

DOI: 10.53116/pgaftr.7734

Value-Informed Public Service

Reframing Civic Professionalism for the 21st Century

Allison H. Turner*

* Professor of Public Policy & Administration, Faculty Associate for Assessment, West Chester University, West Chester, PA, USA, e-mail: ATurner@wcupa.edu

Submitted: 15 October 2024 | Accepted: 3 June 2025 | Published online: 27 June 2025

Abstract: This paper introduces the concept of Value-Informed Public Service, emphasising the critical interrelationship between public service values, professionalism and information literacy in 21st century public administration. Using a conceptual analytical methodology, the study explores how public administrators operate in complex environments characterised by competing values and discretionary decision-making. Key findings highlight that effective public service requires integrating individual value orientations, professional standards and information literacy to guide context-specific decision-making while maintaining legitimacy with citizens and colleagues. The paper recommends institutionalising this integrated framework within public affairs education to prepare competent civic professionals. The originality of this study lies in bridging the theoretical and practical elements of these often separately acknowledged concepts, providing an enduring framework that advances both the scholarship and practice of public administration.

Keywords: public service, information literacy, professionalism, public service values

1. Introduction

This paper introduces the concept of Value-Informed Public Service and calls attention to the critical relationship between public service values, professionalism and information literacy in the study and practice of 21st century public administration. While each of these concepts are acknowledged separately in public affairs and administration education programs, their interrelated nature has been overlooked. Given the complexity of the current administrative environment and the range of public service values, it is critical that public service professionals can function in a variety of political, economic and cultural situations. This requires a strong theoretical foundation and a broad practice-based skill set.

Public administration is a field characterised by competing values and the use of discretion. Public professionals need to be able to consider context-specific information within a public service framework while simultaneously using professional standards to guide their decision-making approach. Thus, the preparation of competent future public administrators is contingent on the acknowledgement and elevation of the relationship between public service values, professionalism and information literacy. Value-Informed Public Service bridges the theoretical and practical elements of a neglected aspect of public administration and provides an enduring framework for the engagement and decision-making processes of public professionals.

First the nexus of, and interrelationship between public service values, professionalism and information literacy is introduced and the centrality of this connection to both public service professionals and public administration education is discussed. The rationale for emphasising the mutual dependencies and linking the concepts of public service values, professionalism and information literacy and their related competencies are also addressed by highlighting the role that each play in the preparation of public service professionals.

2. Research question and research objectives

This inquiry is guided by the question: How does the integration of public service values, professionalism and information literacy within a Value-Informed Public Service framework enhance the preparation and decision-making effectiveness of 21st century civic professionals in public administration? Specifically, this paper seeks to:

1. Analyse the interrelationship between public service values, professionalism and information literacy in the context of contemporary public administration.
2. Evaluate how Value-Informed Public Service supports public administrators in navigating complex and competing values in diverse political, economic and cultural environments.
3. Assess the role of information literacy in enabling public service professionals to access, evaluate and use information effectively within a public service framework.
4. Examine the implications of adopting a Value-Informed Public Service approach on public administration education and the development of competencies aligned with NASPAA accreditation standards.
5. Propose recommendations for integrating Value-Informed Public Service principles into public affairs and administration curricula to better prepare competent civic professionals.

3. Methodology

This conceptual research employs a qualitative analytical approach to explore and clarify the interrelationship among public service values, professionalism and information literacy within the framework of Value-Informed Public Service. The methodology

involves a systematic subject-matter analysis of existing literature, theoretical constructs and policy frameworks relevant to 21st century public administration.

Specifically, the study conducts a comprehensive review and synthesis of scholarly articles, accreditation standards, professional codes of ethics, and historical perspectives on public administration values and professionalism. This literature-based analysis facilitates the identification of key themes, conceptual linkages and the evolution of public service paradigms, such as Old Public Administration, New Public Management and New Public Service.

Additionally, the research incorporates a comparative study of various conceptualisations of public values and professional competencies, drawing on the works of leading scholars and institutional standards (e.g. NASPAA, ASPA). This comparative analysis highlights the dynamic tensions and coping mechanisms public administrators employ when navigating competing values and complex administrative contexts. Through this qualitative and comparative analytical framework, the research develops an integrated conceptual model that bridges theory and practice, emphasising the necessity of a value-informed, professional and information literate approach for contemporary public service professionals.

