. Kernaghan (2003) uses 'statements on public-service values' which he draws from four Westminster-style governments as the basis for his research. There are some important differences between these authors' work, as shall be detailed below. What unites them in a shared methodological enterprise is an ambition to describe and classify the entire range, field or universe of public values as they manifest in the conduct and choices of public service organisations. It is in locating values in this ensemble of institutions, organizations and producer relationships that their work clearly diverges from that associated with generative interpretations. The specific approach that they adopt in pursuing this task has come to be known in the more established research into personal values as the List of Values technique (see for example, Grankvist et al, 2007).

These authors readily acknowledge the many ambiguities in the resulting classifications. Thus, Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) concede that the value of secrecy (in brutal and non-brutal forms) allies with a number of other values, including respect for privacy, stability or effectiveness). The joint products then ‘point in different directions’ (p. 365) in terms of desirable government practice. This imprecision is compounded by the fact that there is no agreed definition of what a public value actually is. Beck Jørgensen (2007, p. 366) explores these ambiguities, noting the common tendency to define value through near-synonyms. These include: ideas; ethos; standards and principles of organisations or society as a whole; interests (an instrumental appropriation); beliefs; attitudes; and even norms and traits. These general contentions pivot on the key term, ‘value’, but what exactly is a value? Hitlin and Piliavin (2004) also explore definitions of values in terms of synonyms. Values are ‘more abstract than attitudes’; they ‘focus on ideals; attitudes are applied more to concrete social objects’ (p. 361). Values are central to identity and are not traits. They are more ‘trans-situational’ than norms and this quality also implies that values are enduring. Their endurance is an important theme in institutional interpretations of public values. Evidence on this tenacity is to be found in Beck Jørgensen (2007). After many years of persistent advocacy of New Public Management on the part of academics and governmental agencies alike, values associated with public administration continue to exhibit a tenacious facility to survive. In stressing durability, institutional accounts clearly diverge from generative readings. In the latter, public value is constructed and unraveled through subjectivist interpretation and are thus ephemeral in nature. If defining the qualities of individual values is problematical, their combinations are ill understood. Public values are often interdependent. Neither are the mechanisms used to diffuse values independent, either. Deci et al (1999) argue, from a social psychological perspective, that greater extrinsic pressure to conform to values is likely to diminish an individual’s intrinsic motivation to act worthily. A similar contradiction between voluntary and enforced values ‘interjections’ is to be found at the level of the public service institution. Kernaghan (1993) finds that imposed values relating to ethical conduct are less likely to alter behaviours than negotiated instruments. These values conflicts are under-theorised, but the importance of conflict is a useful,

more general line of inquiry which personal values theorists have mined to the full in the competing values framework (for example, Van Vuuren et al, 2008).

It is a logical progression from these lists to begin to order classifications according to pre-set criteria. Kernaghan (2003) advocates a two-tier hierarchy of core values that traverse the public service, with agencies, departments and service units being invited to decompose and tailor these according to the requirements of their own immediate task environment. This would mean, for example, ‘fiscal prudence for a finance department’ or ‘detailed conflict-of-interest rules for a purchasing department’ (p. 717). This apparently simple alignment of values against function may be less easy to locate in practice. Beck Jørgensen (2007) searches for this alignment among those Danish agencies that are charged with functioning as a ‘guardian angel of a specific value’ (p. 371) and finds, in actuality, few cases of such. He offers his own hierarchy of public values. This segments public values into four types. Type I values are ‘tough values’ – non-negotiable values that are grounded in principles that have a theological, existential or intuitive logic. Types IIA and IIB are based on consequential and consensual rationalities, respectively. Type III values illuminate preferences: market-type and New Public Management values locate here. The precise manner in which values may be grounded is not fully spelt out here, though. Persuaded that a hierarchy is too strong a claim, Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) offer an alternative interpretation of a values universe. Here, public values are distributed unevenly across seven constellations that, taken together, encompass the entirety of a system of governance. There are two notable issues here:

- Not all public values are of equal value. Some public values are tough or core: they are constitutive of an agency’s self-identity or they may be used to lubricate and ease conflict (Kernaghan, 2003). One may infer, again following the personal values literature (Baron and Leschner, 2000), that these values are deontological (collective-social) in nature and are not readily exchanged for other values. They may function as Protected Values. This reading suggests that deliberate strategies may be adopted by government producers in relation to the values that constitute them.

