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Managing Conflicting Public Values: Governing With Integrity and Effectiveness

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Gjalt de Graaf¹ and Zeger van der Wal¹

Abstract

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Introduction

The articles of this symposium were all part of the *First Global Dialogue on Ethical and Effective Governance*, a conference organized by the VU University in Amsterdam in May 2009. Different as they may be, certain public values and their tensions play an important and sometimes central role in each of the contributions. As the amount of attention paid to ethics, integrity, and (public) values issues within public administration has proliferated during the past decades (de Graaf & van der Wal, 2009; Lawton & Doig, 2006; Menzel, 2006 [AQ: 4]), the credo when promoting integrity in public service often seems to be “the more, the merrier.” Yet the very nature of regulations and top-down policies to enforce integrity can have untoward effects, especially with respect to the performance of public actors and agencies. In one of the few studies looking at the effect of integrity policies, Anechiarico and Jacobs (1996) note: “Public administration students should be challenged with case studies featuring trade-offs between corruption control and efficiency. . . . Every student, scholar and public official with whom we have discussed this has been astounded at the lack of data.” The potential conflict between governing with ethics and integrity and governing with efficiency and effectiveness is the central theme of the symposium.

Public Values

Even though it is almost a half-century since Easton (1965) wrote the influential words, “public policies are the means through which politics allocate values,” not until recently has the study of public values been prominent. The literature on public values has been growing rapidly during

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the past decade, moving from philosophical discussions of public interest to aspects of publicness (Bozeman, 2007; Moulton, 2009) or changing public sector values (e.g., Van Wart, 1998). Within public administration, public values have been at the forefront of recent debates in various shapes and forms. Yet the substance of the literature, like this symposium, is broad. Both the concept and contents (whose values the concept contains) differ widely among scholars (Bozeman, 2007; Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). And, although the discussions of public values seem everywhere, they are addressing different things (van der Wal, 2008). Some authors discuss the safeguarding of public values in a time of privatization (de Bruijn & Dicke, 2006) or dominant economic individualism (Bozeman, 2007). Others plea for reconciliation of public values in a time of businesslike public management philosophies (Frederickson, 2005; Kernaghan, 2000). Some, addressing public values in general, propose sets of public values (Gregory, 1999; Tait, 1997), whereas others derive sets of specific public values (e.g., equity or lawfulness) through empirical research (Jørgensen, 2006; van der Wal, de Graaf, & Lasthuizen, 2008). Consequently, examples of public values in literature differ widely. Although we may read that “[a]n immense landscape of theories and terminologies can be unfolded, especially when we incorporate perspectives used in institutional economics, law and public administration” (de Bruijn & Dicke, 2006, p. 718), it is at the same time hard to deny that

[t]here is no more important topic in public administration and policy than public values . . . if researchers can advance, even incrementally, the study of public values beyond its current ambiguous and unbounded status, then those advances could serve many different theory developments and even practical purposes. (Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007, p. 355)

Good Governance

Values are thus important in public administration and policy, and this importance is specifically acknowledged in the recent body of literature on “good governance.” In both academic and popular discourses, good governance has steadily received attention, albeit in a slightly broader fashion than in the past two decades. Traditionally, the concept was associated with developmental issues and developing countries. In the international arena of politics, poorer countries in the past have commonly abided by good governance principles to get aid from the IMF or World Bank. Yet good governance is increasingly applied to modern nation states struggling to find new (multiactor and multilevel) approaches to public governance. It is those shifts that may explain the recent growth of scholarly interest in a wider application of the good governance concept. As the traditional institutions of government no longer define “what works” and “what is right,” questions on the quality of governance automatically return to the center of public and academic attention. These questions touch on the effectiveness and efficiency of governance, as well as aspects of ethics (integrity), democracy, and legitimacy.

The good governance concept is both appealing and annoying. It is appealing because it widens the scope of public performance evaluation. In the milieu of new public management (NPM) and (output) efficiency, literature on good governance sketches a richer and more extensive landscape of relevant public values and performance parameters. However, at the same time this is annoying in that it is not easy to use the multitude of good governance criteria in practical assessments and evaluations. Often scholars discover many intrinsic tensions between the different values involved—think of efficiency and legitimacy. Broad and divided the literature on good governance may be, but it generally subscribes to the idea that focusing on results increases the risk of neglecting other relevant dimensions such as the integrity of administrative action (Trommel, 2008).