4. Value-Informed Public Service defined

Twenty-first century public administrators work in an environment characterised by varying administrative contexts, competing public service values and dynamic information needs. Decision-making in such a complex environment requires that public service professionals exercise discretion. Choices, however, are not arbitrary. They are informed by the public administrator's individual public service orientation, professional education and background, and degree of information literacy (Turner, 2015). The intersection of these factors can lead to different, yet legitimate, outcomes.

Public service values orientation: As members of a dynamic information rich society, public administrators must use their own life experiences, education and professional training to navigate the contextual forces and paradoxes associated with public service (Molina & McKeown, 2012, p. 384).

Professionalism: Education and background: To be effective in their work, public administrators must establish themselves as legitimate public servants by demonstrating personal credibility, professional competence, respect for democratic principles, and by maintaining positive relationships with citizens and colleagues (Molina & McKeown, 2012, p. 387).

Information literacy: Central to their ability to maintain legitimacy and serve effectively, public administrators must also be able to ascertain their information needs relative to a particular situation, access and evaluate the necessary information, and use it to achieve their goal (ACRL, 2005).

Value-Informed Public Service incorporates a public service orientation, professional standards and information literate approach to decision-making so that public administrators can be responsive to a variety of contexts while maintaining legitimacy with both citizens and colleagues.

5. Public values vs. public service values

Public service values [...] include pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency; serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity; acting ethically so as to uphold the public trust; and demonstrating respect, equity, and fairness in dealings with citizens and fellow public servants (Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, 2009, p. 2).

Public values can be defined as, “those values providing normative consensus about the rights, benefits, and prerogatives to which citizens should (and should not) be entitled; the obligations of citizens to society, the state, and one another; and the principles on which governments and policies should be based” (Bozeman, 2012, p. 13), whereas *public service values* are “the subset of social, professional, ethical, and other values that are related directly to a person’s role as a public servant (i.e. reasonable, legitimate and relevant) in carrying out the functions of a given position in the public sector” (Witesman & Walters, 2014, p. 377). Similarly, Rokeach (1973, p. 5) defines public service values as the “enduring beliefs that influence the choices we make among available means and ends”. This distinction is important. Public professionals use discretion informed by their particular value orientation in their capacity as public administrators. Public service values inform the actions of individual public servants pursuing the realisation of public values.

Public values are generally divided into four categories: ethical, democratic, professional and people-oriented (Kernaghan, 2003). Some values, though, fall into multiple categories. For example, accountability is considered an ethical as well as a democratic value. Excellence is classed as ethical and professional. Because the categories are not mutually exclusive, value conflict within and between the categories is inevitable. As a result, public administrators are often faced with a choice between multiple actions, each justified by different public service values. Witesman and Walters (2014) suggest that while such universal public values inform the perspective of individual public servants, each individual has a unique public service orientation. Personal value orientations are influenced by a number of factors, including an individual’s life experiences, educational background and interpretation of professional standards.

As the prevailing paradigm of public management, New Public Service has had a significant impact on the public service orientation of contemporary public administrators. In contrast to New Public Management, Denhardt and Denhardt (2000) have successfully argued that public servants should serve rather than steer. The primary role of the public servant, as defined by the seven principles of the New Public Service paradigm, is “to help citizens articulate and meet their shared interests” (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000, p. 549).

When the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) adopted its revised accreditation standards in 2009, it effectively recognised public service values as the central and distinctive characteristic of public administration and, subsequently, the foundation of the public administration curriculum (Molina & McKeown, 2012). In order for future public service professionals, as well as current practitioners, to act as stewards of New Public Service, they must develop an inward self-awareness of their own value orientations and the capacity to deal with competing, sometimes contradictory, values in a variety of contexts.