- The theory of public values is bounded and is not a ‘theory of everything’. For example, Constellation 6 in Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman’s (2007) universe focuses on the values of public-sector employees. This is unnecessary. Personal values are determined by other forces in an alternative universe, as are the values associated with agents acting primarily in market environments. Recent French research illuminates these alternative ‘orders of worth’ (for example, Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). How these universes co-mingle is a potentially rich area for further research.

Beck Jørgensen’s (2007) definition of public values is needlessly anthropocentric. If values are only a property of humans, as he asserts, then Kernaghan’s research, which uses codified statements of values, is rendered wholly illegitimate. These statements are objects and objects are slighted in much public values research. The relationship between the design of public facilities and the delivery of public values is visible in the debate surrounding new hospitals in England. Conventional medical (professional-technical) values have been amplified by short term least-cost criteria to dominate hospital design for decades. This ‘emphasis on clinical functionality in hospital design has been at the expense of the total quality of the healthcare environment’ (CABE, nd). There is, though, ‘increasing understanding and evidence that the design of the healing environment impacts on patient recovery and on staff’ (ibid). Radical hospital redesign is advocated to reflect a wider conception of the public value of a hospital as a holistic context for personal health. Soft systems can play an equal role in embodying, freezing and thus, preserving public values. Schall (1997) sought in her experience at the New York City Juvenile Justice Department to ‘hardwire’ purposes in IT systems and thus build inertia or ‘sticking power’. Such systems are a coercive form of values maintenance. Objects can reciprocally be used to dissolve public values. Pollitt (2000) explores the ‘specific processes of forgetting’ as mechanisms of ‘institutional memory loss’ (p. 6). The mechanisms include loss of ‘any systematic body of precedent’, ‘poor record keeping’ arising from a hyperactive meetings culture and casualisation in public labour forces. Pollitt highlights the structural significance of the central registry as a repository of the memories of the public organization. These observations relate to knowledge

management and a technical interpretation of succession planning (Rothwell and Poduch, 2004).

Both encoding and forgetting provide means of deliberately manipulating the public values universe through objectification and by reworking the relation between public servants and the materials with which they work. Deliberate manipulation is Kernaghan's (2003) theme, when he sketches a values regime as a quasi-stable and reinforcing clustering of values. A regime can be induced by conscious use of a 'collectivity of measures for making shared values an integral part of the public-service culture' (p. 711). De Carufel (1994) also believes that the selection of convergent values is important to effectiveness. He asserts that homogeneity in values helps in avoiding intra-organisational conflict. The degree of values homogeneity he terms *cultural content*. Mutually supportive value sets give rise to collectivities that are aligned at a deep level. Cultural content combines with cultural strength: the degree to which values are practically demonstrated in an institution's quotidian activities. The corollary of this reasoning is that cohesive content exists and is important where it enables the reconciliation of situations in which value systems collide.

The values regime (which is further elaborated below) is key to the claim that public values offer a means for managing and improving public service. Unlike the constellations to be found in Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007), a regime is capable of deliberate and creative shaping. It is also, therefore, dynamic. The task that Beck Jorgenson and Bozeman have set themselves is rightly modest: defining, classifying and ordering public values in such a way that their consistency and alignment can be tested empirically. They concede that moving from a philosophical concern with values to an empirical one poses problems for public values research in that the so-called prime values can never be 'objectively or intersubjectively valid'. They are nevertheless happy for public values to be regarded as 'an ambiguous but potentially viable set of criteria for action and accountability' (p. 377). At this stage in the research, it is sufficient, they argue, to taxonomise values and to describe in a very static sense how they are related to, or 'affect', various aspects of public administration and organisation. By their own

admission, this modest research agenda leaves many questions unanswered: most notably ‘who are the presumed purveyors of public value’ (p 355) and how are conflicts among values handled? It is argued here that answering these questions requires the displacement of static fields of public endeavour with overlapping, typically conflicting and dynamic systems of values, creative coordinated through government agency. These action systems are surely not, as Stoker (2006) suggests, maximally open deliberative spaces, but rather partially open and partially closed systems in which values take their place alongside past policy outputs and interests (Lindblom, 1959); bounded rationality (Simon, 1957); variable ‘issue attention-cycles’ (Downs, 1972); and the objects that translate values into concrete policy outputs.

