

ABSTRACT

The talk is of a new public value paradigm that is challenging the dominance of the new public management. In some quarters, however, public value is criticized as a reheated version of other public administration narratives. This article supplements the debate with an assessment of the ramifications of public value for institutional design in the public sector. It scans the literature for premises that might inform the structuring of public agencies. An institutional prescription is advanced and appraised. The article concludes that, while promising, public value's institutional project remains incomplete.

KEYWORDS

public value, public value management, new public management, public sector, public service

INTRODUCTION

The talk is of a new paradigm for public sector management.¹ Some contend that public value is challenging – if it has not already replaced – the dominance of the new public management (NPM). Others argue that public value is less a new paradigm than it is a repackaging of ideas and principles generated by other narratives of public administration and governance. But in the rush to elaborate the normative and theoretical bases of public value, and to develop means of measuring the achievement of public value outcomes, more prosaic matters regarding material institutional arrangements have been overlooked. Debates regarding epistemological status briefly aside, therefore, this article assesses the potential ramifications of public value for issues of institutional design in the public sector. It asks the question: If public value is seriously to be considered as an alternative to NPM, what are the institutional prerequisites for its successful execution?

If public value is indeed to be ‘the next big thing in public management’ (Talbot 2009: 167) then closer attention to the arrangements which structure its procedural and substantive aspects is required. In other words, the challenge is to outline an institutional correlate for the public value narrative. For it is this institutional environment which will mediate ongoing interactions between public managers and civil society actors in the ‘production and distribution’ (West and Davis 2011: 227) of public value; it is this context in which ‘institutional changes ... may be needed which will create an environment in which public value-seeking leadership can be encouraged’ (Wallis and Gregory 2009: 250). Given public value’s emphasis on the co-production of value, a focus on such arrangements is also justified by evidence that institutional arrangements are a significant determinant of public participation in political deliberations (Lowndes *et al.* 2006). Further, revisions to the architecture of the public sector have been at the core of the NPM project. In particular, structural reengineering has been the dominant instrument for pursuing NPM objectives, such that the institutional landscape on which public value now seeks to establish itself requires what amounts to a ‘fitness-for-purpose’ audit.

The focus here is on the approach to public value associated most notably with the work of Moore, and which Lowndes *et al.* (2006) have termed public value management (PVM).

¹ The author wishes to thank the anonymous referees who offered such constructive comments on earlier versions of this article.

Moreover, the core concern is with the procedural dimensions of PVM, rather than with substantive outcomes: to reiterate, what is at issue is public value *management* rather than the achievement of public value. PVM has paid relatively little explicit attention to the matters addressed in the article. A preference for networked or collaborative arrangements can be taken from, say, Benington (2009), Gains and Stoker (2009) and Stoker (2006), while the inference that institutional particulars are context-specific is implicit in the work of Moore (1995), Alford and O’Flynn (2009) and others. Broadly speaking, however, empirical institutional considerations remain underspecified in this corner of the literature. The primary emphasis here, therefore, is on institutional arrangements. While at times (and consistent with ongoing debates in the literature) this necessarily generates some consideration of definitional matters, the principal focus throughout is on a putative institutional correlate for PVM.

The article begins by briefly setting out some underlying assumptions. It then scans the PVM literature for premises which might inform the design of agencies (taken here to include both line departments and arms-length executive agencies) able to produce what is publicly held to be valuable. An institutional blueprint is advanced and subsequently interrogated. The discussion concludes with the observation that while PVM constitutes a coming story of new arrangements in the public sector, at present its institutional project remains incomplete.

Throughout, the backdrop is provided by Westminster-style arrangements in which the institutional division between politics and administration is less pronounced than is the case in other constitutional contexts. Further, the article assumes a notional institutional environment consistent with NPM precepts – one characterized by, amongst other things, the structural decoupling of policy and operations, and of the purchaser and provider roles, and by an overwhelming concern with the efficiency criterion.

POSITIONING THE ARGUMENT

Before proceeding, one or two preliminary points should be made. The first is that it is imprecise to describe PVM as a paradigm, as have O’Flynn (2007), Spano (2009), Stoker (2006) and others, given that it falls short of the categorical rupture with an existing orthodoxy usually associated with a paradigm change. As presently articulated, PVM fails to meet one of the Kuhnian tests of a paradigm: the capacity to set out not only problems but also how these might be addressed. PVM’s diagnosis has gained a good deal of traction, but

it still lacks the prescriptive edge which facilitates the translation of a diagnosis into remedial action.

Specifically, it has not yet proposed what, for want of a better term, might be called an institutional template providing empirical guidance on the sorts of issues traversed further on. The justification for this claim is set out more fully below. However, it is important to acknowledge here the assumption that with greater information and more detailed consideration such a prescription can be more clearly articulated.

This begs a question: Are such templates necessary or even particularly desirable? The question of whether there can, or should be an *a priori* template – some ‘right’ mode of governance – given PVM’s focus on the co-production of outcomes *in situ* is the more pressing given the charge that the implementation of a one-size-fits-all NPM blueprint has generated negative unintended consequences (Schick 1996). There are two responses to the latter claim. First, it is descriptively inaccurate: far from cleaving to a single, unified template, NPM reforms have found expression in different institutional forms, contingent upon political context, geography, path dependency and so forth (Hood 1998; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). The second rejoinder is that normative critiques of NPM can, and should be distinguished from assessments of the potential value of heuristics.

The position taken here is that such heuristics *are* of value; more than this, they may be indispensable to providing a solution to the conundrum confronting PVM. That is, they facilitate and to an extent embody the shift from the analysis of problems to the demonstration of how these might be addressed. In short, they enable the translation of principle into agency. In the context of this article, such a device would assist the rendering of PVM’s normative and theoretical attributes into material states by providing ‘a blueprint for broader public sector improvement’ (Williams and Shearer 2011: 1).