6. Competing values: A critical examination

Public service values have long been recognised as the cornerstone of public administration education and practice. However, the broad acceptance of these values often masks the intricate and persistent dilemmas faced by public administrators when multiple, and sometimes conflicting, values converge in decision-making contexts. As Lipsky (1980) famously identified, public service professionals encounter value conflicts primarily in three scenarios: when one value conflicts with a higher goal, when values are in direct opposition, and when values are commensurable but still difficult to balance.

While this framework provides a useful starting point, it arguably oversimplifies the complex reality on the ground. For instance, the tension between efficiency and effectiveness is frequently presented as a binary choice. Yet, this dichotomy neglects the nuanced ways in which these values interact within organisational cultures and political environments. Decisions that prioritise individual responsiveness may undermine broader community interests, but such tradeoffs are rarely straightforward. Moreover, conflicts between output values (such as efficiency and effectiveness) and process values (such as accountability, transparency and citizen engagement) highlight a deeper normative debate about what constitutes good governance.

A critical analysis of governance paradigms reveals that competing values are not merely operational challenges but reflections of broader ideological perspectives. De Graaf et al. (2014) describe three dominant conceptions of good governance, namely, performance-oriented, responsibility-focused and responsiveness-driven, each privileging different values. This raises important questions about whose values are prioritised and how these priorities shape policy outcomes and public trust. The public administrator's role, therefore, is not simply to navigate conflicts but to critically examine the underlying power dynamics and normative assumptions embedded in these value choices.

Public administrators have developed various coping strategies to manage value conflicts, ranging from organisationally embedded value assignments to incremental prioritisation of certain values. While adaptive, these strategies may inadvertently solidify particular value hierarchies, potentially marginalising less dominant but equally important values such as social equity or citizen participation. The creative attempts to synthesise conflicting values into innovative policy solutions are commendable, yet they also demand a high level of self-awareness and ethical reflection – qualities that are not guaranteed by technical competence alone.

The central questions posed by Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) – regarding the existence of a value hierarchy, the compatibility of public values and approaches to conflict resolution – underscore the need for a deliberate and transparent discourse. Without such discourse, public administration risks perpetuating confusion and fragmentation, undermining democratic governance and legitimacy.

Furthermore, historical analysis by Kaufman (1956) illustrates that the dominance of certain public values tends to be cyclical, shaped by shifting social, political and economic contexts. His identification of representativeness, neutral competence and executive leadership as core but competing values remains deeply relevant. However, the accelerated pace of societal change and the growing complexity of public problems today exacerbate tensions among these values, challenging administrators to balance tradition with innovation.

Critically, Kaufman's insight that incompatible commitments to dominant values can produce conceptual gulfs warns against rigid adherence to any single value framework. Instead, public administration must embrace value pluralism and the attendant ambiguity it brings. This requires fostering a professional culture that not only acknowledges conflicting values but actively engages with them through reflective practice and continuous learning.

In conclusion, while competing values present an enduring challenge within public administration, they also offer an opportunity to deepen the profession's normative foundation. By critically analysing value conflicts and embracing pluralism, public administrators can cultivate more nuanced, equitable and legitimate responses to the complex demands of contemporary governance.

7. Professionalism in public administration: A broader conceptualisation

“The core mission of those offering the MPA degree must be to develop the capacity of graduates to exercise delegated public authority wisely, effectively, and lawfully” (Henry et al., 2009, p. 122). This quote from a report of the Task Force on Educating for Excellence in the Master of Public Administration Degree of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) succinctly conveys the responsibility of public service professionals to demonstrate competency and act professionally. Commitment to the public interest and democratic governance is not enough. While it is true that public administrators exercise discretion in coping with value conflicts, they also face a common set of challenges as public servants. In these situations, it is important that public service professionals can draw on their knowledge of broad public values and standards of practice to inform their actions (Svara, 2009).

Public administration is a diverse and highly specialised profession. Regardless of their particular public service orientation and circumstances, however, public professionals need a firm grasp of the conceptual and procedural knowledge required for any given situation (Turner, 2015). Globalisation, rapid technological advancements and the privatisation of government services require that public service professionals can work across

sectoral and municipal boundaries. The ability to interact with citizens as peers and apply the principles of New Public Service in this dynamic environment is critical.

