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Instruments of Value: Using the Analytic Tools of Public Value Theory in Teaching and Practice

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Abstract

The tools of public value management - such as the strategic triangle and the public value account,– are increasingly used by scholars and practitioners alike. At the same time, some confusion remains regarding their functionality in action. Based on our experiences with these tools in classrooms and boardrooms, we analyze how these instruments help to explore and structure different dimensions of public management challenges. We propose a set of 'principles of application', detailing under what conditions public value tools are most likely to be helpful, and suggest a course of action for strengthening, connecting and extending the current tool box.

Introduction

How do analytical tools work in practice? The tools of carpenters help them to hammer and saw raw materials into their desired shape; the tools of accountants help them to measure and structure financial data into understandable figures; and the tools of surgeons help them to perform diagnostic and curative operations on patients. But how exactly do the analytical tools of public value theory help public managers to understand and improve their practice? In our experience in classrooms and boardrooms, this question is often asked implicitly or explicitly with regards to the tools of public value management: What are the strategic triangle, the public value chain, and the public value account supposed to do? What makes them special? What makes them valuable? After being introduced to the basic tools, some practitioners leave the room inspired and enlightened ('Finally it all makes sense!' 'We are going to change everything!'), others discouraged and disappointed ('Everything seems more complex and confusing now than before'), while others are left underwhelmed ('A triangle? What's the big deal?').

Similarly, scholars wonder how exactly the analytical tools reshape the way public managers think and act, questioning whether public value management fundamentally changes the mechanisms of the public sector or that they simply provide new cover for old habits (Stoker, 2006; Rhodes and Wanna, 2007; Moore, 2014; Dahl & Soss, 2014). Based on the rapidly expanding body of public value literature as well as on our own engagement with the key concepts in classrooms and boardrooms from Europe to Australia and North America to China, we seek to explore how the analytical tools of public value work in action. As such this essay is a reflection on our own practice as academics using the tools of public value theory and a contribution to theory development in the form of a set of propositions that may be tested and refined through empirical research and further theorizing.

The use of public value theory and the accompanying tools is spreading across the teaching, practice, and study of public management (Williams & Shearer, 2011; Bryson et. al 2014). Teachers and students use public value theory to better understand policy and management challenges in the public sector. These challenges include, but are not limited to re-imagining what the goal of government intervention should be in a particular policy area; how success of government intervention might be measured and evaluated; what actors in society the government might partner with to accomplish its policy goals; how stakeholders might be aligned to build a coalition of support for a particular program; and more; Practitioners take

public value theory out of the classrooms and apply it to real world problems and address the challenges of their organizations such as implementing policy, delivering of the appropriate service to the citizen and managing constrained budgets (Kruiter and De Jong, 2008). Researchers are fine-tuning and testing public value theory through theoretical and, increasingly, empirical work (see the essay by Hartley et al in this issue). Central to these activities is the use of the tools of public value management. The strategic triangle is at the core of the toolbox. It has become a key conceptual model for a school of thought in academia and a hallmark analytic device for a practitioners, especially in the UK, Australia and the Netherlands. Further tools, such as the public value account and public value process mapping are also gaining ground (see essay by Alford et al, same issue for a more detailed explanation).

As the use of public value theory spreads, proponents and opponents debate the utility and validity of these tools. Proponents work on extending and refining the toolset. They want to make public value tools applicable to the new challenges emerging in public value management and develop more concrete guidance for management activities in network management (Page et al, 2015), IT-planning (Cook & Harrison, 2015), or process optimization (Alford & Yates, 2014). Page et al (2015), for example, expand the framework with new criteria to show how it applies to collaborative networks, while Wang & Christensen (2015) developed a so-called open value account to measure the performance of the Chinese government.

At the same time, critics of public value theory point to the shortcomings of the existing tools. Some have argued that the tenets of public value theory provide non-elected officials with and unduly political role, asking them to play as guardians of what they may feel is best for the public, while others take issue with "recycling private sector thought" and being too vague to really move the discipline and practice of public management on from New Public Management (Rhodes & Wanna, 2007; Dahl & Soss, 2014). Rhodes and Wanna (2007: 408) accuse the theory of being unclear about either its empirical validity or normative agenda. Yet, as Alford and O'Flynn (2009: 174) observe, the tools of public value can be used to service multiple purposes: diagnose an existing situation, structure thinking about what is to be done, and offer a set of categories for analyzing how managers behave.