A certain risk attaches to this activity, in that a focus on structures may dilute the concern with the ‘softer’ skills associated with coalition building, sense-making and the cultivation of political acumen which are, for many, a principal attraction of Moore’s (and others’) work on public value. At the outset, then, it should be made clear is that this article articulates institutional particulars which are congruent with and flow from Moore’s people-based strategies: the later are – and remain – logically prior to the former.

A further point concerns the approach to institutions taken here. Williams and Shearer (2011: 8) note that a ‘striking feature’ of the literature ‘is the relative absence of empirical

investigation of either the normative propositions of public value or its efficacy as a framework for understanding public management'. While not an empirical investigation, this article does speak to the second of these concerns, insofar as it seeks to concretize and think through the potential nature and ramifications of the 'complex systems' (Williams and Shearer 2011: 7) in which public value is co-produced by public managers and citizens.

In this respect the article responds to Morrell's (2009: 11) concerns about the absence in the PVM literature of 'identifiable propositions or suggestions for empirical development'. Put differently, and in keeping with the suggestion that PVM should connect with 'discussions relating to the nature of organizations [and] institutions' (Williams and Shearer 2011: 15), it is an attempt to identify the empirical attributes of the institutional environment that gives shape to and structures the processes and activities out of which emerge the public value 'stream or flow of worth or social welfare' (West and Davis 2011: 233).

This presumes a position on the nature of institutions. Institutions are understood here as the 'locally distinctive rules-in-use' (Ostrom 1999: 38; cited in Lowndes *et al.* 2006: 539) which frame interactions among social actors, encompassing both formal arrangements and informal conventions, norms and practices. Rather than being exogenously fixed – and consistent with the core PVM tenet that '[c]itizens are ... also designers of public enterprise and *constitutive of the institutions of public service delivery*' (Williams and Shearer 2011: 13; emphasis added) – institutions are malleable and amenable to agency. Therefore, references in the article to institutional design, blueprints and/or templates are to the aggregation of roles and responsibilities (as apportioned both between organizations and amongst social actors), and the rules, understandings, practices and processes, whether formal or informal, through which actors co-produce public value.

The definition deployed here also consciously incorporates organizations. Institutions are conceived as rules which structure and constrain behaviour, but such rules are also embodied, created, adhered to or broken within organizational contexts. Rules are also – for example, through the creation of hierarchies and the formal apportioning of power – manifest in organizational terms. Lastly, this accommodation is required given the PVM emphasis on the significance of organizations such as government departments and voluntary sector agencies as agents in the production of value. In short, a useful definition must encompass the activities, processes, procedures and programmes – both within public agencies but also

across the boundaries between those organizations and their civil society partners in co-production – which convert inputs into public value outputs and outcomes (Moore 2003).

Importantly, however, the degree of prescription inherent in terms such as ‘institutional template’ or ‘institutional prescription’ falls short of the ‘design rules’ proposed by Gains and Stoker (2009) for the allocation of responsibilities between public actors in the context of UK local government. The dimensions sketched in Figure 1 (below) are neither as sharp-edged nor rigid as ‘rules’, but instead provide room for the expression of situated agency (Bevir and Rhodes (2003) in diverse institutional forms.

PUBLIC VALUE MANAGEMENT CONCEPTUALIZED

There has been a surge in academic and practitioner interest in the place of public value in public management and administration (see, for instance, the recent special issue of this journal on the management of competing values in public management (2011, 13: 3)). Recent contributions to debates about ‘what public value is, both as a theory and as a descriptor of specific public actions and programmes’ (Williams and Shearer 2011: 1) include Alford (2008), Alford and O’Flynn (2009), Benington (2009), Benington and Moore (2011), Colebatch (2010), Davis and West (2009), Gains and Stoker (2009), Moore (1995, 2000, 2003), Morrell (2009), O’Flynn (2005), Rhodes and Wanna (2007, 2009), Stoker (2006), Wallis and Gregory (2009), West and Davis (2011) and Williams and Shearer (2011).

In the wider literature a distinction is drawn between the singular and plural uses of the term ‘public value’ (Davis and West 2009; West and Davis 2011). The former refers to that which is produced and held to be of public value, and is characterized by Lowndes *et al.* (2006) as PVM. PVM sees public value ‘as being generated directly from deliberative processes in which principled public servants (elected and unelected) seek mandates for action’ (Davis and West 2009: 64). In such contexts public value is variously represented as a narrative (Alford and O’Flynn 2009), a management style (Stoker 2006), a way of articulating the goals of public service reform (Kelly *et al.* 2002), a conceptual framework (Benington 2009) or a story (Smith 2004) in which a dialogical emphasis on public engagement is positively contrasted with the competitive and consumerist orientations characteristic of NPM.

In contrast, the institutionalist perspective associated with the scholarship of, amongst others, Beck Jorgensen and Bozeman (2007), Bozeman (2002, 2007, 2008), de Bruijn and Dicke (2006) and van der Wal *et al.* (2011) emphasizes the ways in which the formal and informal rules that constitute institutional contexts influence the ordering and selection of public values. The concern in the first instance is arguably less with states of being than with endogenous and subjectively held principles or norms, and how these might be categorized (West and Davis 2011).

