

# Value Policy: Conceptual Interpretation of Research Practices

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## Abstract

**Background/Objectives:** Today the problem of increasing the efficiency of policy management is extremely urgent. Former administrative practices often do not provide desired results; hence there is the need to find new management approaches. **Method/Statistical Analysis:** Conceptual interpretation of research practices related to the study of value policy is based on a methodological reflection, which is aimed at understanding scientists' research actions and revealing hidden, implicit presuppositions of scientific knowledge. Methodological reflection is the external reflection existing as a condition and means of analysis of a specific research activity. **Findings:** In general, the content of value policy based on public values can be summarized as follows: 1) an effective governance should be based on collective public values and generating in the society the most significant of them; 2) public values must be legitimate, i.e., approved by both politicians and the general public in the process of social dialogue; 3) the efficient use of public values in the policy should be constantly monitoring; 4) state and public organizations should understand, articulate and review, if required, public values. The basic principles of value policy based on humanitarian technologies are publicity, axiologiness, subjectivity and humanitarianism. **Applications/Improvements:** In the research practices related to the study of value policy such methodological principles as interpretationism, indeterminacy, contextualism, pragmatism and pluralism should be further studied.

**Keywords:** Conceptual Interpretation, Humanitarian Technologies, Public Value Management, Value Policy

## 1. Introduction

Today the problem of increasing the efficiency of policy management is extremely urgent. Former administrative practices often do not provide desired results; hence there is the need to find new management approaches.

Currently, the new state management ("new state management") retains its position as the most influential concept of governance in the Western countries<sup>1</sup>. This is due to the fact that the existing institutional environment in Western countries contributed to the introduction of the new state management principles, which stimulated innovation capacity of state management and newly set the problem of state responsibility and assessment of management activity effectiveness<sup>2</sup>.

However, implementation of the principles of new

state management in the Western countries had, as the researchers note, the negative consequences as well in the form of absolutization of economic approach, identification of citizens as clients, erosion of ethics of state service, losses of continuity and institutional traditions in management. Implementation of the principles of new state management is accompanied also by an underestimation of the political role of "state service" and the value conflicts in society<sup>3</sup>. All of this led to the need for more balanced concepts of "good governance" emphasizing the necessity for enhancing cooperation of state management with the civil society<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. Literature Review

Nowadays the development of new concepts of "good

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governance” is carried out within the framework of axiological turn in state management<sup>5,6</sup>. Criticism of new state management theory is accompanied by the formation of the concept of “Public Value Management”, which is based on the idea that neither the state itself and civil society in isolation from the state are able to create an effective “mechanism” for solving social problems. Therefore, the state, offering a development strategy must coordinate the system of basic values with society. At that the question is about social values, formed in the course of public discussions with the state participation. The concept of “Public Value Management” is also based on the idea that in the era of late modern public values serving as the basis of state management determine public space and promote achievement of public good.

In modern scientific literature the necessity of transition to a value policy based on public values is substantiated within the concept of “Public Value Management”. However, the need for this transition is accompanied by the recognition that “state management - as researchers emphasize - is not carried out in the same way in Spain and England or in Germany and Italy. Even among the neighboring countries of Europe, whose traditions and cultures are close, significant differences can be found”<sup>7</sup>.

Scientific literature indicates that the issue of public values in the state management sphere was updated as a part of the neoliberal discourse, in which the government following purely economic criteria in management activity, was seen as an institutional obstacle to social progress<sup>8</sup>. State management guided by public opinion of the citizens and based on public values was offered as an alternative to this principle of management activity.

In the context of the value cooperation between the state and the society, public values, as researchers emphasize, are the result of the collective request of citizens, laying their significant preferences in it. These preferences are documented and maintained in the course of public discussions in the democratic discourse space. Therefore, the basis of the concept of “Public Value Management” is the theory of public values, which, according to researchers, work effectively within the systems thinking and strategic management. However, the researchers note that the implementation of this concept in practice faces with certain difficulties, connected with understanding the nature and identity of public values<sup>9</sup>.

In general, it should be noted that cognitive interest to the value dimension of public policy, having arisen

in the mid-90s of the last century,<sup>10</sup> is now supported by numerous scientific studies<sup>3,9,11-15</sup>.

### 3. Methodology

Conceptual interpretation of research practices related to the study of value policy is based on a methodological reflection, which is aimed at understanding scientists’ research actions and revealing hidden, implicit presuppositions of scientific knowledge. Methodological reflection is the external reflection existing as a condition and means of analysis of a specific research activity. This notion of external reflection is paired with an image of a specialized methodological activity related to the conceptual interpretation of existing research practices and their research results. Therefore, the cognitive effectiveness of external reflection depends on the level of methodological consciousness development, which is that sphere of intellectual activity in science, in which the understanding of the ways, means and forms of producing scientific knowledge and its optimal organization happens.

### 4. Main Results

Value policy as a kind of administrative activity is based on public values. In the scientific discourse there are different ideas about what the public values are, who and how should form them. Some researchers criticizing a “fashionable”, but vague concept of “public values”, note that “it is not clear”<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, there is a “controversial, but potentially viable set of criteria” for the value actions in the field of state management<sup>16</sup>.