We acknowledge these fundamental debates about the merits and limits of public value theory, including that they are unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. Our position is that

public value approaches do have significant empirical value, and therefore in this essay we propose to focus on an essentially practical question: *how* do the analytic tools of public value theory work? We therefore have to return to and examine carefully the intended and practical purposes of the tools. It is our view that the tools were developed first and foremost to help make sense of strategic challenges in public policy and management. They are not intended to be recipes for success in a utilitarian sense ("If you do this or follow these steps, you will accomplish that"), nor are they normative admonishments in a deontological sense ("As a public manager, you really should do this or leave that"). That is not to say that there are no utilitarian or deontological dimensions to the tools in use. On the contrary: the tools are designed to help people think about the utilitarian and deontological dimensions of the creation and evaluation of public value – multiplicity of normative perspectives in any given public environment is a key idea.

However, as tools, they are neither purely instrumental nor entirely normative: they intend to enable scholars and practitioners to describe and diagnose empirical situations in such a way that thoughtful deliberation among reasonable people who hold different beliefs becomes possible. The tools do not intend to provide answers, but raise questions and help those who are willing to engage with fundamental issues in public management to identify action alternatives. While some analytic tools, for example quantitative tools with embedded algorithms or decision-making tools with fixed weighted criteria may produce specific answers or clear action alternatives, the strategic triangle, the public value chain, the public value account and the public value score-card should be considered *heuristic devices*, which help identify challenges and structure discussion about them.

Heuristic devices are "*artificial constructs to assist in the exploration of social phenomena*" (Marshall, 1998). These frameworks do not provide answers to the question how, exactly, management issue questions should be resolved but they help to explore what the salient intellectual and practical challenges are and where and how the analytical work can start. The frameworks help managers to actually engage with ambiguity (Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003): how to deal with the continuous clash between meanings, opinions, and values core to so many public challenges. These devices so help to reshape the way public managers understand and act on their ambitions, strategic space, constraints, or personal responsibilities, potentially leading to new mechanisms or new forms of interaction inside and outside their agencies.

It is important to realize at this point that practitioners and readers of *Creating Public Value* or *Recognizing Public Value* typically are exposed to public value through the case study method. Both in the classroom and the book, they are first presented with a problem and then invited to intuit the core tools first before having the conceptual framework laid out for them. Understanding the use of these tools is therefore best reflected by noting the *learning effects* they offer practitioners: the tool aims to help not just practitioners, but indeed also scholars, to explore the challenges of public management. The tools therefore do not provide clear-cut answers or detailed marching orders, but they do generate a series of questions about what is happening or what could be done in the face of a public sector challenge (Alford & O'Flynn, 2009).

In order to assess the merits and identify possible improvements or additions to the public value toolbox, we will first properly discuss the function and impact of the existing tools as heuristic concepts in action. Below, we will review a significant part of the repertoire of tools currently available and describe what typically happens when they are applied to understand particular public management challenges that executive students or clients bring to a discussion. We draw here from our own experience and fully acknowledge our own bias and the limitations of this analysis. We do, however, believe that our combined 40+ years of working with and writing about public value theory allow us to suggest some propositions. These propositions, to be discussed by peers and tested in practice, are about the principles of application of the tools of public value theory. How can they be used effectively to facilitate the diagnosis and deliberation described above? Finally, we chart some next steps for further scientific examinations of these tools in action and further innovative intertwining of these tools with other public management instruments.

Tools in public value management

For a more detailed overview of the different tools within public value management, see the introductory essay by Alford et al (same issue). For the purposes of our discussion here, we will briefly outline the main characteristics of the different tools. There are two generations of tools within the work on public value management as developed by Moore, with a further set of tools developed by adopters of the public value paradigm.