Professionalism in public administration concerns the universal skills required of effective public administrators. According to Perry (1989), effectiveness in public administration is “doing the job right, doing the job well, and overcoming impediments”. To achieve effectiveness, public administrators must be results-oriented, have the technical skill to engage in and manage specialised activities required by a particular circumstance, and understand how particular circumstances relate to the broader environment. They must possess the interpersonal skills to facilitate collaborative activity and span organisational boundaries. They need to demonstrate openness to democratic processes in a way that is consistent with the principles of New Public Service and accepted ethical practices. Most importantly, proficiency in these areas will help public administrators recognise and appreciate the tradeoffs posed by conflicting values and understand how their actions can contribute to stability within the public sector (Perry, 1989).

While this framing aligns with long-standing views within the field that professionalism is foundational to ensuring the legitimacy and efficacy of public administration, a critical examination reveals several nuanced challenges and tensions inherent in operationalising professionalism in contemporary public service. The proposed framework highlights the increasing complexity of the administrative environment due to globalisation, technological advancements and intersectoral governance, which demands a broadened skill set beyond traditional bureaucratic functions. While this expansion of competencies is necessary, it raises questions about the coherence and boundaries of professionalism itself. As public administrators navigate a more fluid and often ambiguous landscape, the traditional markers of professionalism, namely, technical expertise, adherence to codes of conduct and results-orientation, may be insufficient or even conflicting. For example, adhering strictly to professional standards could constrain innovative problem-solving needed in dynamic contexts, suggesting a potential tension between professionalism and administrative discretion.

Second, Perry’s (1989) definition of effectiveness as “doing the job right, doing the job well, and overcoming impediments” invites scrutiny regarding whose definition of “the job” and “effectiveness” is privileged. The competing public values discussed previously, such as efficiency versus equity or accountability versus responsiveness, imply that effectiveness is not an objective standard but a contested concept shaped by value orientations. Thus, professionalism must be understood not only as technical competence but also as the capacity to navigate and adjudicate among competing norms and expectations.

Moreover, the discourse on professionalism integrates the principles of New Public Service, emphasising democratic engagement and ethical conduct. This normative stance challenges the classical dichotomy between politics and administration by compelling public administrators to act as facilitators of citizen participation rather than neutral implementers. Such a role expands professionalism to include political sensitivity, ethical judgment and public deliberation skills. Yet, this expansion also risks politicising professionalism, potentially undermining the traditional ideal of bureaucratic neutrality and raising questions about how public servants maintain legitimacy across diverse constituencies.

Another critical dimension is the relationship between professionalism and information literacy, which the proposed framework links as core competencies for contemporary public administrators. This connection suggests that professionalism is not static but evolves with the capacity to critically assess and apply information within ethical and value-laden frameworks. However, this also exposes a gap in many public administration education programs, where the cultivation of information literacy may be underemphasised relative to technical skills or ethical training. The emerging need for “value-informed information literacy” demands a redefinition of professionalism that integrates cognitive agility with normative awareness, an area ripe for further exploration and pedagogical innovation.

Finally, the document implies that professionalism is intrinsically linked to public service values and that public administrators must possess a “value-based perspective broader than the particular job at hand” to effectively exercise discretion. This assertion brings to light the inherent ambiguity in professionalism: it is simultaneously a set of universal standards and a context-dependent practice shaped by individual and organisational values. Such ambiguity necessitates ongoing critical reflection and ethical deliberation by public professionals, reinforcing professionalism as a dynamic, practice-oriented concept rather than a fixed status.

While professionalism remains essential to competent public administration, it is a multifaceted and evolving construct, fraught with tensions between technical competence and value-based discretion, neutrality and political engagement, and tradition and innovation. Addressing these complexities is crucial for both public administration educators and practitioners committed to preparing and embodying professionalism in the 21st century.

8. Value-informed information literacy: Transcending the foundational definition

Central to concerns of public service values and professionalism in public administration is the ability of public service professionals to exercise value-informed information literacy. The term “information literacy” was first coined in a 1974 report to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (Haras & Brasley, 2011). The report described “information literates” as individuals who are familiar with and able to use a wide range of information tools. Since that time, information literacy has developed significantly in theory, practice and scope.