The meaning and applications of ‘public value’ are vigorously contested – and necessarily so, given the normativity and fluidity of competing understandings of terms such as ‘public’ and ‘value’. (Williams and Shearer (2011) review the key areas of contention.) Yet if it is to disrupt the existing institutional order and speak compellingly to a qualitatively different role for and orientation to the public sector, and if it is to empirically realize the ‘closer linking of users and producers in creative joint development of products and services’ (Bennington 2009: 236), then PVM must address matters of institutional design in the public realm. Dialogue and engagement across state/civil society boundaries is a defining feature of PVM, the nature and outcomes of which will necessarily reflect the institutional particulars of public agencies. What needs articulating, therefore, are institutional attributes consistent with the premises that underpin the emerging PVM canon.

Public value management has yet to fully engage with such issues. Much of the PVM oeuvre seeks to establish the different meanings and forms of public value, and so is couched in terms of over-arching principles; not often are these overtly translated into detailed institutional considerations. In his seminal work, Moore (1995: 2) makes it clear that the focus is ‘on managers, not organizations.’ That lens has continued to frame developments. For instance, having noted that ‘managers pursuing public value should be concerned about achieving the right structure, finances, staffing and information management in their organizations ... since these are all key ingredients in ensuring their operational capacity’, Gains and Stoker (2009: 440) quickly move on to discuss the authorizing environment in which public managers function. Kelly *et al.* (2002: 10) sketchily compare approaches taken by traditional public management, NPM and PVM to accountability and delivery systems. And in a comprehensive review of the state of the PVM literature, Alford and O’Flynn (2009) find no mention of institutional design considerations.

What we have, then, is an ongoing tussle within PVM at the conceptual level (or, in the case of Kelly *et al.* (2002), at the level of possible performance measures within the context of institutional arrangements that are taken as given). The absence of an extended consideration of institutional design issues suggests a view that extant public sector arrangements are presently fit for PVM purpose; that is, that they constitute a ‘large, amorphous deliberative space in which all relevant decisions and actions are open to challenge and justification’ (Davis and West 2009: 606). However, that is open to contest, given that NPM-inspired reforms tend to accommodate neither deliberation nor challenge in the public realm.

In part, the assumption stems from the lack of consensus regarding an over-arching PVM theory of governance from which principles of organizational design might be deduced. As Stoker has acknowledged:

Without a more general theory of public administration for networked governance, public administrators and other actors are less able to characterize the nature of emerging systems in the management of public services and programs, much less evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these changes (2006: 41-42).

This lacuna stands in stark contrast to the explicit diagnoses of bureaucratic distemper, and the attendant prescriptions for institutional reengineering, which have informed NPM and public-choice inspired reforms of public sectors globally. Fundamental assumptions associated with the rational actor model, principally utility maximization and bureaucratic instrumentality, informed the implementation of short-term employment contracts, output-based appropriations régimes, the institutional division of policy and operations, and the creation of markets for publicly funded goods and services. In public sectors around the world *homo economicus* has provided an intellectual justification for swingeing structural change.

Public value management is not characterised by such deductive coherency (in part because, contra rational choice, institutional formation is conceived as an endogenous and mutable process). That said, it is possible to extrapolate from the published record a series of institutional attributes likely to facilitate the achievement of public value. For Moore (1995, 2000, 2003), PVM is a model for strategy development. He offers a strategic triangle which

can direct public managers' attention to three issues – the value proposition of their organization, the sources of legitimacy and support for the organization (the authorizing environment) and the organization's operational capabilities – when considering ways in which they might enhance substantive policy outcomes for citizens.

For some who have elaborated on Moore's seminal work, PVM has come to represent a 'paradigmatic change which attempts to redefine how we think about the state, its purpose and thus, ways of functioning, operating and managing' (O'Flynn 2007: 353). Typically, this usage positions PVM as an alternative to NPM. Hence Stoker (2006: 41) sees in PVM 'a vision of an alternative paradigm, an overarching framework in which to put ... new [public sector management] practices'. Used in this manner PVM constitutes a conception of the role and style of public management under conditions of networked governance. The core of Stoker's case, for example, is that PVM managers seek out opportunities to enable dialogue between governors and those being governed. Service users become agents in determining the particulars of service provision, rather than passive consumers whose role is confined to conveying to providers their perceptions of the quality of those services.

In this view, the achievement of public value replaces the grinding pursuit of efficiency as a core objective for public agencies. Deciding on public value end-points is a collective process involving elected representatives, appointed officials and civil society actors; equally, stakeholders collectively determine *how* commonly agreed-upon objectives are to be achieved. In a procedural sense, then, networks – of deliberation and delivery – are central (Stoker 2006: 42), and constitute the contexts within which collective deliberations take place regarding public value outcomes and the services required to achieve those objectives.

For others, PVM is less a paradigm and more a distinctive ethos which motivates and guides the actions of public managers, and which is directed at the creation of public value for citizens. Gains and Stoker (2009: 452) describe public value as 'a new normative approach to guide the work of public managers'. Horner and Hazel illuminate the nature of public value by contrasting it with the return shareholders receive on their investments: where private investors earn a pecuniary dividend, citizens' taxation contributions generate 'economic prosperity, social cohesion or cultural development' (Horner and Hazel 2005: 34; cited in O'Flynn 2007: 358).

More concretely still, public value is used to describe both public services and the outcomes these outputs contribute to (thus blurring the standard – and conceptually

contestable – NPM distinction between outputs and outcomes). In this sense public value ‘refers to the value created by government through services, laws, regulation and other actions ... [and is] ... ultimately defined by the public themselves’ (Kelly *et al.* 2002: 4). It also explains ‘government activity, policy-making and service delivery ... [that is] ... both post-bureaucratic *and* post-competitive’ (O’Flynn 2007: 353; original emphasis). Things to be done and achieved, then, are determined by rather than for or on behalf of the public. Moreover, services become the vehicles for delivering public value, both insofar as they embody values regarding redistribution, equity and fairness, and in that they lead to the public value results that citizens have articulated.

PROPOSITIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

A methodology which frequently defines PVM in opposition to NPM has led to increasing clarity around normative parameters, and how these might shape the processes of determining policy objectives, and formulating and delivering public services. Fewer attempts have been made to address matters related to the design of public sector institutions. Such considerations may be implicit (as in the earlier reference by Stoker to the frameworks within which management practices are situated), but little explicit attention has thus far been paid to the implications of PVM for the apportioning of public agencies’ roles, relationships and responsibilities; for the ways in which they set policy objectives, determine delivery priorities and negotiate contracts with third party providers; and for matters of accountability.

There has never been scholarly consensus on how best to address such issues. However, Boston *et al.* (1996: 70) propose one way of identifying the core issues institutional architects must address, which include the kinds of organizations that should undertake tasks for which the state assumes responsibility, how such organizations should be structured internally, and the manner in which public agencies should address questions of accountability.

In the PVM accounts referenced above institutional context is typically assumed, and the analytic lens rests on matters of ethos, motives, public involvement and so forth. However, given that designing public institutions is an inherently normative project, there is a case for greater reflexivity regarding the ramifications of PVM for the crafting of public institutions. To take two instances: O’Flynn’s reference to service delivery that is ‘post-bureaucratic and post-competitive’ suggests arrangements which are not characterized by hierarchy, or by

contestability of supply and/or marketization. What, then, *are* they to be characterized by? And if public value accrues when public ‘services, laws, regulation and other actions’ are ‘defined by the public themselves’ (Kelly *et al.* 2002: 4), that infers structures which are sufficiently porous to permit extensive if not determining contributions from civil society. If so, how are competing demands from such quarters to be mediated?

These are significant considerations, for which reason it is important to more clearly elucidate the possible institutional consequences that flow from PVM. In the following sections an initial series of premises is distilled from the literature cited above; these are subsequently translated into a set of potential, over-arching institutional attributes (see Figure 1 below).

Central to most accounts of PVM is a sense of an engaged public sector populated by institutionally porous agencies which are receptive to – indeed, actively seek out – dialogue with and input from citizens. So, too, is the view that what is needed are public institutions with the capacity to identify, build and maintain networks with relevant civil society actors. Collaboration, rather than competition, with both citizens and/or non-state service providers is the *sine qua non* of PVM.

Procedural considerations, and in particular the capacity to construct deliberative fora in which state and non-state policy actors come together, are also of pivotal importance. Process is frequently treated both as means and end. Regarding the former, robust and inclusive processes provide the route to collectively defined preferences; as for the latter, processes are regarded as vehicles for generating and promulgating values such as trust and fairness (see O’Flynn 2005).

In addition to the importance of an inclusive public sector, attention is regularly drawn to the shift towards an enabling and facilitative role for public agencies, and some cession of control over the determination of preferred policy outcomes, and the requisite services, beyond the executive branch of government. A corresponding and equivalent shift takes place in the role of the citizen: rather than the citizen-as-consumer, as institutionalized under NPM, PVM recasts the citizen as both a service user and an active participant-collaborator in the making of decisions about the substance of those services and the ends they contribute to.

In this context Crosby and Bryson’s (2010) discussion of boundary groups – comprising policy actors from different sectors or experiential bases who collaborate in the co-production of policy – is apposite. Indeed, a PVM organisation, as conceived here, is likely to possess

certain of the characteristics of a boundary organization; principally, the capacity to reach out to and collaborate with multiple policy actors in the co-production of value.² The terms are not synonymous, insofar as public value may very well be sought within the confines of a particular policy domain. Nonetheless, the complex nature of most contemporary policy-making is such that boundary-crossing strategies – such as the creation of cross-sectoral networks, task forces, teams and coordinating committees (Crosby and Bryson, 2010) – are likely institutional features of processes designed to generate a public value outcome.

This superstructure rests on particular understandings of social actors' motives. In PVM, altruism, sociability and cooperation trump instrumentality, self-interest and utility-maximization as the imperatives behind social action: *homo publicus* usurps *homo economicus*. And these citizens' preferences are not fixed and exogenously determined; rather, they are fluid, contextualized and reached through rolling processes of deliberation, dialogue and interaction with others.

What is sought, then, is a public sector/civil society nexus characterized by high levels of trust and openness, and a collective willingness to exchange intellectual and other resources, and to engage (and sustain) processes of deliberation and dialogue.

Figure 1: Public Value Management – considerations of institutional design

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Machinery of government

What sorts of public agencies might be fit for such purposes? Figure 1 constitutes a stylized profile of the kinds of arrangements compatible with the procedural and substantive variants of PVM, and a comparison of these with NPM antecedents.³ At the broadest level, PVM

² And while this is not an article about leadership, it might follow that amongst the skills required of public value managers are those associated with 'integrative leaders', including the ability to bring 'diverse groups and organizations together in semi-permanent ways — and typically across sector boundaries — to remedy complex public problems and achieve the common good' (Crosby and Bryson, 2010: 211).

³ Figure 1 distinguishes possible institutional forms (machinery of government) and practices, ideas and values (the remaining categories). It does not pretend to capture all possibilities. In particular, it should not be read as precluding the nuanced development of different institutional forms (shaped by factors including path dependency, type of service, geography, etc.). Further, as noted at the beginning of the article, it is intended to complement PVM's central concern with relational considerations.

suggests some knitting together of functions and roles which were pulled apart in the NPM rush to clarify roles and objectives, and to reduce the scope for rent-seeking behaviour and other forms of instrumentality assumed to be endemic amongst bureaucrats (for the logic behind which see Buchanan 1988; Downs 1967; Niskanen 1971; Tullock 1965).