In this regard, the preliminary methodological condition for the study of public values is the operationalization of “public value” concept by distinguishing its subject matter. This operationalization is necessary because there is a “diversity and complexity” in the definition of the concept of value itself, as researchers note<sup>17</sup>.

Some researchers point to the fact that theoretical concepts by W. Thomas, F. Znanetskiy, M. Rokich and M.C. Kagan have significant methodological potential in understanding values. W. Thomas and F. Znanetskiy characterized value as “any item with a determinable content and meaning for the members of a particular social group”. They also offered the definition of values

as “rules of conduct” by which “the group maintains, regulates and distributes the appropriate types of actions among its members”<sup>18</sup>. M. Rokich believed that “a value is a strong preference for the individual or society of a certain way of conduct or end state, as opposed to another type of behavior or condition”<sup>17</sup>. For M.S. Kagan the concept of value is inseparable from the value attitude, manifested in the concrete situations of activity, because of, on the one hand, the presence of objects’ certain properties, on the other hand - the presence of subject’s certain culture, which turns the subject’s properties into values<sup>17</sup>. In this regard, the researchers propose to consider values as preferences manifested in social norms and social ideals. Social norms are certain requirements, standards of social behavior and public participation. The social ideal can be considered as a perfect example of social reality and as the ultimate goal of social activity.

In the scientific literature, public values are interpreted as “deep-rooted ideas about what is good and what is bad”<sup>19</sup>, and therefore public values are considered as something more than a public good, the public interest or public benefit<sup>20</sup>. Besides, public values are sometimes categorized as “limit values determining the interaction in public policy, collective needs of citizens, formed during the civil communications”<sup>3</sup>.

Public values as social preferences are binary in nature. “Preference-believes” and “preference-opinions” can be identified in their structure, which are, respectively, of the unconscious and conscious character. Unconscious structures of public values are stable and reactive. They are “asleep” but as soon as a suitable situation appears, they are activated, often against wishes and the will. Unconscious structures of public values are more or less homogeneous, they are inherent to the whole society to some extent and are difficult to be changed. Conscious structures of public values inherent to different social communities are diverse and variable. The big influence on their change is exerted by such factors as changing social situations, reflection on the everyday experience, state of social communications, the impact of symbolic capital of governance. Transforming conscious structure of public values, it is possible to change the value orientation of a particular social group, to seek legitimation of state governance, to raise the ratings of political leaders, to influence the electoral preferences of the citizens in the short term. If unconscious structure of public values in society, perform the function of identification, conscious structures are the basis of its value differentiation<sup>21</sup>.

The vision of the binary nature of public values as public preferences allows suggesting that value policy as management activity can be carried out, not only basing on the current state of unconscious and conscious public values, but also purposefully diversifying conscious structures of public values in the context of the dialogue between the state and society. Therefore, the researchers note that “public values are not everything that is presented in the public discourse, and what has the nature of the mandatory requirement for the system of state management and organization of interactions in the public sphere, and has a positive meaning. Public values cannot be formed without the participation of the state, provided that it does not impose public priorities but engages citizens in cooperation”<sup>3</sup>.

In this regard, the researchers emphasize that “the value cannot be considered as public only based on that it is defined by government organizations. Value can be articulated by private companies, non-profit or governmental organizations or other legal entities and what not”. The concept of value “is not the one who defines it, but the one by whom it should be taken. The public value should be recognized by all citizens together, not by individuals”. However, the researchers note that the content of public value in any democratic society is the subject of many discussions and debates that make the basis of value conflicts<sup>3</sup>.

In the identification of public values and finding ways to resolve the conflict of values the state cannot ignore the role of citizens, because, according to some researchers, the government can hardly determine the values of society and to prevent the values crisis<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, the formation of public values and the prevention of conflict of values in a society is the result of complex axiological compromises. The community should play an important role in determining public values and the resolution of value disputes in the public policy, but the direct participation of the public should be specially organized, so that it can perform this role.

In this regard, the researchers conclude that to secure the value policy experts in the field of state management should be able to identify and justify the relevant public values. Justifying public values, they must also have the ability to resolve value conflicts, helping to create collective public values, preventing the social “value gap”. Therefore, public managers, who, as researchers note, have knowledge about the problems, should cooperate with selected politicians and officials, and they are able

to help and officials form an idea of what is valuable in a society. In this regard, public managers should formulate strategies which are relied upon public values to the full and acceptable to the political authority<sup>8</sup>.

The main problem of value policy is to identify public values. The biggest obstacle on this way, as researchers note, is the presence of many of values in the community, and hence - the need for their hierarchical sorting and understanding of their relationships<sup>16</sup>. Despite of that, researchers notice that the basic public values can be defined both intuitively and during the public opinion polls<sup>23</sup>. But the primary means of identifying public values is, according to researchers' opinion, the organization of public debate<sup>22</sup>. These discussions as a "product" of the interaction of professionals in the field of state management and citizens can be, according to researchers, not only a means of determining public values and resolution of value conflicts, but also an effective way of public communication, developing abilities of both officials and citizens to understand each other, to show mutual claims and to influence decision making<sup>24</sup>.