The first generation of tools stems from Mark Moore's 1995 book *Creating Public Value*. This book identifies the importance of 1) the *public value proposition*, the formulation of what social outcomes are considered desirable and what specific contribution the agency or

network hopes to make; 2) the *authorizing environment,* the set of different stakeholders which need to provide the activities of the agency or network with legitimacy and support; and 3) the *operational capacity,* which refers to the processes required to work with the stakeholders of the organization or network to materially deliver the public value desired. The strategic triangle brings these three elements together and became the foremost analytical tool of public value management (Figure 1), reminding students and scholars that the "definition of public value is conditional on the support of the political authorizing environment (…) and on the existence of some organizational and operational capacity that must be animated and guided to produce public value" (Moore, 2013: 104).

Figure 1. The strategic triangle of public value management
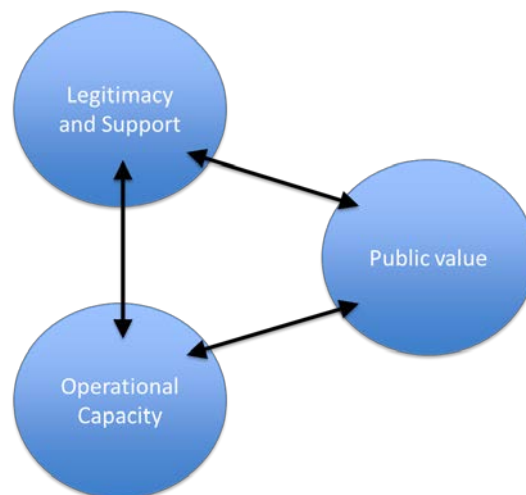
The second generation of tools is discussed most comprehensively in Mark Moore's 2013 book *Recognizing Public Value.* This volume addresses the challenges of performance measurement and accountability for public value creation. It provides more refined tools to define and evaluate the public value proposition, to analyze and engage the authorizing environment and to map and rethink the operational capacity. The public value account is in essence a format that aims at accommodating to the public sector the "income statement" valid for private sector organizations. It captures both the value created by government actions (in terms of mission achievements, unintended positive consequences, client satisfaction, justice and fairness) and the related expenses, sacrifices required and unintended negative consequences (Moore, 2013; 2014).In addition, Moore starts to detail the groups within the authorizing environment through a long list of the different types of actors involved, details the operational capacity by highlighting key processes important to public

value creation, and describes the value chain from organizational inputs activities, to outputs for clients and social outcomes for the public at large.

Finally, there are tools developed by other scholars and teachers of public value theory. Some explore the nature of aligning the three elements of the strategic triangle in more detail (Leonard, 2005), others zoom in and expand upon the public value chain by mapping value chain processes (Alford & Yates, 2014), while yet others connect public value to transparency practices (Douglas & Meijer, 2016). Because all of these tools show fidelity to the basic conceptual framework, we speak of them belonging to the "public value toolbox".

The tools of public value management in action

Let us now consider the function of these heuristic devices at work. *How* do the frameworks generate new insights and raise new questions about value ambition, strategic space, conflicts and constraints and personal roles of individuals? As said, heuristic devices should help us to explore and structure social phenomena. In this case, the tools of public value help people to explore and structure the different dimensions of their policy, public management or governance challenges. The tools help people to identify the questions, puzzles, and resources at hand and generate new perspectives for addressing them. Reflecting on our respective experiences with applying the tools and seeing others apply the tools, we suggest that the following four dimensions are most salient – these are the different ways in which the tools are useful to the scholar or practitioner using them:

- **Ambition**: what is at stake for clients, stakeholders, the public at large? How is value defined, and by whom? What more can be done to satisfy clients or improve social conditions? Are we underperforming and missing out on creating more value?
- **Strategic Space**: what are the external circumstances that put pressure to retain or move from the status quo? What room to maneuver exists for the organization as a whole or the individual public manager to adapt to these circumstances?
- **Conflicts and constraints**: what value trade-offs, conflicting interests, political power struggles or disputes over budgetary control and governance manifest themselves as a source or result of the situation that requires strategic adjustment?
- **Personal role**: what can *you*, as an individual politician, policymaker, policy advisor, executive, manager or professional to help align value, capacity and support at a more

optimal equilibrium. Referring back to the first three points above: how can you shape the value ambition, explore the strategic space and mediate and resolve conflicts and constraints in service of the creation of public value.

