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Reviewing quality of governance

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published in

Quality of Governance
2020

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1007/978-3-030-21522-4_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21522-4_10)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

document license

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[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Paanakker, H., Masters, A., & Huberts, L. (2020). Reviewing quality of governance: New perspectives and future research. In H. Paanakker, A. Masters, & L. Huberts (Eds.), *Quality of Governance: Values and Violations* (pp. 237-247). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21522-4_10

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Reviewing Quality of Governance: New Perspectives and Future Research

Adam Masters, Hester Paanakker, and Leo Huberts

10.1 QUALITY OF GOVERNANCE, AND VALUES IN CONTEXT

Why is a better understanding of quality of governance values important? What is the value of this book and further study of public values more broadly? To answer this, we must remember that public values are the benchmark for peoples' expectations of their institutions of governance, creators of governance instruments, and the practitioners of governance. People believe in the importance of public values. Public officials, both elected and appointed espouse them, legislators craft laws to meet public

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values—policies flow from law and embody public values, as do guidelines, rules, codes of conduct, training, expectations, interpretations, and more. Yet whenever an empirical eye is applied to a particular value—or in our case a range of values—we find differences in understanding, interpretation, application, and in the effect values have on any given society. Differences can be contextually driven from nation to nation—Simonati aptly demonstrate this with the growth of administrative law shaped for the Italian context, and Schnell also demonstrates the relevance of context in Romania. Elsewhere differences can be shaped to suit institutional or organizational needs or points of view—as was the case in Flint, Michigan, addressed in Chap. 2. As Reynaers, Paanakker, and Masters showed, even officials working in the same context can interpret values differently at the individual level. So the complexity of values requires research to know when they are applied to the satisfaction of the community which has set them, when they are violated, or when they come into conflict. A better understanding should improve the application of the values core to quality of governance.

Our goal was to scrutinize notions of good and bad *quality of governance* through a values-based analysis. The preceding chapters focused on a particular set of values and the contribution these values add to or detract from to the overall quality of governance. Some interesting new perspectives or themes can be identified that run across the different chapters and deserve acknowledgment in this concluding chapter. These challenging perspectives cover a broad scope both temporally and geographically, but do not exhaust the field of values research. Our work peels back some of the mysteries in this important aspect of public administration. Values remain central—as Frederickson put it: ‘...that values inhabit every corner of government is given. Who studies administration studies values and who practices administration practices the allocation of values’ (1996, p. 32). Such sentiments apply equally to the broader study of governance and our closer examination of quality of governance—values are key. As our study is admittedly not the final word, we must acknowledge that more scholarly energy needs to be directed at not only normative thinking about values and quality of governance, but empirical research to support scholastic notions which can improve the lives of both administrators and the publics they serve.

Here, we offer some reflections on the preceding work to contextualize its importance. How does this work reflect both quality of governance and the relevant values associated with the concept? How do these values relate to one another? Where does confusion lie—for both the academic and the

practitioner? Why is the variety of contexts an important consideration in a values analysis? What influence do the various layers of governance exert on values, and consequently the quality of governance? And finally, what does the agenda for future values and quality of governance research look like in light of this contribution?

10.2 WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

But first of all, a brief recap of the work this book contains. In a set of case studies from around the globe, this volume addresses which values matter in governance processes and outcomes, how they matter in specific contexts, and what dangers arise when they are violated. As such, it offers a unique and in-depth assessment of quality of governance and its contingent and disparate nature. The contributions to this volume cover the following values in part one: democratic legitimacy, accountability, transparency, integrity, and lawfulness. These values consider values from an institutionalized perspective, how these particular values matter to governance *practices*—policies, strategies, rules, regulations, etc.—or *what* is being done to accommodate governance values. Part two concentrates more strongly on *who* is implementing the values—the governance *practitioners*. The second part opens with effectiveness (in terms of service quality), followed by an examination of professionalism—or public craftsmanship. Finally, a careful examination of robustness as a value reveals how conflict in values can lead to violations of what should otherwise be seen as good. Combined, the contributions discuss the underlying question of the relevance, limitations, and applicability of these specific values to the overall quality of governance.