The structural re-coupling of policy and operations, in particular (if not of monitoring and regulation), appeals as a precondition for the achievement of PVM. This 'regovernmentalization' (Dunleavy *et al.* 2005) is a logical extension of the reassertion of altruism (which removes the second of the two NPM justifications for the structural division of functions alluded to above): if opportunism is no longer assumed, the case for an institutional inoculation against provider capture is weakened. More pragmatically, in its absence, the conceptual coupling of service delivery and outcomes signaled by O'Flynn (2007) would be that much more difficult to realize. Better, surely, to reflect organizationally the connectedness of public activities.

The reintegration of policy and operations may also reduce some of the complexity associated with the collective negotiation of policy priorities. Public value management leans strongly towards collaboration between citizens and public officials in determining both preferred outcomes and their associated delivery activities. Harmonizing such processes, and shortening the chain linking decision and implementation, may be less challenging in vertically integrated organizations than in an institutionally fragmented environment.

Functional integration, however, begs the question of the appropriate institutional form to adopt. The traditional line department responsible to the political executive seems at odds with the PVM concern for deliberations structured and driven by public managers and citizens. Thus, and following O'Flynn's call for post-bureaucratic forms, there may be a case for combining policy and delivery responsibilities in non-departmental organizations which are closer to the communities they serve. Such public entities would be operationally autonomous from the political centre (but held accountable through, say, a fully or partially politically appointed board), and thus more flexible, nimble and responsive to local aspirations than central departments are considered to be.

Arrangements of this nature would – at least in those contexts in which the structural pursuit of arms-length delivery has not been a staple of public sector reform – presage some reconfiguration of the administrative executive: a smaller core public service might, for instance, focus on monitoring/regulation, and serve as a source of contestable policy advice.

In fact, arrangements might not be greatly dissimilar to those in jurisdictions – such as New Zealand – in which the logic of NPM has been vigorously and enthusiastically pursued (see Boston and Eichbaum 2005; Chapman and Duncan 2007). Further, to the extent that PVM acknowledges a role for the political executive in either determining or guiding overarching policy priorities, this may be provided through boards, and via instruments such as purchase agreements, statements of intent and other over-arching strategic tools.

Determining priorities

Whichever institutional option or mix thereof is chosen, structural change is likely to be a necessary but insufficient precondition. Public value management calls for reconstituted arrangements in which dialogue regarding what is to be done, how and by whom is a signal feature of authorizing environments. To the extent that public agencies constitute such places, they would require the procedural capacity to respond to citizens' demands for greater engagement across the spectrum of policy-related activities. Citizens' agency under PVM extends well beyond that conventionally associated with the sovereign consumer: as hybrid service users/policy actors, citizens will be pushing (metaphorically, but perhaps literally too) past the front door and into the heart of public agencies. Accordingly, the boundaries within those organizations that have traditionally circumscribed the respective spaces and roles of professionals and service users would need to become considerably more porous.

Such permeability would undergird the enhanced role for citizens in policy-making. Figure 1 notes an NPM delineation between responsibility for determining policy and delivering services which PVM does not entertain. Rather, what is foreshadowed are iterative and essentially communal decision-taking fora in which control over decision-making is shared amongst state and non-state actors. In turn, this presages the strong possibility that, from time to time, decisions regarding the distribution of public resources will be taken which run counter to officials' (both elected and unelected) preferences.

Appropriations

If the objectives for which public resources are sought are to be determined through a more or less fluid dialogue between public managers and citizens, budgeting on the basis of

outcomes would appear appropriate. The NPM model of public financial management – which is constructed on an innate suspicion of the fiscal consequences of bureaucratic instrumentality – is displaced by one predicated on altruistic and other-regarding principles.⁴ Accordingly, the allocation of resources on the basis of an assessment of the cost of either inputs or tightly specified bundles of outputs would make way for arrangements capable of accommodating the price of future states of affairs. More particularly, PVM's concern with context-specific, localized decision-making entertains a significant devolution downwards and outwards of responsibility for determining fiscal parameters.

The challenges a model of this sort might present can easily be envisaged (and are explored in greater detail below). There are methodological difficulties associated with demonstrating associations between publicly funded activities and results (which bedevil extant public financial management systems), and there would likely be conflict between citizens with clear ideas about what they want and officials – both elected and appointed – with equally clear views on the merits or otherwise, and fiscal consequences of those ideas. Not least, direct citizen engagement with budget-setting would pose daunting logistical and political challenges.⁵

Service delivery

On matters of service delivery – and again, contra the orthodox NPM preference for distinguishing the respective roles and obligations of political principals and administrative agents – the PVM position is that civil society requires means of contributing to the internal decision-making and resource allocation processes public agencies work through when deciding on the mix of services to be purchased and/or provided. Further, rather than an *ex ante* specification of bundles of outputs based on outcomes negotiated by political and

⁴ It is possible to overstate the gap between the respective maximands of PVM (altruism) and NPM (utility-maximization) and to assume that the former is 'laced only with good intentions' (Rhodes and Wanna 2007: 409). In fact, insofar as the operational capability point of Moore's strategic triangle acknowledges finite resources, PVM may well entertain the possibility of maximising behaviour on the part of either public servants and/or members of civil society. That said, in PVM assumptions regarding utility-maximising behaviour are subject to powerful constraints. In particular, the importance attached to process legitimacy is such that maximising behaviour, even if entertained, must be recast. For instance, Dunleavy's (1991) approach – which replaces the classical (budget-maximising) bureaucratic maximand with an imperative centred on maximising policy leverage – appeals, given PVM's preeminent concern with influencing policy settings.