The tools are useful in helping people to identify and diagnose public management challenges on these dimensions (but, of course, not all users use the tools in the same way and to the same extent). If we think of the functionality of the tools in terms of a continuum, we can imagine a hypothetical optimum as well as two extremes. The optimum, a functional usage of the tools, would lead to the intended effects, as described above: it would help practitioners and scholars to broaden and structure their thinking about the challenges of public management. On the two extremes of the continuum, however, we can imagine less functional usage of the tools when manager apply them respectively with too much or too little fidelity to the actual ideas and conceptual frameworks of public value theory. Fidelity here does not refer to exactly reproducing the exact same decisions across time and contexts, but in staying true to the original purpose of public value theory and its tools, which may very well necessitate context-based variation in decisions.

This fidelity requires a balanced appreciation of the key tools, steering clear of both an all-round rejection of their ideas and an overzealous uncritical embrace. In the case of overuse, public servants may get carried away, become unrestrained and inflate their own importance as architects of value or overextend their strategic space for public value maximization from their perspective, with the risk of putting firs their own interest to those of the public. This overuse could be driven by self-interest, but also by uncritical acceptance of the tools without proper reflection. In the case of under-usage, people stop themselves from exploring their potential to create value and retreat to conventional conservative administrator behavior. Again this behavior could stem from a personal interest in 'not rocking the boat', but could also be caused by a misunderstanding of underestimation of the utility of these tools.

We take a pragmatist approach to evaluating "functional" use of the tools, rejecting either extreme end of the continuum and subscribing to a situationally appropriate and normatively balanced and inclusive application of their heuristic facilities. Of course, the assessment of 'functional use' is highly subjective and the concept of a 'functional optimum' itself is debatable. The purpose of introducing this notion of functionality is not to promote one normative perspective of what value should look like or how it should be produced or what the appropriate role of the value-seeking public manager should be under all circumstances.

We are agnostic with regards to both issues. We do argue that, given the stated objectives of public value theory in the cited works, the tools can be used in more or less functional way - that is in a way that is more or less helpful in making sense of strategic challenges in such a way that viable action alternatives can be identified and evaluated. Drawing on our own experience and deliberation among ourselves as a diverse group of scholars and teachers we bring together the main insights in what happens when these tools are used. Table 1 shows how different applications of the tools of public value theory have an impact on these four dimensions of a public management challenge, while the next paragraphs explore these effects in more detail.

Table 1. *Understanding the dimensions of a public management challenge through public value tools*

Dimensions of challenge	Restrained (fidelity too high)	Balanced appreciation (optimal fidelity)	Unrestrained (fidelity too high)
Value ambition	Focus on minimizing costs and hitting targets	Focus on adding value to society	Focus on fulfilling own ambition for society
Strategic space	Focus on managing operations and serving politicians	Focus on alignment between public value, legitimacy and support, and operational capacity	Connect everything with everything, overextending the strategic space
Conflicts and constraints	Take constraints as a force of nature and aim to depoliticize or ignore value conflicts	Aim to assess and discuss constraints and facilitate the resolution of value conflicts through deliberation and structured negotiation	Ignore constraints and aim to prevail in conflicts at all costs
Personal role	Accepts alienation from work and does not insert oneself into the equation	Strikes a balance between loyalty to the current political or social equi-librium and commitment to changing the situation by individual exercising leadership	Regards the public domain as personal exploration space and adopts a frontier mentality

Value ambition

Using the tools of public value theory starts with a set of fundamental questions that are rarely asked in the day-to-day practice of public management: what value are you and your

organization producing? Who decides or has decided that this is the value to be produced? How do you know you are actually producing any value? Is it conceivable that more value could be produced if things would change? What would that look like? Questions like these guide the process of mapping, diagnosing and potentially reshaping the ambitions of public managers and public organizations. Many public organizations have been battered by years of re-organization, budget cuts, political turmoil, and so on. The technical interventions of business process redesign, performance management and change management have become stale. Public managers are often either absorbed by operational issues and organizational conflict or by political issues and public opinion.