Today, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) defines information literacy as the ability to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (2005, p. 1). This foundational definition, while essential, requires expansion in the context of public administration. The practice of public service occurs in complex environments where information is intrinsically political, value-laden and embedded within power structures. Therefore, information literacy must transcend technical competence to encompass the critical evaluation of the ethical, legal and societal implications of information.

This expanded conception involves integrating knowledge and resources with explicit research and evaluation skills, as well as critical assessment of political, social and economic factors influencing information use (Breivik & Gee, 1989). Public service professionals must be vigilant about whose interests are served by particular information sources and how these align or conflict with public service values such as equity, transparency and accountability. Decisions based solely on data without consideration of underlying values risk undermining democratic legitimacy and public trust.

Historically, the role of information literacy in governance and public policy is not new. Enlightenment philosophers like Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat Condorcet recognised the indissoluble link between the progress of knowledge and the advancement of liberty, virtue and respect for natural rights (Shapiro & Hughes, 1996). This historical lineage underscores that information literacy is not simply a skill but a democratic imperative essential for administrators and citizens alike.

Public service professionals, as stewards of democratic governance, have a core responsibility to facilitate the democratisation of information, empowering an informed and engaged citizenry. Their ability to share recognised, located and evaluated information effectively depends on applying a public service perspective to its use (Turner, 2015). This symbiotic relationship between administrators and citizens situates information literacy as a foundational element of civic engagement and public welfare.

However, this expanded notion of information literacy reveals inherent tensions. Public administrators must maintain objectivity and professionalism, grounded in evidence-based decision-making, while simultaneously navigating subjective value conflicts and political pressures that shape both the production and interpretation of information. Balancing these demands requires sophisticated judgment, reflexivity and the capacity to critically reflect on the contested nature of information – a challenge for both practitioners and educators.

Despite policy initiatives recognising the public importance of information literacy – such as the UNESCO Prague Declaration (2003), President Obama's 2009 proclamation of Information Literacy Awareness Month, and California's Executive Order S-06-09 supporting IL education in public schools – the practical challenges of implementing value-informed information literacy remain significant. Issues such as information overload, misinformation and unequal access complicate the ideal of information literacy as a democratising force. These challenges necessitate that future research and education explicitly address how to equip public service professionals not only to be competent users of information but also ethical stewards of information's power within democratic governance.

Value-informed information literacy is not simply an additive skill but a transformative approach that situates information use within the ethical and value-driven contexts of public administration. It demands critical reflection on the production, dissemination and use of information, recognising information as both a tool and a contested terrain in the pursuit of public service. Integrating this critical understanding into public administration education and practice is essential for preparing 21st-century civic professionals capable of navigating the intricate interplay of knowledge, values and power.

9. Practical application of Value-Informed Public Service

Building upon the foundational concepts of competing public service values, professionalism in public administration and information literacy, it is essential to translate these principles into actionable strategies that public service professionals can employ in their daily work. The dynamic and often complex environment in which public administrators operate demands not only theoretical understanding but also practical skills that integrate public service values, professionalism and information literacy. This section outlines key practical applications that enable public administrators to navigate competing values, exercise discretion responsibly, and maintain legitimacy with the public and colleagues. These practical applications are further illustrated through three short hypothetical case studies.

9.1. Integrating public service values in decision-making

Public administrators frequently face decisions involving conflicting values such as efficiency versus equity or transparency versus confidentiality. To manage these dilemmas, professionals should adopt structured decision-making frameworks that explicitly recognise value pluralism. This involves identifying relevant public service values at stake, assessing their implications within the specific context, and prioritising them in a manner consistent with both ethical standards and organisational goals. For example, when allocating limited resources, administrators might weigh community needs (equity) against budget constraints (efficiency), documenting the rationale transparently to uphold accountability.