The first values chapter by Buckwalter and Balfour demonstrated that an attack on democratic legitimacy could have perverse effects, both on a range of other public values and on public outcomes. Their case study of Michigan's emergency response to a tainted water supply showed how values conflict with each other in the reality of administrative practice. As a key yardstick of quality of governance, democratic legitimacy was argued to outweigh other values such as expertise, even (and perhaps especially) in times of crisis. Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated that both accountability and transparency harbor an array of different, and sometimes conflicting, meanings. From both O'Kelly and Dubnick's American/Irish take on accountability and Schnell's Romanian perspective, they stressed that such conflict may obscure clear-cut harnessing of these values. Conflicting

meanings may produce irreconcilable normative point of departures, incompatible policies, or power struggles to the detriment of other values. Yet at the same time, it can also open up opportunities to do justice to these different meanings in theory and practice. Huberts then explored incorruptibility and impartiality, approaching these values from the angle of integrity and its meaning for the overall quality of governance. Part one concludes with Simonati's detailed examination in Chap. 6 of lawfulness in Italy proved how both the executive and legislative powers flexibly interpret this value, and imposes technical boundaries—strong and weak—to running administrative systems efficiently and effectively, while upholding quality.

Reynaers opens part two by framing the value of effectiveness in one of the key markers of governance—the public-private partnership (PPP), the classic formulation of governments no longer rowing, but steering the ship of state (Rhodes, 1996). Reynaers explains that effectiveness was questionable at least: in different case studies service quality was neither safeguarded nor a priori better protected with the involvement of a private partner. Chapter 8 introduced the concept of public craftsmanship as a way to look at street-level quality of governance, or street-level professionalism. Paanakker argued how case-based evidence in the Dutch prison sector illustrates the contingent and disparate nature of quality of governance as a concept. Finally, Masters illustrates how the uneven weighting and conflicting nature of the sub-values of robustness—at both the organizational level and that of the individual public servant—can create the conditions for the integrity violation of bureaucratic animosity to occur.

It remains open for debate whether the panorama of values summarized above is complete and adequate. The different chapters offer food for thought on this point—on the one hand, the definition or interpretation of the values, and on the other—the focus on these values, and what might be missing in the framework.

10.3 VALUES INTERPRETATION—CLARITY AND CONFUSION

The starting point of the book was to include a 'panorama' of relevant values with chapters that reflected on the content and importance of those values in different contexts. A first insight to reflect upon is that the different chapters clarify that challenging and different interpretations of the

values exist. Some chapters reveal clashing perspectives in our philosophical or theoretical conceptions of values—normative conceptions that underpin policy and behavior, and that determine the direction of scholarly and administrative debates. Other chapters demonstrate how values are differently translated to decision-making and behavior in administrative practice. Some address a combination of both different theoretical underpinnings and different implementation behaviors. Hence, attention to and clarity about which conception we use is key to make sense of how value debates evolve in theory and practice.

10.3.1 *Clashing Perspectives*

That theoretical and philosophical conceptions of values are contested is hardly surprising. This volume is the latest attempt to add some clarity to what values are, to give clarity to the practitioners who are guided by organizational and societal values as they implement the processes of governance. Yet this is not straightforward. For instance, O’Kelly and Dubnick in Chap. 3 frame accountability as a metaphorical spectrum. Such a widening is necessary for us to better understand the relationship between the value of accountability, and its darker reflection unaccountability—a violation of the core value. This forms the central theme of their argument—the overzealous adherence to accountability can be a ‘bad’ quality of governance value through signaling a struggle for power or domination between the accountable and those they account to with respect to the interpretations they opt for. Only when it is made clear and transparent which interpretation of accountability is used and why, can it become a ‘good’ quality of governance value.

10.3.2 *Translating Values into Action*

The contributions on effectiveness and service quality by Reynaers in Chap. 7 and professionalism by Paanakker in Chap. 8 shift our focus away from the philosophical reflections toward empirical insights into the application of values. Both Reynaers’ and Paanakker’s insights come from interviews with practitioners. One cannot get further from theorizing about values than to discuss it with those charged with their implementation. As Hecló and Wildavsky (1974, p. xiii), advised, ‘[t]he cure for ignorance about how something gets done is to talk with those who do it’. In Reynaers’ case, the different public and private partners involved were

found to interpret service quality in different ways, and Reynaers argues that it requires craftsmanship to make PPP's work—craftsmanship that takes into account different meanings, labels, and interpretations. The importance of facilitating ambiguity is supported by Paanakker, who also explains how practitioners make their own compilations of values of craftsmanship. When considering Reynaer's work with Paanakker's chapter on professionalism as a value, we can see the worth in centralizing value interpretations during processes of change in public management and public administration.

Another illustration of this point is Masters' exposition on bureaucratic animosity in Chap. 9 as the dark side of quality of governance, which also highlights the clash of values perspectives. At the macro-level the pursuit of lawfulness or rule compliance oftentimes leads to both intended and unintended violations of integrity, effectiveness, or efficiency. Also at the micro-level, adaptability conflicts with regime loyalty. His chapter also frames the role of citizen/clients in the governance processes—in effect giving due consideration to their role in the co-production of both 'good' quality of governance and 'bad' quality of governance.