The notion of examining what public managers think might be of value to society based on their knowledge, data, expertise and proximity to the task, , is as refreshing as it is radical. They sometimes think about their work as a set of performance targets to be achieved or a set of problems to be dealt with, but beneath and above that, there is typically a motivation to contribute to public value. Conversely, entrepreneurial public managers who have always been focused on innovation and change find the strategic triangle helpful in articulating their value proposition in ways that are more easily translatable into operational and accountability terms.

Some public managers feel they do not have the information or right to determine what is valuable. They argue that it is up to the politicians to decide what is valuable and that civil servants should merely execute their wishes. Other civil servants get a little carried away in the value statements. They feel that the concept of public value allows them to state their own goals and serve as the banner for their own crusade for a public cause. They tend to forget their relationship to the authorizing environment or the constraints of operational capacity. In this sense, talking about public value gets to the fundamental doubts and aspirations of public managers, but it also highlights that the value proposition cannot be understood without including the legitimacy and operational perspectives.

Strategic space

At this point, the *strategic triangle* helps to show how a public value proposition is tied to the authorizing environment and the operational capacity. Some public managers may be too focused on satisfying the whims of their ministers or resolving operational issues, without considering the connections between these issues and the overall ambition to create public value. The strategic triangle helps managers to take a broader view of their strategic space,

whereby traditionally they tend to understand their relationship with political masters in relatively narrow principal-agent terms or perceive strategic issues through the crowded lens of day-to-day operations.

The relationships between the different parts of the triangle allows the discussion to be broad, yet structured. Additionally, the analysis helps make sense of ambiguity caused by competing demands for attention, conflicting loyalties, colliding values, and contradictory messages from stakeholders in the authorizing environment.

The notions that an authorizing environment may have to be nudged into consensus, that a public value proposition can be multifaceted or under-articulated on purpose, or that operational capacity may have to be found outside the boundaries of one's own organization help managers make sense of an otherwise frustrating situation. The descriptive power of the concepts (even visually, on blackboard or whiteboards) lies in their ability to acknowledge ambiguity, fragmentation, and tension). That appeals to managers who experience this reality daily and often have trouble relating to neatly organized concepts of academic theories. The strategic triangle does not impose an overtly neat framework onto messy realities; it opens up the strategic space by seeing new patterns and possibilities in what previously looked like an impossible chaos. In other words, the strategic triangle does not impose strict normative means and ends, but rather provides conceptual tools for thinking about both means and ends.

In some cases, opening up the strategic space through the triangle leads to endless digressions and ponderings on what legitimacy really is or what stakeholders or business processes are important. There is indeed a near endless list of potential constituencies for a given policy, just as there are an endless number of operational processes involved, but that is no excuse for analysis-paralysis. In our experience, the strategic triangle is best used to drill downwards to the core issues and task at hand and separate essential from protean circumstances. The triangle is built to ask questions, and follow-up questions, as long as needed to arrive at an answer that combines the current or desired value ambition, the nature and source of legitimacy and support for the vision of public value, and the elements that make up the operational capacity in a concrete way.

Conflicts and constraints

After reviewing the entire strategic space, practitioners very quickly point to the obvious tensions between what is desired, what is supported, and what is operationally possible. The

three corners of the triangle never align neatly, a further exploration of the authorizing environment often reveals contradictory demands and preferences. Here public value management reveals its understanding of the public domain as inherently political with a small 'p' (see discussion in Introduction, same issue). Public value does draw on objective measurements of value or processes where possible, but ultimately recognizes that the appreciation of public achievements is a subjective process, as visualized in the value chain.

Ideally, the tools of public value management help practitioners to structure these value conflicts. These conflicts and choices cannot be depoliticized or ignored; pretending that all questions are decided by the technicalities of legal mandates, procedure mandates or operational constraints will not get the agency very far. However, public value management does not aim to over politicize all issues. Where possible, public value management does aim to use qualitative and quantitative data, if not only to identify operational bottlenecks or facilitate the subjective evaluation of the stakeholders. Rather emphasizing that everything is 'politics' in the view of public value management, it may be more apt to say that everything is 'public' in public value management. Finally, when discussing conflict and conflict resolution, links are typically made to negotiation analysis (mutual gains approach) and (adaptive) leadership theory (Heifetz et al, 2009; Hartley & Fletcher, 2008). Both sets of ideas are focused on maximizing value in a multi-actor environment and helping organizations and social systems arrive at a better equilibrium, both in terms of substance and in terms of relationships. The authorizing environment corner of the triangle is therefore a good segue into politics, negotiation and leadership theory.

