

Public sector organisational effectiveness research



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Introduction:

The ' Public Value' approach has fast become an established (if as yet minority) approach to assessing the success (or otherwise) of public services and organisations in the UK, Australia and some other countries. A wide variety of organisations from the BBC to the Scottish Government – including police forces, local authorities, public sports and arts organisations – have

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adopted some variant of a public value approach. Research in the field is also increasing and various think tanks (eg The Work Foundation and IPPR) have become involved. It has also stirred up a lively academic debate.

Two questions invariably arise in discussions with practitioners and policy-makers about 'Public Value':

- The first is what is 'Public Value' (singular) and is it possible to have a single 'public value' in a world of conflicting public values and institutionalised competition between values systems (ie through democracy and political parties)?
- The second – which assumes a positive answer to the first question – is how can we measure 'Public Value'? In particular, even if a single concept of PV can be established, is it not primarily subjective and therefore difficult if not impossible to measure objectively?

An approach based on the 'Competing Values Framework' (CVF) offers a potential answer to both these questions. It will argue that there is no singular PV but multiple public values. The common 'solutions' to these multiple values is either aggregation and/or choice – so, for example, political parties represent both aggregation of some values within each party and choice between them.

A CVF approach argues instead for balance between a limited set of fundamental choices or values, none of which can be ignored and all of which have to be satisfied to some extent to achieve excellence in public service.

Public Value:

The idea of ‘Public Value’ has been championed through the work of the Kennedy School’s Mark Moore. His seminal *Creating Public Value* (see Moore, 2003) has been highly influential in current UK debates. In particular the publication by the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit of its own version of PV (Kelly et al., 2004) was highly influential with a range of public sector policy-makers

Moore’s original work emphasised three aspects of performance for public agencies:

- Delivering actual services;
- Achieving social outcomes;
- Maintaining trust and legitimacy of the agency.

Moreover the PV concept outlined an active, strategic, role for non-elected public servants in both defending and developing their services. Moore has not been the only scholar to champion such a role – a number of recent publications have argued in a similar vein – if not using the language of Public Value (eg Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003).

Ipsos MORI’s ‘six oppositions’ in British behaviour and opinions in ‘Blair’s Britain’

The six oppositions are stated as below.

Parent and children v Adult-to-Adult:

In this type of situation the government takes over the control in a more parental way. The government agencies takes the decisions. However in

Adult to Adult method the choice of public service is done by members of the society in association with the public officers. Thus

Individual v Community:

The general public looks for individualist services that should be arranged by the government. However there are some issues when the all the individuals comes together and makes a public opinion on a certain issue.

Having it all v Tough choices:

The rise in the standard of living and the expectations of the people has resulted in the concept of Having it all. People thus look for all the facilities and comforts to be given by the government. Whereas some tough choices are taken in some cases for improving social and environment problems.

Consumers v Citizens:

People in general always want themselves to be considered as a consumer who look for the best choice available in the market. But as a citizen they have to bear some implications from the government in terms of tax payment and following new laws passed by the government for the benefit of the society.

Small club v Big tent:

The Small club stands for the facility that should be provided by the government to the people to few members of the society who needs them. For instance the old age homes for old people. On the other hand the big tent theory states offering the facilities all those people who are part of the society.

Turned-off v Clued-up:

The people today are more technical savvy due to which they participate in all the government activities and understand the ways of their working.

However some are still reluctant enough to take interest in the public activities and busy in their own businesses.

Source: (Marshall et al., 2007)

Competing Value Framework (CVF):

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) emerged in the early 1980s from studies of public sector organisational effectiveness conducted at the Institute for Government and Policy Studies, at the State University New York at Albany. It has since evolved and mutated in many forms, but the underlying principles remain constant and extremely useful.

CVF asserts that human organisations are shaped by just two fundamental contradictions – the desire for flexibility and autonomy versus the need for control and stability; and the focus on internal concerns and needs versus responsiveness to the external environment.

In one of their more recent publications, Cameron and Quinn and colleagues have carried out

a very interesting analysis of the performance of top private sector companies using a CVF

framework to determine what sorts of competing or contradictory measures of performance are

required in each quadrant of the CVF model (see Table 1).

Table 1: Competing performance measures

Quadrant of	Measures	Proxies
Control	Quality	Gross margin
	Efficiency	Asset turnover
Compete	Profit	EVA
	Speed	Change in EVA growth
Create	Growth	Sales growth
	Innovation	Standard deviation of market model errors

	Future
	growth
	Knowledge values
Collaborative	Sales/
te	Community
	number
	of
	employees
	es

Source: (Cameron et al., 2006 p95)

Their analysis concludes that the best companies – by market rankings – tend to do well, relatively, in all four quadrants of competing performance measures. They are not unique in suggesting that highly successful organisations tend to have contradictory or even paradoxical goals – one of the best selling of recent business books *Built to Last* (Collins and Porras, 1994) reached the same conclusion, if using slightly different sets of contradictory goals. Going back even further, what was probably the best selling business book ever, *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1982), contains a much neglected discussion about the contradictory and paradoxical nature of individuals, organisations and management.

Conclusion:

This has been a very tentative attempt to suggest a way in which a ‘Public Value’ and a ‘competing values’ approach might be synthesized into an approach which could give some real purchase on the problem of ‘measuring public value’. It is very much a ‘work in progress’ and needs a

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great deal more elaboration and discussion. The discussion over CVF and broadly related approaches to understanding the paradoxes of social, organisational and public life.

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