### **The Dynamic of Public Values Creation:**

In summary, there are big problems in the current public values literature. There is, first, a real danger in moving too quickly to establish public value management as a new paradigm of practice and in bringing it prematurely into the managerial realm. This danger is particularly acute in the case of the generative perspective on public management, where assumptions of direct democracy remain largely tacit. The perils in premature adoption are demonstrated through the New Public Management experience. Such paradigms persist despite their acute contradictions and inconsistencies. Once the sale to policy-makers and public managers is effected, the product acquires the status of a recipe, notwithstanding the cautions of academics about undue generalisation. This leads to the second peril: that public values, argued in relation to specific problems and in competition with individualist and economic values, become hard-wired not just in behaviours but also in the very fabric of the material world. These considerations are combined with a close reading of the disparate writings on public values to yield a model that seeks to address problems in causal attribution. Formal modelling is designed to avoid ‘*ad hoc* patterns of values, which are hard to generalize between people and organizations’ (Van Vuuren et al, 2008, p. 48). What is sought instead is an ‘underlying framework of interrelationships’ (*ibid*), based on plausibility; propositions that capture ‘what goes on in the black box during the transformation of input to output’ within the

public service organisation; and the structured linkage of action to context (Donaldson and Gooler, 2003, p. 357).

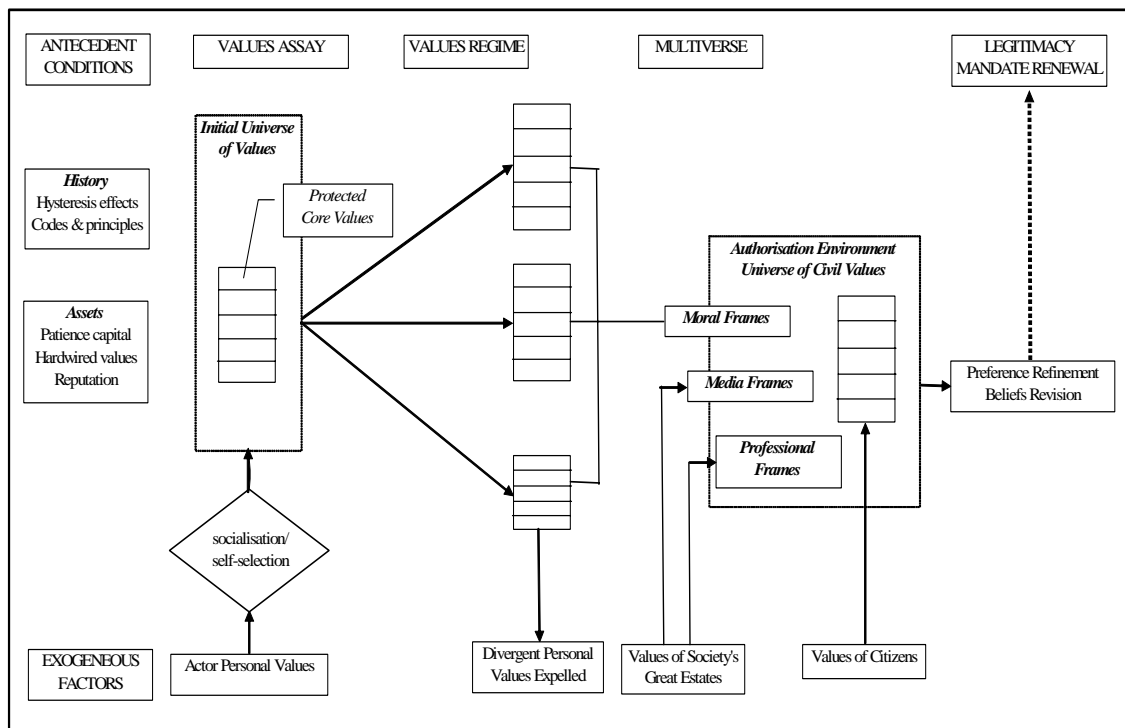
The model set out here seeks to address some of these issues. It proceeds from a number of propositions. These include:

- History has an impact upon the selection of values, particularly where values are encoded in legal statutes and judgements. Where the past powerfully constrains the present, a high degree of path dependency may prevail (Kay, 2003).
- Objects embody values in ways that delimit both their subsequent use and the actions of those using them.
- Institutions and organisations have more or less restricted choice in selecting specific public values from the public values universe.
- A critical moment arises in institutions' value creating work where public actors look for public support or legitimation. They will then be faced with a broader set of values-based propositions about 'what is to be done' that emanate from society's other great estates.
- This broader set of values-based propositions will result in a further refinement of public values as those values crystallise into citizen attitudes and specific beliefs.

