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Value Divergence

Value Divergence

How Professionals, Managers, and Policy Makers
Perceive Public Values and Street-Level
Craftsmanship in the Prison Sector

Hester Paanakker

The important role of public values in the design and implementation of public service delivery is undisputed. However, there is a blind spot on the level of convergence of public officials' perception of the concrete role, meaning and enactment of public values in hands-on street-level professions. With the prison sector in the Netherlands as its case study, this thesis examines the extent to which professionals, managers, and policy makers share a common understanding and evaluation of the values that relate to craftsmanship at the frontline of public service delivery.

The results reveal a complex dynamic of convergence on key street-level values, but also a dynamic of divergence, toxic value stereotypes, and targets over content - a clash between instrumental values and intrinsic values, between ideals and enactment, between management and professionals, and above all between mutual perceptions and public officials' own views. Value divergence is shown to create organizational paralysis and practical implementation problems, to negatively affect street-level attitudes, and to undermine the realization of public values in public service delivery, but also to spur creative coping mechanisms.

In a plea to better understand the value divergence on the surface and to better facilitate the value convergence that goes unnoticed, the thesis advances scholarly as well as practitioner knowledge on the role of public values and the frontline craft.

Hester Paanakker (1984) is Assistant Professor of Public Administration. She will receive her doctorate on this book at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Hester Paanakker