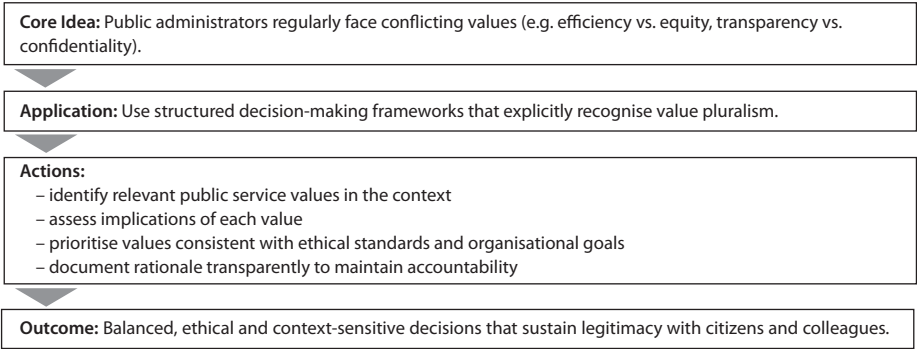


Figure 1

Value-Informed Public Service: Integrating public service values in decision-making

Source: compiled by the author

9.2. Applying professional competence and ethical standards

Demonstrating professionalism requires public administrators to continuously update their knowledge and skills, ensuring they are competent in emerging technologies, regulatory changes and public management practices. Maintaining open communication channels with citizens and stakeholders fosters trust and promotes democratic engagement. Ethics training and adherence to codes of conduct, such as those promulgated by ASPA, provide a critical foundation for navigating complex situations and reinforcing public trust.

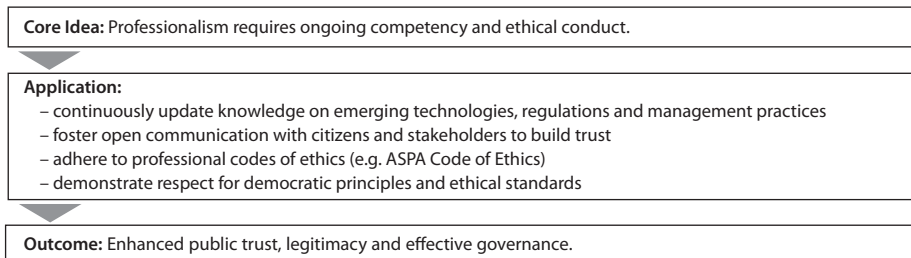


Figure 2

Value-Informed Public Service: Applying professional competence and ethical standards

Source: compiled by the author

9.3. Exercising value-informed information literacy

Effective public administration relies heavily on the ability to recognise information needs, locate credible sources, critically evaluate data, and apply findings in policy formulation and service delivery. Public professionals should cultivate information literacy skills that allow them to discern biases, validate facts and understand the broader social, political and economic contexts influencing information. For instance, when analysing community health data to develop public programs, administrators must evaluate the reliability of data sources and consider ethical implications related to privacy and equity.

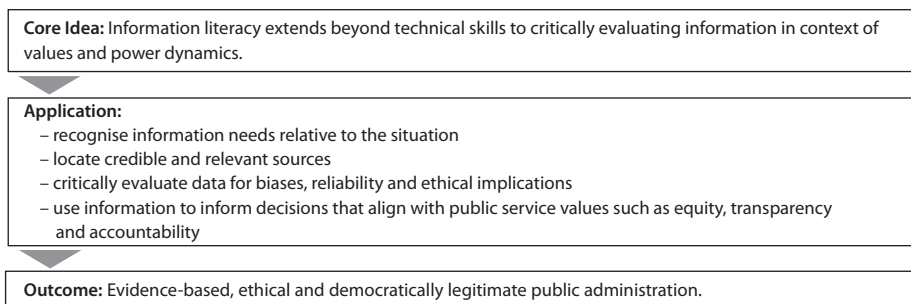


Figure 3

Value-Informed Public Service: Exercising value-informed information literacy

Source: compiled by the author

9.4. Fostering collaborative and adaptive leadership

Given the intersectoral and multi-jurisdictional nature of contemporary governance, public administrators must employ leadership styles that promote collaboration across boundaries. This includes facilitating stakeholder engagement, mediating value conflicts and encouraging innovative problem-solving approaches. Adaptive leadership that remains attuned to changing environments and values enables professionals to respond effectively to unforeseen challenges while maintaining commitment to public service principles.