Personal role

Finally, underneath all the tools of public value management, there is an invitation for public managers, policy advisors, administrators, professionals, stakeholders, and politicians to insert oneself personally into the situation. What can *you* do to make a difference? The tools do often provide a system overview, but are connected to the personal views of practitioners on these systems and constantly ask them what they can do to create more value. In the books of Moore himself (1995; 2013), this is best illustrated by the fact that all cases have a clear protagonist, allowing the readers to take a human and relatable vantage point for considering the issues. In teaching, the case method helps participants experience dilemmas by putting them in the shoes of decision makers and weigh the alternatives.

This approach aims to break through the sense of alienation that a lot of participants in public life may feel. The systems of government and the language of management often inspire detachment and depersonalization. Structures and processes are emphasized and human agency is de-emphasized. Ideally, the tools of public value reconnect practitioners with the values driving their own actions, but also show how they are personally reliant upon others for legitimacy and support. This element is the bridge to leadership theory, in particular *adaptive leadership* (Heifetz, et al 2009): to what extent do your current job description and your formal authority allow you to play the role that is needed to better align value, capacity and support and to what extent do you need to re-interpret your role and transgress the boundaries of formal authority?

This need not imply that managers take on a grandiose role and feel emboldened to pursue their private public value agenda, as has been cautioned by Rhodes & Wanda (2007) with specific reference to Westminster-type politico-administrative systems. That is of course a risk, but spending just a couple of minutes discussing the question "Where does legitimacy and support come from?" will be a sobering experience for those prone to overzealousness. What the element of one's personal role in the larger picture of strategic analysis means, is that public value theory is not removed from practice, but derives its meaning and utility from application in practice. You can't apply the tools unless you apply yourself.

Principles for the application of public value theory tools

Based on the different dynamics created by the tools-in-use described above, we would like to suggest a number of propositions about principles for successfully applying the instruments of public value theory. These principles can help us to optimize the impact of the current set of public value theory tools, by staying true to their original intent and practical utility. These principles can help teachers to transmit the different tools of public value management, practitioners in the application of the instruments, and scholars towards formulating hypotheses which can be operationalized and examined through further research (see Alford et al, this issue). The first four principles are derived from impact on the value ambition, strategic space, conflicts and the personal role as detailed above.

1. Value ambition: Tools should encourage and sustain the process of relentless value seeking, not limit the imagination and freeze actors into dogmas.

2. Strategic space: Tools should encourage a reframing of the domain of the challenge at hand, involving players as they are relevant to the situation and prioritizing operational issues if they turn out to be relevant for the solution of the problem.

3. Conflicts & constraints: The tools should help actors to engage with the ever-present ambiguity of public management by helping them to structure conflicts, not to eradicate uncertainty by reducing challenges to merely technical issues.

4. Personal role: The tools should keep public value management personal. Although the value ambition may extend to the entire community (or beyond), the first and final question is always to the individuals involved: What will you do?

We would like to add a fifth principle on the pedagogics of teaching and transmitting public value tools, arguing that this is core to the function of public value tools as heuristic devices. The essence of public value management cannot be captured through passive observation, just as they cannot be explored solely through theoretical expositions or simplified hands-on guides. It takes a combination of reflection and action (Kolb et al, 2014) to explore and structure the dimensions of the public management challenge, whether they concern the value ambition, strategic space, constraints, or personal roles. This call for constant learning and interaction applies to teaching (exploring, not explaining), practice (co-creating, not dictating), and research (submerging, not merely observing).