⁵ See Fung and Wright (2003) for examples of participatory budgeting.

administrative actors, what emerges under PVM is a rolling, context-specific specification of desired results and associated services through dialogue amongst stakeholders.

On the question: Who should provide services?, PVM is agnostic. What makes value public is who *consumes* it, not who *produces* it. Pragmatism is the guiding principle here. This suggests a mixed economy in which services may be provided through the public, private and/or voluntary sectors, depending on the preferences emerging from the kinds of deliberative processes sketched above, and on the capacities and capabilities of the agencies to hand. Assuming the reintegration of policy and operations (and the requirement to secure support within the authorizing environment), this might logically privilege public providers, although if so what would be envisaged are public agencies that are fleet of foot and able quickly to respond to localized preferences.

As to the contractual bases of service delivery, the long-standing NPM concern with efficiency of production would be complemented with PVM considerations including the need to ensure that delivery is commensurate with the needs of communities (and as defined by those communities). Correspondingly, procurement of services would likely be via relational contracts between networked actors, rather than classical contracts between principals and agents.

Accountability

An objective of the NPM reforms of the last two decades has been the reinforcement of vertical hierarchical relations within the executive branch of government. Appropriating on the basis of the cost of output classes, for instance, and the use of short-term employment contracts for senior officials, reflect a normative concern to (re)establish ‘the primacy of representative government over bureaucracy’ (Aucoin 1990: 115). Accountability on the part of the bureaucracy has typically been envisaged in the context of bilateral relationships between political principals and bureaucratic agents.

Simultaneously, however, initiatives such as the splitting of the purchaser and provider roles, and recourse to non-departmental or non-public service providers, entertained – and established the institutional preconditions for – the prospect of markets and networked modes of governance. Under PVM, the challenges for accountability attendant upon a ‘differentiated

polity' (Rhodes 2007: 1243) are rendered even more complex by the centrality to policy-making of multiple networks of state and non-state policy actors.

Clearly, this has implications for the ways in which accountability is understood, specified and enforced (see Gains and Stoker 2009). At least two matters require consideration. First: in the sorts of institutional environments latent in PVM, for what are people to be held to account? The skewed incentives associated with holding administrators accountable for the efficient delivery of outputs are well documented: risk aversion, management-by-checklist and an inability to respond to unforeseen circumstances are amongst the unintended consequences of the tight accountability régimes associated with NPM (Schick 1996). Given the nature of PVM, as presently conceptualized, accountability for the achievement of results appeals as a more appropriate benchmark; a continuing focus on the efficient production of deliverables runs counter to and constrains the articulation of public value outcomes through deliberative processes. But given its emphasis on process legitimacy, PVM also presages answerability for the procedural dimensions of policy development which precede the achievement of substantive outcomes, such that accounting for operations, intent *and* outcomes are all likely features of accountability arrangements under PVM.

Secondly, who is accountable to whom? The requirement for public managers to intervene in authorizing environments complicates things (although perhaps a little less than is sometimes claimed by PVM's critics). The imperative stems not only from accepting that political support is central to the successful achievement of outcomes, but also from acknowledging – as per Lipsky (1980) – that front line officials do not simply administer the decisions of others: rather, they actively shape policy through the implementation process. In PVM, bureaucratic agency does not lurk behind the veil of formal executive decisions. Instead, managers are required to construct coalitions of public and political support for policy initiatives (which has arguably always been the case, insofar as ministers' support has always been a requirement, and in that responsive competence requires public servants to be attuned to the political dimensions of ministers' projects). Indeed, such activity is central to securing legitimacy for and trust in innovation in public services, in the absence of which even the most innovative programme is rendered vulnerable to external attack. Ministerial authority therefore remains a crucial resource under PVM, in which respect public managers continue to remain accountable to elected representatives.

But matters necessarily become more diffuse – or, following Rhodes, distributed – once civil society actors are embedded in a network responsible for decisions regarding preferred outcomes and the goods and services required to achieve these. This recalibration of the process of determining and subsequently achieving policy outcomes effectively dissolves the new institutional economics distinction between principals and agents. Instead, accountability is distributed across networks of public actors. To the extent that PVM – as an approach guiding public management practices – is consistent with networked governance, it is not yet clear how (or to whom) a network (as against its constituent actors) can be held to account for its deployment of public resources.

Under PVM, then, we have accountability pointing in several directions. Public managers continue to answer to their political masters and mistresses, but additional accountability interfaces with citizens – and in all probability with third sector delivery agencies – are created. And while financial and other forms of performance are likely to remain a focus, new accountability instruments sensitive to the less tangible, procedural aspects of the production of public value (including interventions in the authorizing environment) will need crafting.

ASSESSING POTENTIAL

The institutional landscape that PVM inherits from NPM contains the germ of a refurbished order capable of delivering on its potential. The degree of ‘fit’ is not such as to allow an unproblematic transition from one to the other but, were the requisite political agreement to be secured, PVM’s institutional architects would not be working with a wholly unsympathetic environment. The decoupling of services from results, and of politics from administration; the devolution of the service delivery function and the subsequent advent of relations between funders and public, private and voluntary sector providers; the creation of executive agencies and the introduction of contestability in markets for publicly-funded services – certain NPM initiatives have produced the distributed institutional arrangements fit for PVM purposes. In conjunction with the (contested) shift to what Hood and Lodge (2006) term the ‘delegated agency bargain’, in which public managers are given ‘the discretion to mobilize delivery networks held together by mutual trust and commitment’ (Wallis and Gregory 2009: 257), these characteristics constitute, at least to some extent, the institutional

preconditions for a refurbished ‘public value’ public sector. Insofar as the participation of civil society actors in making decisions about policy and in delivering services rests upon networks in which authority is dispersed, then the construction of those networks is made possible by certain of the institutional reforms characteristic of NPM.