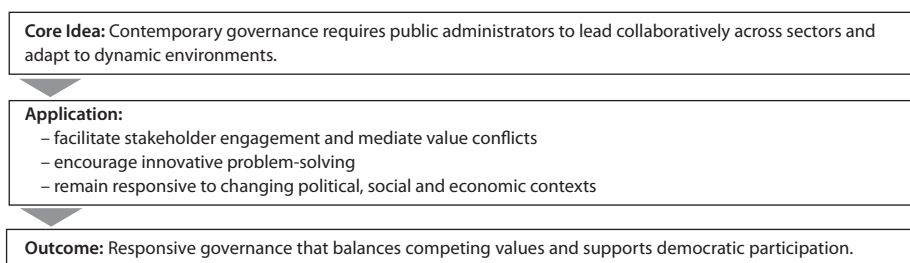


Figure 4

Value-Informed Public Service: Fostering collaborative and adaptive leadership

Source: compiled by the author

The practical application of Value-Informed Public Service requires a deliberate and reflective approach that harmonises public service values, professional standards and information literacy. By embedding these interconnected competencies into everyday practice, public administrators can enhance their capacity to make informed, ethical and context-sensitive decisions that advance the public interest and uphold democratic governance. The following hypothetical case vignettes demonstrate how public service professionals apply their own public service orientations, professional standards and information literacy to navigate complex, value-laden decisions. They reflect the assertion that competent public service professionals bridge theoretical concepts and practical decision-making by exercising discretion informed by integrated values. In public administration education, such case studies could be used to engage students in examining value conflicts, applying ethical frameworks and practising information evaluation – thereby operationalising the proposed Value-Informed Public Service framework.

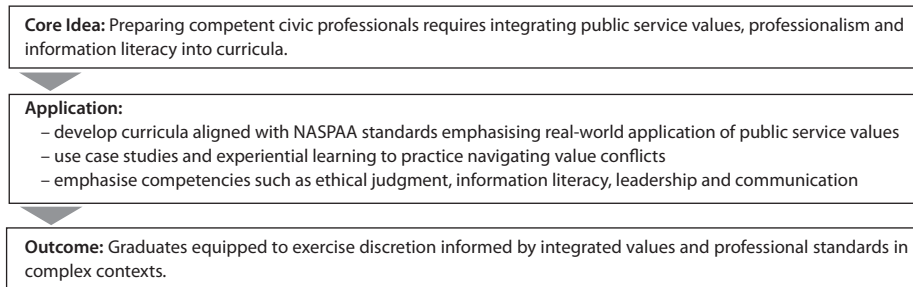


Figure 5

Value-Informed Public Service: Embedding value-informed public service in education

Source: compiled by the author

9.5. Case Study 1: Balancing efficiency and equity in public health policy

Scenario: A public health administrator must allocate limited resources during a pandemic. The choices include prioritising efficiency (maximising the number of vaccinated individuals quickly) or equity (ensuring vulnerable and underserved populations receive attention, even if it slows overall progress).

Values at play: Efficiency, effectiveness, social equity, accountability, transparency.

Discussion: The administrator exercises discretion informed by a public service value orientation that prioritises social equity without sacrificing professional standards of competence and accountability. Information literacy is critical here to access and evaluate epidemiological data, demographic information and community needs to make an informed, balanced decision. The administrator engages with stakeholders transparently, maintaining legitimacy and trust. This scenario illustrates coping with competing values, a key challenge highlighted by value-informed public service.

9.6. Case Study 2: Ethical decision-making in environmental regulation

Scenario: A public administrator in an environmental agency faces pressure from industry lobbyists to relax regulations that protect local ecosystems. The decision involves weighing economic development against environmental sustainability.

Values at play: Public interest, ethical conduct, respect for democratic principles, transparency, professional competence.

Discussion: Here, the administrator's professionalism demands adherence to ethical standards and respect for democratic governance, while information literacy enables thorough evaluation of environmental impact studies and economic data. The administrator must navigate value conflicts between economic efficiency and environmental stewardship, making a decision that upholds public service values and maintains public trust.