5. Learning and interaction: An effective use of the tools rlies on a continuous interplay between the abstract and concrete, people and phenomena, examples and principles

Finally, the depth and scope of the tools are a function of the instrument and the skills of the person using it. A guitar virtuoso may bring more music out of a basic toy guitar than a beginning guitarist out of an advanced high end instrument. The strategic triangle and related tools are basic instruments – conceptually they provide teachers and students with the basic notions of the theory. The second generation of tools and the additional tools developed by other public value scholars add a layer of detail, but still leave a lot of room for the individual professional to put emphasis, add detail, and shape the direction of analysis. The use may also depend on context: how well does the tool align and resonate with the particular theoretical or practical contact in which it used? The strategic triangle now pops up in many different courses, from policy analysis to social entrepreneurship and from operations management to ethics – besides the courses of strategic management and leadership. As the tools of public

value are more widely used around the world, teachers and practitioners of different capability will apply them in different ways and with varying levels of fidelity and utility.

Strengthening, Connecting and Expanding the Toolbox

After our examination of the tools-in-use and discussing the principles of application, let us now look ahead and identify opportunities for further development of the toolkit. Although we believe much can still be gained through applying the tools appropriately, we do also see opportunities to strengthen the toolkit in order to augment its ability to explore and structure the value ambition, strategic space, constraints, and personal roles within government. So how might the existing toolset be strengthened, connected to other tools and potentially extended?

Strengthening the toolbox

Some authors are still skeptical of the ability of the tools of public value to move the field beyond New Public Management obsessions with technocratic performance management and award sufficient respect to the importance of necessary democratic conflicts and constraints. Dahl & Soss (2014) voice concerns when examining the tools and mechanisms of public value management. They question "*the extent to which public value governance challenges the economistic logic of neoliberalism*" and argue that the tools take too "*little account of power, conflict, and inequality.*" As Rhodes and Wanda (2007) before them, they fear that the tools of public value management are simply a continuation of the New Public Management project, albeit with a new language and further excuses for by-passing democratic principles. Dahl & Soss argue that the tools of public value management therefore require fundamental strengthening.

We recognize that the tools of public value management, when superficially applied, can fail to grasp the complexities of an authorizing environment. How power is distributed, exercised, and manifested or hidden is an important part of any strategic analysis. We would argue that the strategic triangle is in fact one of the few frameworks in public management theory that brings politics back in, and through the front door. Both in the philosophical analysis of the public value proposition (what value is created, how and for whom) and in the careful consideration of the authorizing environment (whose support is needed and what makes a policy or executive discussion legitimate) lie at the heart of democratic politics.

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To argue that the strategic triangle does not pay enough attention to politics would be unfair to a theory that has explicitly attempted to do just that. To say that it would be helpful to have more refined tools to map stakeholders, analyze sources, distribution and exercise of power is a valid statement. It would be interesting to develop a more detailed generic template for examining the authorizing environment. What John Alford has done for Public Value Process mapping is bringing the authorizing environment into the analysis of the value chain. Moore lists the stakeholders in the Public Value Account and Score Card as a means of demonstrating how different actors care about different things. Another approach might be to take the authorizing environment as a point of departure and somehow bring the operational capacity and public value proposition into that. This might build on existing tools for stakeholder or network analysis, or it might be a new tool altogether.

The tools of public value theory do not claim to be granular, exhaustive, or advanced, but holistic, integrative and foundational. Therefore, 'strengthening the tools' would appear to apply to their capacity to stimulate and shape discussion and careful consideration of relevant dimensions. The tools are at their strongest when they instill curiosity in the public manager. This curiosity, directed at the strategic challenge, the manager's assumptions and beliefs, and insights offered by the literature, is guided by the tools and the teacher. The tools help the teacher switch between the concrete situation (a teaching case, or a personal real world challenge) and abstract ideas or general theories. The tools of public value, when properly applied, do not reduce complex questions to easy answers, but do help managers with structuring the hard work of navigating ambiguity. As such the tools are a necessary condition to orchestrate a conversation that is as integrative as public value theory intends to be, but not a sufficient condition. It will always be up to the teacher or facilitator to ensure that all dimensions of the public challenge are carefully explored, in appropriate detail, and in a balanced conversation.