The model is set out in Figure 1 below. The model as outlined takes as its object the public institution. It is recognised that public action now occurs frequently within networks or associations of actors, as Stoker (2006) rightly observes. This is therefore, just one of the many possible constellations of values that Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) discuss. Its extension into the networked realm should only be attempted with caution. It is most readily transmutable to this networked realm when inter-organisational networks take on some of the organising features of an institution. This means situations where there is a high degree of centralised control (Provan and Milward 1995), such that a coherent values regime (a pivotal moment in the model) is formed. The model may, therefore, only be applied to a distinctive sub-class of networked governing situations. Many of the features of this model hinge on differentiation in actors' base of values and

on plural representations of social problems. In these regards, it is distinguished from the generative approach. The model is built on a logical framework that moves from institutional context, through the acquisition and nurturing of resources to public engagement and public judgement. The explanatory narrative that follows is ordered to reflect this.

**Figure 1 – Plural Public Values, Policy Frames and Public Engagement**



*Antecedent conditions*

Beginning at the far left of the diagram, a number of what have been termed antecedent conditions (see for example, Gugu and Rodriguez-Campos, 2007) are identified. These shape the way in which public values flow around the governmental system. Charles Lindblom (1959) highlights the effect of history and past settlements on current and future policy orientations. In any pluralist system, Lindblom argues, enacted policies represent the accommodation or settlement of competing interests. These hysteresis effects are typically embodied in principles, codified routines and even, powerful or

persuasive discourses. These will serve to limit the imagination of what is possible. However, the universe of possible values is constrained not just by cognitive limitation, but also through material fixatives. Drawing on the insights of Actor Network Theory (Callon and Latour, 1981, Latour, 2005), the model posits that objects that have been deployed to furnish or equip (Thévenot, 2006) public actions will also serve to constrain what is possible. Fully cognisant actors may further deploy or jettison these resources, only within limits, in pursuit of their strategies. For their part, these objects, being embedded within policy systems and being also inscribed with certain practices, also have a moral quality. For example, a waste incineration plant with an amortisation period of thirty years or more will, at least for that period, embody a specific value orientation, regardless of the general evolution of thinking or technology within that particular policy domain. As fixed plant, the technology will have low forward flexibility. Similarly, information systems implemented during the era of the New Public Management may continue to promote economistic modes of performance measurement long after the underlying cognitive values have expired. Such systems would truly function as ‘electronic concrete’.

### *Initial Values Assay*

Policy agents will then face an initial, constrained, universe of public values and a collectively derived set of desires. In executing those desires, institutional agents will need to attend to the mix of public values to be found in that agency. If these are inappropriate or inadequate, the institution may engage in hiring. The evidence suggests that public bodies attract recruits that are broadly sympathetic to public service (self-selection) (Becker and Connor, 2005) and seek congruent values in their employer. These recruits are increasingly socialised with collective values over time, generating a labour force that is motivated by a strong sense of public ethics (Bozeman, 2002). This ethics does not necessarily generate loyalty to a particular institution, however (Balfour and Weschler, 1990) – as the history of public sector industrial relations amply testifies. This initial universe of values may contain core or non-negotiable values (Kernaghan, 2003). These core values make up the identity of the agency and assist it in resolving values conflict. Incoherence and values conflicts are to be expected as the norm here. This

means, in short, that cultural content is low, the universe of current values is heterogeneous and the List of Values is long. The institution may then seek to encode those core values in a statement of principles or in a mission statement and render them unchangeable as Protected Values.