Managing Tensions Between Public Values

As Kettl (1993) [AQ: 5] states, government's fundamental challenge in serving the public interest is to balance the pursuit of different inevitably contradictory standards. Trade-offs between valued principles are thus an ineluctable fact of any designing process (LeGrand, 2007 [AQ: 6]). For instance, services that are fully responsive to the needs and wants of some individuals may not be very efficient in terms of the interests of the wider community. Besides, ideas of effective operational structures could be in breach of the law. Reflections on the concept of good governance may be helpful in interpreting these trade-offs. Following recent studies, good governance may be defined as the generally valued criteria of what government should bring about (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003; Bovaird & Löffler, 2003; Van Montfort, 2004 [AQ: 7]). In other words, using recent discourse, good governance is about *managing tensions between potentially conflicting "public values."*

Bovens, ten Hart, and van Twist (2007) distinguish four clusters of values relevant to the assessment of good governance: lawfulness, integrity, democracy, and effectiveness/efficiency (the two are closely related but not identical). All scholars in this area of literature acknowledge that these values clash, and most note that good governance criteria are contradictory to some extent. To what extent and how to deal with it is open to opinion. We see an agenda here for the future of studies in administrative ethics and good governance. In the next section we will explore just one of the possible conflicts—having integrity *and* being effective and efficient—as an example of the difficulties of governing both good *and* well.

Governing Good and Governing Well

Effective governance leads to good roads, hospitals, safety—things everyone wants. Ethical governance obtains society's trust and support—arguably a democratic necessity. The first is about reaching objectives and the second is about being "good" while doing so. Can public governance accomplish both? Conventional wisdom and anecdotal data tell us otherwise: Truthfulness, decency, and transparency do not characterize the spirit of effectiveness. What is more, infractions such as rule-bending, selective honesty, and the resetting of agendas allow those in power to "get things done."

Suppose morality (governing good) undermines the effectiveness and efficiency of governance (governing well), meaning that doing things right does not ensure doing the right things. Or that doing things right means doing things less efficiently. If a local government official expedites the process of building 5,000 desperately needed houses by circumventing procurement rules (and in doing so knowingly violates integrity policy), is the official then good or bad, moral or immoral?

On October 8, 2008, Dutch Minister of Finance Wouter Bos admitted to an integrity violation by acquiring the ABN AMRO Bank without informing the Parliament. He knew that the State could not by law take an interest in a private company without first informing the Parliament, but in lieu of the imminent credit crisis, time was too short. He added that he would break the law again under similar circumstances to govern effectively. Was Wouter Bos right or wrong?

Another example stems from a recent spate of crime in Amsterdam in the form of theft by boys on scooters. The boys approached their victims in the (seemingly safe) daylight, threatened them with violence, robbed them, and drove away. It had been reported that boys of Moroccan ancestry were committing the crime. The Amsterdam police thus decided to stop and search every Moroccan boy encountered on a scooter. This clear case of racial profiling did not qualify as ethical or even legal governance, yet it was effective governance: The number of scooter burglaries declined sharply.

Being good and doing well are not the same things. This symposium will serve as an intellectual arena to explore the relationship between the two in the context of governance. In modern society,

there is much confusion about moral values and norms and little agreement on what constitutes “the good life.” Hence, we stress in our pluralistic societies procedural values: those of the governance process, how we reach our decisions. The importance of governing with moral norms, such as transparency, equity, and honesty, is clear. Yet it is also clear that acting in accordance with moral values does not always produce the policy outcomes critical to the legitimacy of public governance. A former New York City agency commissioner noted: “It’s more important for the agency to look honest than to get anything done” (Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1996). **[AQ: 8]** It has often been stated that both effectiveness and moral rules are important for governance to have legitimacy, and of course, only a government that is trusted will have legitimacy. But this leads to a paradox: A moral government is honest and thus reveals every integrity violation. This would lead to a decline in trust and perception of its integrity. In the same vein, Nieuwenburg (2007, p. 218) suggests that

The contemporary literature on administrative ethics, too, sometimes gives one the impression that integrity is primarily a matter of reputation management: “nothing is more important to public administrators than the public’s opinion about their honesty, truthfulness, and personal integrity. It overshadows competence as the premier value sought in their public officials and employees.” (Lewis, 1991, p. 21)

Questions on the conflict between effective and ethical public governance often surface in contemporary discussions in public administration, for example, in NPM literature. The oft-cited NPM authors Osborne and Gaebler (1992, p. 14) have said, “In making it difficult to steal the public’s money, we made it virtually impossible to *manage* the public’s money.” One of NPM’s rationales was to pay more attention to outcome, implicitly assuming a trade-off between ethical and effective governance. But could the opposite be true? Could too much attention to managing public money lead to more corruption? De Graaf and Huberts (2008) have noted that the corrupt are also often effective in what they set out to do. Scholars have wondered whether concentration on output and performance would lead to less concentration on integrity issues. Many scholars have warned that introducing NPM techniques into the public sector simultaneously introduces the likelihood of corruption and integrity violations (Bovens, 1996; Frederickson, 1997; Gregory, 1999; Jacobs, 1992; Wittmer, 2000). Evidence, however, is either speculative or absent. The question of the moral consequences of NPM has often been posited, but empirically, it has only been partly answered thus far (e.g., Kolthoff, 2007; Maesschalck, 2004 **[AQ: 9]**).