Undoing the policy/operations split

That is as may be, but in the context of this article there is more to be gained by pinpointing the challenges that would likely stem from the sorts of arrangements schematized in Figure 1. Some of these are attendant upon the imperative to reconstitute much of what NPM has pulled apart through the process of ‘agencification’ (Wallis and Gregory 2009: 257). For instance, the re-coupling of policy and implementation appeals as a partial solution to the difficulties caused by the institutional separation of those responsible for policy and those who undertake service delivery. Typically, however, elected representatives are not involved in the day-to-day grind of the sorts of collective interactions demanded by PVM at the state/civil society interface. Yet the PVM model rests on the dispersal of authority beyond the political and bureaucratic executives; it requires, in effect, arrangements in which speaking truth to power amounts to having a conversation with oneself. What is foreshadowed are arrangements for citizens to contribute to shaping policy trajectories and subsequent programmes which extend existing institutions of representative democracy. The level of disaggregation of executive authority that this would require poses a considerable challenge to constitutional and institutional architects.

Bringing policy and operations into a closer orbit would also raise supply-side issues. For one thing, it is likely that geography would be a significant independent variable in determining the particulars of service delivery. If implementation is a rolling function of deliberations between public officials and members of the public, then local considerations – not simply community needs but also the capacities and capabilities of those engaged in deliberations – would necessarily influence what is delivered on the ground and in what quantities. Assuming an unequal distribution in the population of the requisite endowments (such as discretionary time and education), there is a clear risk of an unequal distribution of goods and resources and, eventually, public value outcomes.

Deciding what counts

PVM proposes a new and more inclusive institutional bargain struck between public managers and citizens, enabling greater citizen involvement in defining substantive policy outcomes. But absent established processes of legislative and executive decision-making, how is it established that agreement has been reached on what constitutes an appropriate outcome? The question has both substantive and procedural dimensions. Regarding the former, Bozeman (2008: 136; original emphasis) expresses the conundrum thus:

if public values are no more than the values that those in public positions express, then let us speak of ‘values’, not *public* values. If they are no more than the private values of individuals for public action, then let us deem this ‘political preference’.

Agreement on what counts rests on the politics of decision-making. Underlying these issues lie deeper considerations regarding the constitution and exercise of power (Morrell 2009). While few would criticize what, in an earlier period, might have been called ‘stakeholder involvement’ in planning and delivering services, that structural endowments advantage some groups in society is not easily denied. The possession of the relevant resources (which may include membership of existing policy-making communities) is likely to have a bearing on citizens’ capacity to both gain access to, and subsequently to sustain a contribution to or influence the process and outcomes of deliberations about public value initiatives.

Public preferences are at the ‘heart of public value’ (Kelly *et al.* 2002: 6), but their expression and aggregation remain problematic, especially as ‘value ... does not ... exist in any concrete sense, and is open to multifarious interpretations in accordance with the particular political philosophy being espoused’ (Erridge 2007: 1030). In this respect some contributions to the PVM literature seem oddly politically neutered, in that references to ‘public’ mask the ideological bases of people’s material preferences. ‘Public preferences’ can sound like the ‘public good’: the term implies a uniform, undifferentiated endpoint, rather than plural and competing endpoints (see Alford and O’Flynn (2009) for a comparison of public value with public benefit, interest and good).

Apropos of this, the asymmetries enjoyed by public managers should be taken into account. In any negotiating process of determining public value outcomes and associated outputs, officials would likely enjoy information, resource and other advantages over citizens. B. Guy Peters' assessment of the resources available to officials in the context of relations with political executives is apposite here: in dealings with citizens officials would have at their disposal the sundry advantages that accrue from permanency, access to information, possession of expertise and so forth (Peters 2001: 234). The full time professional would meet the part-time citizen-amateur, and in such contexts it is reasonable – without subscribing to an orthodox rational choice case – to question whether or not the other-regarding motives attributed to civil servants by some in the PVM 'school' would be sufficient to guard against the prospect of bureaucratic domination (intentional or otherwise) of deliberative and decision-making processes. While the quiet retirement of the assumption that civil servants are inherently opportunistic and self-regarding is welcome, under PVM, officials' agency and influence is arguably greater than under the straightened circumstances occasioned by NPM. Notwithstanding a seat at the table, citizens may well remain at a relative disadvantage.

Determining the budget

Similarly, one need not accept the rational choice premise of bureaucratic instrumentality to question the potential for over-supply. In conjunction with bureaucrats' systemic advantages, the symbiotic relationship between officials and citizens that defines PVM poses fiscal risks: one can imagine the pressure elected representatives could be subjected to when presented with a case for public provision the crafting of which citizens have been central to. The internal logic of PVM rules out maximizing conduct of this sort; with the departure of *homo economicus* goes the assumption that officials or citizens will be motivated to systematically seek increases in public provision and/or funding. But, and for the best of reasons, even *homo publicus* may be capable of over-stating the demand for service provision, and an institutional prescription for PVM would need appropriate safeguards against the attendant fiscal risks.

Who delivers?