### *The values regime*

The next stage in the model is where a degree of choice is enacted. The institution now begins to forge identity and its associated rule-base, through the implementation of a values regime. There are only three possibilities here. These are, first, an amplification in the universe of values, where diversity is a most prized institutional attribute. Alternatively, the initial universe of public values is held constant in terms of range and priorities, where this is deemed most adequate to addressing the policy or service problems implied or articulated in the mandate. The third option, obviously, is to collapse the initial universe of public values, such that values approach the univalence prized by theorists of strict alignment. The choice as between these trajectories (values amplification, values maintenance or values contraction) is likely to be influenced by a number of factors including, but not only, the nature of the problem to be addressed and the need for and risks associated with experimentation, as well as by the degree of hard-wiring within the task environment. An institution mandated to attack problems the causes of which remain largely contested may build an experimental capacity by growing its inventory of values. The ‘nurseries’ that are related in Blaug et al (2006) tend public values. In an amplification regime, these nurseries may hothouse other value systems. Trial-trading arms or business units may be readily incorporated into a plural public agency as subordinate value systems based on market-type mechanisms. In this vein, public institutions may come to function as ‘incubators of ideas, laboratories of innovation, and modelers of new pathways’ (Stone, 2006, p. 129). Managing the conflicts between these proliferating values then becomes a key task. The example of the Greater London Authority (GLA) is illuminating of this (Rydin *et al*, 2004; West *et al*, 2003). One technique of values amplification deployed by the London Mayor was to engage in aggressive hiring of dynamic and high-profile personnel both within the core executive office and in tributary organizations. One example was the hiring of the highly-acclaimed

former New York city public transport boss, Bob Kylie as head of Transport for London (TfL). TfL was subsequently frequently hailed by the Mayor as an example of a virtuous, modern and forward-looking public service organization. In parallel, however, entirely different values were being nurtured in the London Development Agency in its work with black and minority ethnic businesses - arguably more closely aligned with the old, egalitarian, Greater London Council (of which Mayor Livingstone was also the head), and a different set of values again in the sustainable development unit within the core GLA bureaucracy. It is precisely this chameleon-like character of London's first mayor and the institution he was beginning to shape that made him hard to analyse using standard political science concepts of interests and agendas. His eclectic approach was, though, entirely suited to the multifarious nature of the social problems of this heterogeneous city.

A values regime that seeks to homogenise the labour force can require the expulsion of unwanted personal values. This can be a violent process. A common tactic used by public institutions to achieve this is to deploy one set of values against another. Private firms are often hired to redesign local agency functions. As a part of this, they effect change in, for example, office behaviours in public agencies. One of us (Davis) researched values shift in a borough council in the north-east of England. The council's Chief Executive was able to draw scathing comparisons between core council and externally managed office environments. The council offices resembled, in his view, a 'rubbish dump', replete with personal paraphernalia, while the offices of outsourced functions were stocked only with operative and ordered artefacts. Outsourcing was designed in part to re-draw a line between personal and institutional realms. Expulsion is structural to the US Presidential system, but eschewed in UK national government. In local government, expelling people bearing inappropriate personal values is difficult in law. It becomes more difficult the more senior the staff member involved, with a local government chief executive officer being almost impossible for a political administration to remove.

Following De Carufel (1994), it is contended that the benefits of strengthening public values lie in the rigour with which values are applied, through successive rounds of

policy making. This repetition builds reputational capital in the eyes of onlookers (Mower, 2001). Yet, the strategies used in pursuit of reputation can be paradoxical. Consistent values may be consistently applied, but equally, inconsistent values may also be consistently applied. In this latter case, cultural content may be low, but cultural strength is high. The case of the Greater London Authority is again illuminating here. Its consistent values heterogeneity presented an accountability challenge to the Mayor, as the institutional complex – clearly loosely-coupled as it was – spoke with many different voices simultaneously, and did so repeatedly. It is in this sense of consistency and permanence that public values generate public value, in the institutional system. With a clear reputation for clarity or ambiguity among society’s great estates, the institution is ready to frame persuasive and compelling frames through which it offers its perspectives in the authorisation environment, or the theatre of accountability (Stewart, 1984).