Contributions to This Symposium

Concerning the relationship between governing good and governing well, some of the contributors see value conflicts whereas others focus on values that go hand in hand. The intriguing Benedictine piece by Inauen, Rost, Frey, Homberg, and Osterloh will kick off our symposium. “Monastic Governance: Forgotten Prospects for Public Institutions” presents an example of good governance practice within monasteries. From both historical and empirical angles, they make an interesting case for an appropriate governance structure that emphasizes intrinsic motivation rather than businesslike incentive structures. Inauen et al. touch on the central theme of this symposium by suggesting that democratically elected abbots perform better than those who are appointed. They also point to the importance of complying with a common value system in governance.

The next four articles are rather diverse; each addresses issues within specific sectors, regions, or countries. Moynihan and Herd discuss the concept of “red tape” in relation to citizens and citizenship rights rather than organizations, which is usually the case in such studies. In “Red Tape and Democracy: How Rules Affect Citizenship Rights,” they argue that administrative rules frequently exert significant and unjustified compliance burdens that restrict access to political and

social rights, especially for disadvantaged groups. The authors point to inevitable trade-offs in programs with multiple legitimate purposes and between legitimate purposes and compliance burdens. They call attention to trade-offs between important values in public governance. Some voting rules, for example, are effective in the sense that they prevent waste and fraud, but at the same time they violate democratic citizens' rights in terms of equal access. In the cases of Moynihan and Herd, effectiveness clearly is chosen over moral values.

Next, Grimes and Wängnerud present an empirical study on social welfare reform in Mexico and its effect on reducing corruption and on other aspects of political life. In "Curbing Corruption through Social Welfare Reforms? The Effects of Mexico's Conditional Cash Transfer Program on Good Government," the authors conclude that the social welfare reforms, in particular the conditional cash transfer program, may reduce corruption but it also may dismally affect civil society and the empowerment of women. In other words, Grimes and Wangnerud concluded that the overall objectives of conditional cash transfer programs in Mexico were achieved; that is, they were effective, but they warn of unintended side effects. The programs may erode the basis for social accountability. We see here a possible trade-off between values, even though not necessarily between integrity and effectiveness.

In "Fairness Perceptions and Organizational Misbehavior: An Empirical Study," de Schrijver, Delbeke, Maesschalck, and Pleysier study 19 Flemish governmental organizations and confirm the hypothesis that the more the employees perceive their organization to be just, the less they perceive their colleagues to be engaged in behavior harmful to the organization. Last, Smith digs deeply into the role of whistle-blowers in promoting good government and governance in "The Role of Whistleblowing in Governing Well: Evidence from the Australian Public Sector." Using data from a large-scale survey among public sector employees and a number of whistle-blowers, he identifies key factors that lead to good outcomes from whistle-blowing and that can make whistle-blowing a "normal part of governing well."

Smith pays attention to governing with integrity in that he advocates for proper whistle-blowing procedures. Like Inauen et al., he does not seem to see conflicts with governing well: whistle-blowing should be a normal part of governing well. Somewhat in support of this, de Schrijver et al. show how fairness enhances integrity.

The final two contributions cover more general themes within the symposium's framework. They involve cross-country comparisons (Plant, Stalebrink, and Vasavada) and a study concerning the European Union as a whole (Beck Jørgensen, and Martinsen). "Public Values, Public Official Associations and Professionalism: A Cross-National Analysis" presents an exploration of the role of public official associations in the "effective management of the public interest." Comparing the United States, Sweden, and India, Plant et al. conclude that such organizations help integrate professional and public service values and are important to forming networks on policy issues. "Accountability as a Differentiated Value in Supranational Governance," the last piece of the symposium, deals with the actual and important concept of accountability in the context of the European Union. Examining value conflicts in the administrative reforms of the European executive, Beck Jørgensen and Martinsen find that "although accountability appears as the 'good value per se' its applied period is brief and its status is contradicted by conflicting values."

Plant et al. warn that too much attention to private values such as efficiency and effectiveness diminish the appreciation of public service and the public interest, and thus values associated with being "good" in governing. In Sweden, it seems that SALAR injected values based on private sector practice. Beck Jørgensen and Martinsen extensively discuss conflicts between values in (public) organizations, naming them *negative co-values*. They see conflicts between governing good and governing well mainly as a conflict between accountability and efficiency. Values instrumental to efficiency contradict the values that are instrumental to accountability (values Plant et al., while referring to Kernaghan [2003], call *ethical*). In the reality of the European Union, the authors

then establish that efficiency constitutes the value most embedded in the rationale and organizational logic of the supranational administration. In other words, they give further evidence to the notion that, when governing good conflicts with governing well, governing well wins.

Despite the valuable insights the articles bring to the fore, much remains unclear, such as how often governing good conflicts with governing well and what trade-offs in values the conflicts lead to. Furthermore, there is no theory on which specific factors contribute to the conflict between the values and norms of governing good (having integrity) and those of governing well (being effective and efficient). What we have thus far is partial and varying evidence that points to an existing trade-off between integrity and effectiveness in which effectiveness seems to prevail. However general the conclusion may be, it is a promising point of departure for important research endeavors of the future.

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Bios

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