## 5. Discussion

In recent years, the value policy as a special type of administrative activity based on public values began to be criticized for its categoricalness, monologicalness and ideologicalness. "Axiological policy - as critics say - suggests that some things were settled outside the political process, and thus, the policy becomes a means for the implementation of a priori positions. Its ideologicalness suggests that the answers have already been found... Axiological policy discredits the political subjectivity of the actors, whether they are individuals, large groups or state as a whole"<sup>25</sup>. An axiological policy is opposed by critics to a dialog policy, in which pluralism of political process participation is of essential importance.

Such a critical attitude to value policy has a good reason, if it is understood as a policy taking into account only public values. However, in the neoclassical model of state management value policy is a special kind of management, which not only focuses on public values, but also creates public values as a basis for an efficient state management. In this case, the value policy is not opposed to the policy dialogue since the value policy includes a dialogue as a social value, which implies that public values should be identified both by political leaders and the general public in the public discourse process.

This idea of the value policy does not discredit the political subjectivity of the actors of state management, it also suggests this subjectivity as a necessary condition of value policy.

Within the framework of concept of "Public Value Management" the idea of the value policy as the most efficient administrative activity in conditions when the idea of the nation-states as "obsolete units of analysis" today does not look as convincing as it was at the dawn of globalization is formed. Therefore, the theory of globalization, as researchers note, should be supplemented by conclusions with respect to "local effects"; and this is especially topical in connection with the cultural processes and changes in the value system of nation-states<sup>26</sup>.

Value policy is based on humanitarian technologies which are aimed at humanizing the management system and improving the efficiency of public communication<sup>3</sup>. Public management from the standpoint of "public values", stimulating and encouraging different ways of thinking, is fully consistent, as it is emphasized by researchers, to ideological and value units of humanitarian technologies<sup>27</sup>. Value policy based on humanitarian technology leads to the fact that citizens are increasingly seeking to shape the political "agenda", the boundaries of the state and civil society actually erode, and their dialogue becomes more open<sup>3</sup>.

Such concepts of value policy as publicity, axiologicalness, subjectness and the humanities can be identified as the basic ones. The concept of publicity assumes that the value policy as management activity, based on valid public values becomes open to public debate, existing as an important resource of development of political and administrative decisions. Axiological principle means that the basis of policy management activity includes public values formed during the public debates with the participation of the state. The concept of subjectivity suggests that value policy as the management activity should not only focus on social values, but also form public values as a basis for an effective state management. The concept of humanitarianism requires that the value policy as a management activity should base on humanitarian technologies relied on humanitarian thinking and aimed at the humanization of the management system and improving the efficiency of public communication.

In a study of the value policy such methodological principles as interpretationism, indeterminacy,

contextualism, pragmatism and pluralism can be identified. Methodological interpretationism in the study of value policy is associated with the interpretation of public values on which management activity rely upon. Interpretation is such a cognitive process, in the basis of which is understanding the content and meanings of public values and its translation to the language of substantive scientific knowledge. This cognitive process involves the ability of multi-variant interpretation and deconstruction of public values, including on the one hand, the widest range of possible interpretations, on the other hand - the search of not obviously expressed meanings. Possibilities of multi-variant interpretation and deconstruction of values are determined by the interpreter's specifics of culture and language.

Methodological indeterminism, denying the cognitive value of causal explanation in the humanitarian sciences, during the study of value policy based on instruments of soft cooperation in the field of state management (without the use of rigid authoritarian pressure), suggests the ambiguity of the results of management activity, with an account of public values. The methodological principle of contextualism is aimed at studying the value policy based on humanitarian technologies, conditioned with the national political, socio-cultural and ideological specifics.

The methodological concept of pragmatism suggests, first, the study of conscious and unconscious public values in the statics and dynamics on which the value policy relies, and secondly, the possibility of transformation of social values in the public space of management practices. The methodological concept of pluralism during the study of the value policy focuses on the one hand, on the search of value diversity in managerial interactions, on the other - on revealing the binary nature of social values as the conscious and unconscious preferences in the public sphere.

## 6. Conclusions

Criticism of the theory and practice of "new state management" is accompanied by the formation of the concept of "Public Value Management" and the transition to the value policy based on public values. In general, the content of value policy based on public values can be summarized as follows: 1) an effective governance should be based on collective public values and generating in the society the most significant of them; 2) public values

must be legitimate, i.e., approved by both politicians and the general public in the process of social dialogue; 3) the efficient use of public values in the policy should be constantly monitoring; 4) state and public organizations should understand, articulate and review, if required, public values<sup>28</sup>. The basic principles of value policy based on humanitarian technologies are publicity, axiologiness, subjectivity and humanitarianism.

In the research practices related to the study of value policy such methodological principles as interpretationism, indeterminacy, contextualism, pragmatism and pluralism can be identified.

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