At a first-principles level, PVM is not anchored to a preference as to service provision. Proponents eschew both the NPM faith in market-based delivery mechanisms and the ‘traditional’ public administration preference for departmental delivery, arguing for a pragmatic approach in which stakeholders are ‘open to the utilization of any of a variety of means to achieve program purposes ... consistent with the important values at stake’ (Alford and Hughes 2008: 131). As Kelly *et al.* (2002: 33) put it, under such conditions ‘we might expect the bodies commissioning services to adopt a more variegated approach, replacing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ perspective with one that assesses any potential provider according to their capacity to create value.’

Decisions about who will provide services are, therefore, to reflect circumstances. In the absence of the guidance typically provided by ideological markers, however, PVM’s agnosticism (or eclecticism) provides little direction as to the bases on which decisions about preferred providers are to be taken. The NPM position on this is clear: the contract for supply generally goes to the provider able to deliver a given quantum of output at the lowest cost. In the interests of consistency and equity across time and space, and of effective and timely decision-making, PVM needs an equivalent metric. It should be one that is neither solely reducible to process considerations, nor as exhausting as the organizational audit suggested by Kelly *et al.* (2002: 33), who would have potential providers assessed (by whom remains unclear) on the basis of their ‘leadership; capacity to listen to and work with citizens/local groups; openness; ability to innovate - together with the provider’s track record in converting these resources into dimensions of public value.’

Answerability

Holding potentially volatile and unstable networks of actors accountable for achieving outcomes as disparate as economic prosperity, social cohesion and cultural development (see the reference to Horner and Hazel above) would present significant political, methodological and other challenges. As indicated in a prior section, PVM requires a reconceptualization of accountability that is more fluid and accommodating – and which is endogenously articulated rather than imposed exogenously – than that associated with NPM. To this end Kelly *et al.*

(2002: 35) propose '[a] more rounded accountability, which faces outwards towards users and citizens, as much as upwards towards departments and inspectorates.' Gains and Stoker (2009: 441) advance a more specific prescription, suggesting that accountability under PVM might be:

delivered managerially through performance and financial management objective setting and targets, through greater informatory accountability and transparency as well as through the formal conventions of parliamentary accountability via ministerial responsibility.

Leaving aside the similarities between this description and standard NPM conceptions of accountability (which emphasize performance, management by objectives and enhanced transparency), a central question remains unresolved. It concerns the revised accountability relationship that PVM would necessitate between the executive branch of government and civil society. It has been suggested above that while PVM disrupts the traditional accountability of the administrative executive to its political masters and mistresses, the challenges thereby posed may be overstated. Given that legitimacy demands the (elected) ministerial *imprimatur*, public value managers must remain accountable to the political executive. Indeed, in eschewing the forced, and empirically naïve, distinction between political responsibility for decisions and administrative responsibility for implementation, PVM does us all a favour.

However, it has yet to offer a fully fledged solution to a key issue thereby created: while citizens can hold elected representatives to account through the electoral process, they cannot effect the same leverage over appointed public servants. In Westminster there is no bureaucratic equivalent of the doctrine of ministerial responsibility. Public value management is therefore likely to demand new and more direct forms of bureaucratic accountability to the public on whose behalf managers act. Citizens who play an active part in creating public value are unlikely to accept traditional approaches in which bureaucratic accountability to the public is effected via the conventions associated with ministerial responsibility. Furthermore (and assuming that those concerned do not hold elected office), the probability that only some citizens will actively engage in the co-production of value perhaps constitutes a case for new forms of accountability in which those involved in determining the distribution of scarce public resources answer for their choices to those who are not.

CONCLUSION

This article has sought neither to praise nor to bury. Moreover, given its primary focus on questions of institutional design it has not engaged with the explicitly normative debate about PVM triggered by Rhodes and Wanna (2007, 2009). Rather, and following Alford's (2008: 365) call that 'we should be engaging with [PVM] and seeking to take it further', the principal aims in this article have been to propose and critically appraise institutional characteristics in the public sector which are congruent with a reading of the PVM literature. The focus, then, has in large measure been on those arrangements that might mediate relations between state and civil society actors rather than on, say, intra-organizational issues such as the cultural and operational shifts within public agencies that would be necessary to give effect to PVM.

The differences between the institutional ramifications of NPM and PVM – the former realized; the latter largely putative – can be overstated. Such would come as no surprise to those for whom path dependency explains relative institutional equilibrium. Furthermore, as Stoker (2006: 43) puts it, the 'period of transition [to PVM] is complex given that it is driven by reform initiatives that are not entirely coherent and where new ways of working run alongside features of administration and management that would have graced earlier periods.'

But there are fundamental differences between NPM and PVM – chief among them being the central role for citizens in directly determining policy priorities – which justify a more explicit consideration of, and greater reflexivity regarding the new institutional settlement consistent with the search for public value.

The assertion that 'institutions matter' is now unremarkable. Yet analyses of the potential empirical consequences of the 'new post-NPM analytic of government' (West and Davis 2011: 228) remain all too uncommon in the PVM literature. That needs addressing before the dual promises of more decision-making autonomy for public managers and greater civil society involvement in that decision-making are realized. This article has proposed one approach to such matters. It poses more questions than it provides answers. However, that may be both ineluctable and consistent with the spirit of PVM, for which any attempt at elucidating appropriate institutional forms must remain cognizant of context, and sensitive to the specification of the relevant 'locally distinctive rules-in-use' (Lowndes *et al.* 2006: 539). But if the sorts of issues raised here do not wholly lend themselves to prescription *ex ante*,

neither should they be left to chance, for on their resolution rests the equitable distribution of public value. In increasingly straightened times in which both public managers and civil society actors confront job losses in back offices, cuts to the budgets of front line staff and political hostility, it is perhaps more important than ever that the advocates of public value rise to the challenge.

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Another size fits all? Public Value Management and Challenges for Institutional Design

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