In part two, Reynaers and Paanakker directly, and Masters indirectly, share a common element in their empirical engagement with street-level bureaucrats (defined by Lipsky, 1980, 2010), those practitioners charged with the implementation of values, and focus on the level of differences in their value conceptions and interpretations. These chapters demonstrate that values are not fixed: the context shapes how we translate values into action. Similarly, the chapters on democratic legitimacy, transparency, and lawfulness show how context shapes values into institutional practices. Getting quality of governance values right or wrong, as with all cases in this volume, improves or degrades the level of success in both process and outcome.

10.4 MANY VALUES MATTER FOR GOVERNANCE: HOW DO THEY RELATE

Many values are addressed by the diverse research of this volume. The importance of each separate value is argued convincingly, but a relevant question that remains under-addressed is how do they relate to one another. As the recap in this conclusion clearly outlines, although contributions to this volume focused on one value at a time, all contributions

acknowledge the interdependency of values and mention, either explicitly or implicitly, how a certain value interacts with some other values, stressing their related nature, or the inevitable sequential impact of addressing one value on another value. In short, context determines whether values complement or compete with each other. The authors in this volume unequivocally conclude that there is no such thing as a stand-alone value in governance, and addressing quality inevitably means addressing values in combination with each other. Unsurprisingly, this rarely led to explicitly addressing the potential conflict with other values in the research presented here, as that fell beyond the scope of this volume, addressing a particular value in each chapter. There are however many debates on value pluralism, on conflicting values, and how these can, or should, be managed. Some of these overarching debates are also touched upon in the chapters. The clashing nature of values, for instance, is in particular addressed in the chapters on robustness and bureaucratic animosity, which points out potential conflicts between bureaucratic animosity (the systemic or overzealous application of rules, regulations, and the law), lawfulness, and integrity, and the chapter on professionalism, which examines conflicting (value) expressions of craftsmanship in the prison sector (for instance, security versus humanity).

More in-depth research on how (conflicting) values relate in administrative praxis, and explicit attention to a broader spectrum of related values to account for 'value spill-over effects,' would advance our theoretical and practical knowledge on how values matter. Can values reinforce each other's role and worth in governance processes and outcomes, and if so, in what way and to what extent? What are the limitations to value enhancement through value interdependency, for instance, through processes of isomorphism between governance institutions, or through cultural institutionalization and socialization within organizations? And how can values function to undermine each other, exacerbating negative behaviors and (side) effects within confined governance settings? In addition, more detailed analysis of how conflicting conceptions are dealt with by public officials, and how their modes of coping relate to the nature of the values, the severity of the value conflict, the impacts administrators foresee in a more consequentialist reasoning of public decision-making, or their effectuated impact on public service delivery are promising research areas that require more attention. Providing further insight into the management of, and coping with, conflicting values offers a challenging agenda for research.

10.5 QUALITY OF GOVERNANCE IN CONTEXT

This volume explicitly draws attention to the importance of contextualizing the role and impact of values, and adherence to them. The chapters unanimously illustrated that values always must be put in to context—as context generates differences on how the values are interpreted and applied by practitioners. The chapters illustrated the range of differences almost by necessity, depending on the policy domain or policy topic, on the sets of actors involved (public/private, politics versus administration, etc.), on the national context, or on the profession at hand, to name a few examples. However, regardless of contextual differences, it seems also clear that the selected values have to be taken into account in advancing knowledge on what matters for the quality of governance. Nevertheless, theory and research on the quality of governance is still rather macro-oriented and quantitative, with frameworks of values that suggest a common, universal meaning. The studies in this book illustrate that the relevance and interpretation of the many values are context dependent, in content and consequences. More specific knowledge taking into account the context seems an important topic for future research, including moving toward more clarity about the characteristics of the context that seem to matter, including the different phases and levels of governance.

10.5.1 Values in Different Policy Phases

Governance is about input, throughput, output, and outcome—and also the connection with different types of values. The chapters address primarily process, with challenging insights on accountability, transparency, legitimacy, lawfulness, integrity, professionalism, with attention at times for the quality of the outcome (policy effectiveness, service quality). In addition, though, it seems worthwhile for future research and theory building to be more clear on the phases or aspects of governance that are addressed as well as on the (inter)relationship between process and outcome values.