#### *The authorisation environment*

The model explicitly borrows Moore’s concept of an authorisation environment, but a distinct interpretation is placed on that concept. Policy actors will bring propositions on policies and services to a wider public arena or theatre in the form of policy frames. These will contend directly with other frames of reference for the limited attention and support of the general public. The key contention here, explicitly pluralist in nature, is that the shaped universe of public values, honed now into assertions about specific policy objects or service propositions, is only one value universe among many. This is where the argument diverges from the works of Bozeman and Jorgenson. Defining the morality or worth (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) of public actions and public products in terms of public values is only one of the ways in which such actions and products will be morally framed – and judged. Society’s other great estates, including the media, professional groupings and private producers, will also challenge such moral framings. This wider and inherently plural hierarchy of value universes may be termed the multiverse. Following Rhodes and Wanna’s (1997) critique of the public value management literature, it is important to register the unique significance of public policies. Some public values will be more highly contested in their expression (as propositions) than others – in part, because they directly contest the core values of other universes. It is also precisely in

moving through the value chain from abstract values to concrete policy or service proposals that values become visible to the wider public and thus, attract their notice. If the proposed policy output is controversial, experimental or issues from a crisis, it is likely to draw the attentions of competing value systems into the authorisation environment.

A values regime must be able to generate coherent frames, to communicate and argue its case in the authorisation environment. It must be able to prepare public servants for the multiple accountabilities – and collision of values – that they will face in this multiverse. Detailed research on this central process appears scant, however. Stone (2006) identifies causality as a key theme in the moral claim underpinning public framing. She observes that moral frames require an underpinning and ‘persuasive causal story’. Causality identifies human drivers and consequences to problems, so that issues become ‘amenable to human action’. Causal stories also permit grounded accusations, serving to ‘place blame and assign responsibility’. Finally, they map the agents’ behaviours and responsibilities and thus ‘embody fixes’ (pp. 129-130). A policy frame is thus distinguished from competing frames in its content, or element of account (Stewart, 1984). In this view, values are explained through a transparency based on causality. Transparency is replaced by ambiguity, in Vickers’ (1973) reading of the conduct of political life. This ambiguity is founded on what he claims to be the inherent indeterminacy of certain key public values. There are important feedforward effects within the model at this point, too. If the values regime accentuates heterogeneity, it is likely to generate multiple frames, based on alternative causal explanations of a problem. Such systems encourage ‘managers to say different things to different stakeholder groups as well as prompting inconsistencies between speech and actions’ (Huzzard and Östergren, 2002, note 3). Heterogeneous values breed institutional hypocrisy, with potentially penal consequences in highly contested authorization environments. That may be a cost of pluralism. Finally, there is surely a reflexive public value that needs to be debated here, namely, the obligation on public institutions to sustain the capacity of this authorisation environment. This may be argued to apply in all circumstances, even where

this means building the capacities of other great estates in the likelihood that this capacity may be turned against the agency itself.

The outputs from this interpretation of the authorisation environment are twofold: movements in citizen attitudes about specific issues, reflecting successful persuasion by one or more of the competing frames. Citizen beliefs are revised. Second, the initial multiverse of values is redistributed, new constellations are formed and new values are allocated.

### **Summary and Conclusions:**

New Public Management tended to confine politics ‘to the provision of initial input and subsequent evaluation’ (Blaug et al, p. 21). ‘Any expansion of politics beyond these tasks is then seen as symptomatic of failure’ (ibid). Public values promise to re-energise the political realm. The generative view of public value management asserts that deliberative politics does (should) take place between input and evaluation driving the process of value creation’ (ibid). This claim for direct democracy is compromised, however, by its reliance on undifferentiated and inclusive deliberative spaces functioning as authorisation environments. This is, moreover, undesirable if universality is still a value. The contradiction is apparent where representative systems seek to incorporate aspects of public value management (Accenture/National Trust, 2006). What results are ‘citizen centric goals’ that are prioritized through multicriteria analysis to achieve services that are ‘aligned to citizen expectations’ (p. 14): a considerable diminution in the ambitions of direct democracy. The model proposed here seeks to translate plural public values into policy outputs that takes account of the antecedent constraints on values, the moral quality of objects and the shaping of values regimes. It is not, as Stoker contends, in wholly inclusive and deliberative spaces or permanently attentive authorisation environments that public value is generated. Rather, public programmes are shaped from values regimes, which often involve brutal values engineering. Regimes are often fixed in objects. Certain values will be core or protected and it is to these values that appeals are made in conflictual circumstance. Authorisation environments do not typically permit

calm deliberation about possible responses to perceived social problems. Rather, public servants come with ready-shaped propositions (offers rather than open minds) to an authorisation environment in which a claim to moral framing of action contends alongside other framings for endorsement. This alternative account of the significance of public values issues not in public value management, but in 'principled government'.

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