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Background

The issue of how to assess and account for “performance” of governments, public services and public agencies in various forms has always been with us and will never go away. It remains a perennial issue for both practical and theoretical reasons. Practically, governments, citizens and others will always want to know if the money being gathered in taxes to spend on benefits and services actually achieves anything, and how things can be done better.

Theoretically, academics are always going to be interested both in how well the public domain does what it does, and the performance of public organizations will also always be compared to that of private organizations.

What I Did

I critically reviewed and analyzed a very large amount of research, theory and evidence from various academic, governmental and non-governmental sources to try and get more of a fix on these issues.

- ❖ One source of my work was the 46 other research projects conducted within the Public Services Programme, all of which aimed to analyze some aspect of performance
- ❖ I mainly reviewed the academic organizational and management literature.

Aims

A vast number of detailed studies have been conducted of public service performance. But this project aimed to stand back from the detail of individual cases, to review and develop our theoretical knowledge (that is, our ability to generalize) about the performance of public services.

The project focused on three issues:

- ❖ What is the institutional context, or ‘performance regime’, within which public agencies have to work?
- ❖ What are the key drivers and dimensions of performance for public agencies (and how do they relate to private organizations)?
- ❖ What are the most important desiderata (often nowadays described as ‘public value’) that public agencies have to deliver on?

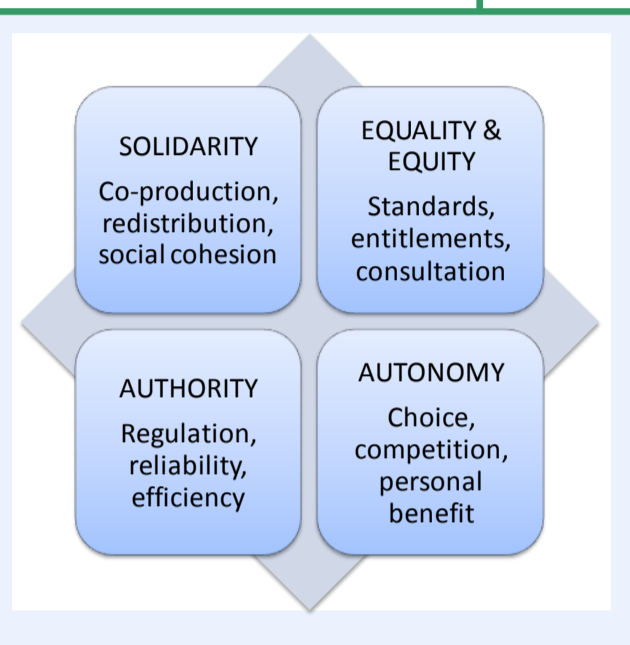


Figure 1:
Competing
Public Values

Findings

- ❖ PERFORMANCE REGIMES: We know enough to develop comparative and historical maps of performance regimes, and to catalogue the various types of interventions and policies aimed to improve public agency performance. What is lacking is cumulative evidence about what works.
- ❖ ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: Models of the dimensions of performance for both private and public organizations have been developing for decades, and that means that we now have at least a rough idea of what the key dimensions of performance for public agencies are.
- ❖ PUBLIC VALUE: While the idea of ‘public value’ as what public organizations aim or should aim to pursue has been in the literature for 15 years or so and the concept has been enthusiastically adopted by reformers, it has often lacked concreteness. This project has identified some of the key values involved (Figure 1), showed that those values are multiple and often conflicting (such that it is often more appropriate to talk of ‘public values’ rather than ‘public value’) and how the process of public value creation works.
- ❖ Figure 2 sums up these three components into an overall picture of the shaping of public performance.

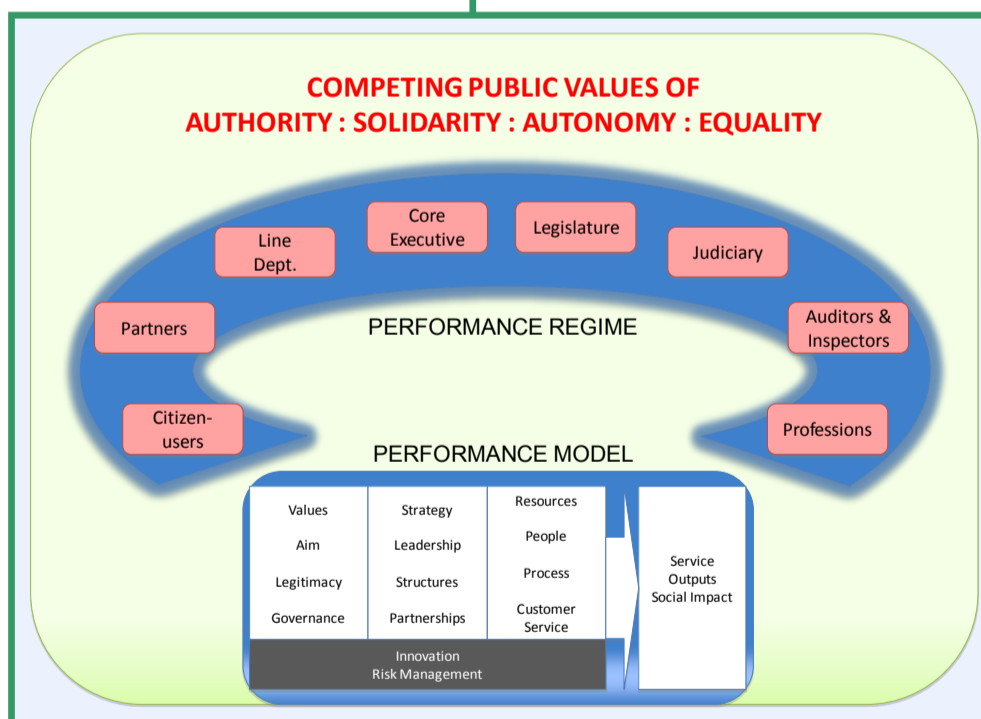


Figure 2
SHAPING PUBLIC
PERFORMANCE: public
value(s); performance
regimes; and an
organizational
performance model

Find out more...



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