Connecting the toolbox

The importance of proper application in the spirit of public value does not mean that the use of these tools precludes the use of other management tools stemming from different managerial traditions. Instruments primarily associated with the New Public Management tradition, such as lean management or benchmarking, could actually very well be benefit from adopting principles of application we proposed. Public value theory is essentially agnostic to tools of management, as long as they take into consideration the three main

dimensions of strategic management. Many tools can be deployed to navigate ambiguity, identify action alternatives, and make general ideas more concrete. To give the example of lean management, or business process reengineering more generally, it may seem that public value proponents would be distrustful of lean management because New Public Management proponents love to use it. However, when lean management is used to streamline the creation of value, rather than simply the fulfillment of efficiency targets, it is actually a very powerful tool to maximize the capabilities of the operational processes. Lean management can help managers to reveal false constraints in their value process chain. In the case of lean management, embedding it within a proper understanding of the value ambition could actually be said to restore the underlying ambition of lean management, which attached paramount importance to customer value, not rigid processing rules (Seddon et al, 2011).

Similarly, benchmarking, another tool favored in New Public Management, could be applied within the principles of public value management. It may be very instructive to compare the performance of one agency to another. This additional data may serve to showcase what amount of value creation is possible and where the agency is lagging behind, again furthering the understanding of operational constraints. Importantly, however, in line with the focus on cases and customization inherent in the tools of public value management, it is not then the intention to mindlessly emulate the top-performers in a benchmark. Instead, public managers could work with their own authorizing environment and operational capacity, to determine what priorities are prominent for the stakeholders of this agency and what operational issues can be addressed in their context.

In some cases, currently available management tools must be augmented to deal with the nature of public value. A key priority would be to widen the scope of measurement or value assessment in many established management tools. The current armory of management tools is overwhelmingly focused on the organization as a unit of analysis, measuring its value, capturing its clients and owners, and optimizing its processes. To further extend the reach of public value theory, it might be helpful to rethink some of the tools from a public value perspective. Alford and Moore have shown how, respectively, business process analysis can be enhanced and enriched by adopting and applying public value theory and how the balanced scorecard can be reinvented to express the relevant dimensions for strategic public management. Many more tools may be eligible for this kind of modification. That would

provide public managers with the practical utility of management tools without dangerously simplifying their challenges.

Extending the toolbox

The toolbox could also be expanded by creating new tools. While, as mentioned, skillful teachers and advisors can manage perfectly well with the existing basic instruments, it might be helpful to those who are new to the theory to have some ancillary tools at their disposal or to equip expert users with more refined instruments. A good place to start would be a tool to help map and analyze authorizing environments beyond principal-agent accountability relationships and incorporating new conceptual ideas, such as those of Talbot (2010) on performance regimes and Page et al (2015) on network management. For the operational capacity, we need a better understanding of optimizing operations which involve stakeholders and citizens outside the immediate scope of the organization, linking to the work on collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008) and innovation (Torfing et al, this issue). For the value proposition, we need additional tools to capture societal impact, linking to the work on health care outcomes (Porter & Teisberg, 2006) and Big Data initiatives.

Conclusion

The tools of public value management are heuristic devices that help students, practitioners and scholars to explore the dimensions of strategic challenges in public management and identify and evaluate courses of action. More specifically, the tools invite and encourage managers to reflect on their public value ambition, strategic space, constraints, and personal role and responsibility to act. If the tools are used with too little or too much emphasis on fidelity, they may actually lead to flawed thinking and ill-conceived practice. Instead, the tools of public value theory require a balanced appreciation and continuous in their application by teachers and practitioners. Principles for successful application include encouraging value-seeking behavior, engaging with conflict, constraints and ambiguity, stimulating personal engagement, and explicitly connecting abstract ideas with concrete situations. However, the tools may be necessary instruments to convey public value theory, but are not sufficient on their own to guarantee high quality discussion or action. Skillful, informed and principled facilitation is required to bring out the strength of the tools.

Our principles of application should be regarded as hypotheses grounded in practical experience and study of the literature. More theoretical refinement and empirical research is needed to define and test these propositions regarding the application of the tools and

facilitation of enquiry. Similarly, there is theoretical and practical work to be done to further refine and expand the current toolkit of public value theory, both as a set of interrelated tools and in connection to other tools of business administration, public policy and management and democratic theory. This will require more integrative conceptual work in combination with a design oriented approach to applying the tools in practice. Let us therefore use the whiteboards in board rooms and the blackboards in classrooms not just to advise and teach, but also to learn, experiment and further develop public value theory.

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