First, on the phases of the governance process. This process includes the input phase of agenda-building, the throughput phase of policy preparation and decision-making, and the output phase of decision and policy implementation and evaluation. In all these phases, the actors' operations are guided by values and norms within an institutional framework, which itself also contains public values and norms. The different chapters in the volume deal with all phases, but more differentiation per phase might be

worthwhile to reflect upon and take into account in future research. Is legitimacy, accountability, and/or transparency equally relevant in all phases of governance? Or does that differ for agenda-building, preparation of policy, decision-making, and implementation?—like Reynaers addressed in her chapter on PPPs in different policy phases.

Second, on the relationship between the quality of the governance process and the quality of the outcome. Both matter for the overall quality of governance, but how they relate is a crucial topic to reflect upon more explicitly. This also relates to issues addressed in other relevant bodies of knowledge, including on ‘procedural and substantive justice.’ With, on the one hand, attention for the quality of the process of decision-making or governance and, on the other, the consequences of that for the legitimacy and acceptability of the output and outcome of the process. Van Ryzin for example concluded that trust depends ‘not just on the extent to which government succeeds at delivering outcomes to citizens, but on getting the process right’ (2011, p. 755). Thus, the process of governance might be more important for the legitimacy of government and governance than the output legitimacy. But what qualities and values of the process do really matter then? Rothstein (2011) focused on the impartiality of governance, for example, as the decisive process characteristic for quality of outcome. We doubt that for now, also building on the relevance of many values addressed in this book, but it is clear that impartiality leads to a challenging empirical research agenda on the relationship between the quality of the governance process and the societal quality of the outcome. Process and outcome seem intertwined, more than our joint research on the quality of governance seems to realize.

10.5.2 *Different Value Scopes*

Our research on good governance and the quality of governance often focuses on the macro-level (comparing countries), sometimes also the meso-level of organizations (as in this book), with relatively little attention for the micro-level: how do individual public servants cope with the also conflicting aspects and values of ‘good governance.’ The attention for the micro-level seems to offer an inspiring and important contribution to our reflection on the quality of governance (for example, Paanakker’s chapter in this book). At all levels, values are important, but what is seen as quality or good governance also seems to differ at the macro-, meso-, and micro-

level. More clarity about the different levels or scopes seems important, also in research. How do they relate, and how do they influence one another?

10.6 AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

Careful assessment and deliberation on what it is that constitutes quality and what can be done to improve it remain, in our view, imperative for our future research and its impact. The ideas presented are the state-of-the-art research and theory building on the quality of governance, which offer challenging insights to advance theory and practice in our field of study, but of course also open up an agenda for future research. In line with the themes outlined here, more research into concrete cases with attention for (coping with) conflicting values seems important. As does research into the interdependency of values and the way they complement and reinforce each other in concrete cases.

In addition, empirical research on the actual application of values in decision-making and policy implementation seems an interesting venue for future studies. How are abstract values translated to actual behavior of politicians, public administrators, and a variety of semi-public, non-profit, or private sets of actors? This also relates to the relationship between ‘process’ and ‘outcome’ values.

Governance cannot escape the rise of populism in recent years, and its influence on public values. Commentators note this rise of both right-wing and left-wing populism, which increasingly challenges core governance values such as democratic legitimacy (e.g. Albright, 2018, pp. 79, 81, 113). Such ingrained and extemporaneous claims—although useful in their own right—have very little scholarly use when unsubstantiated by research. This volume touches on populism—Buckwalter & Balfour show that even in the most advanced economies democratic legitimacy can be swamped by populism, which results in a deficit of legitimacy, as was the case of Flint, Michigan. Populism further distorts public values like robustness, favoring systemic efficiency over flexibility, as Masters’ reflection on Australia’s governance of refugees shows. Yet populism can drive positive change as well, Schnell’s analysis of the growing transparency regime in Romania demonstrates improvement in public values, and consequently, the quality of governance can be driven by popular demand. The continued rise of populism in the advanced economies provides license for a rethinking of public values in other nations (see Albright, 2018; Trommel, 2018). Populism tends to challenge governance and governance values *de*

facto. A critical necessity for future research is normative and empirical work focused on the public values that are relevant to, and lead the involvement of populist movements and parties in public governance. Governance practitioners and researchers need to look for more substantiated ways to understand these challenges, working within value frameworks rather than rejecting them in advance to win popular vote.

Another topic that needs more attention is the relationship between the ‘quality of governance’ at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. How do societal, organizational, and personal values relate in decision-making and policy implementation? These questions remain an important challenge as we try to better understand quality of governance, identify areas for improvement, and try to shift governance toward the quality expected from the increasingly diverse societies of the twenty-first century.

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