9.7. Case Study 3: Facilitating citizen engagement in urban planning

Scenario: A city planner aims to develop a new urban development project. The planner must incorporate citizen input while managing political, economic and cultural considerations.

Values at play: Citizen engagement, accountability, respect, fairness, responsiveness.

Discussion: The planner demonstrates professionalism by facilitating inclusive public participation and objectively evaluating diverse viewpoints. Information literacy helps in gathering relevant data on community demographics, economic trends and environmental impacts. The planner balances competing values through transparent communication and iterative consultation, embodying the New Public Service paradigm of serving rather than steering.

10. Rationale for Value-Informed Public Service

Separately, the centrality of public service values, professionalism and information literacy to the practice of public administration is generally accepted. The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) expressed its commitment to the promotion of public service values and professionalism through its Code of Ethics, designed to “increase awareness and commitment to ethical principles and standards among all those who work in public service” (ASPA, 2013). Similarly, as a precondition for accreditation, NASPAA (2009) requires that education programs in public affairs and administration programs demonstrably emphasise public service values. Accredited programs must demonstrate the achievement of student learning with regard to professional competencies, including the application of public service values to real world problems, the acquisition and integration of new and complex knowledge, and the ability to apply such knowledge and understanding to solve problems in a variety of contexts.

NASPAA also seeks to promote consistency between the learning goals of public affairs and education programs and the competencies desired by potential employers. To ensure that the concerns of employers are represented in its accreditation standards, NASPAA used marketing and information campaign surveys to ascertain the knowledge and skills required of contemporary public administrators (Calarusse & Raffel, 2007). Employers identified “decision making/problem solving, communications skills, leadership, and teamwork” as extremely important public management skills (Calarusse & Raffel, 2007, p. 9). “Ethics and integrity, openness to citizen participation and involvement, organization and group behavior, and political/legal institutions” were also identified as extremely important or important public service knowledge and skills (Calarusse & Raffel, 2007, p. 9). A separate study conducted by NASPAA showed that employers also valued program evaluation and accountability (Calarusse & Raffel, 2007, p. 9; NASPAA Surveys, 2007). These results were confirmed by additional sources, including both public and private employers and literature published by the government, academics and practitioners.

While the link between public service values, professionalism and information literacy has not been explicitly articulated by either NASPAA or ASPA, the logic for doing so is evident in ASPA's Code of Ethics and NASPAA's Standards (Turner, 2015). These organisations have taken steps to ensure that the field's leading organisations represent emergent concerns within the discipline. The future of public administration is, in large part, shaped by recent developments (Calarusse & Raffel, 2007). Factors such as globalisation, rapid technological advancement, privatisation of government services, widespread demographic change, economic polarisation and increased interest in civic engagement, will determine the professional competencies of future public administrators.

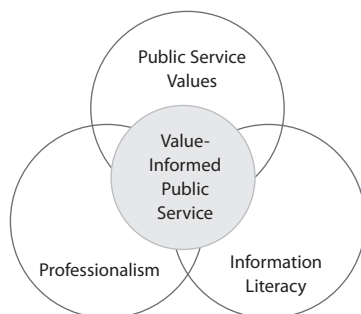


Figure 6
Value-Informed Public Service

Source: compiled by the author

Support for the interrelation of these concepts can also be found in the four – not three – pillars of public administration: economy, efficiency, effectiveness and social equity. Prior to the 1960s, the study and practice of public administration was defined by a politics–administration dichotomy (Norman-Major, 2011). The standards of economy, efficiency and effectiveness were paramount. Rejecting this sterile view, however, H. George Frederickson and other public administration scholars argued that public administration should not, nor cannot, be value-free. Their “New Public Administration” introduced values into the practice of public administration. They argued that the inclusion of social equity, responsiveness, public participation in decision-making and administrative accountability were necessary components of authentic public administration (Wooldridge & Gooden, 2009). Since the 1960s, scholars and practitioners have continued to argue that public service should be judged by the degree of equity in which it is delivered (Frederickson, 1990; Shafritz & Russell, 1997; Wooldridge, 1998; Svava & Brunet, 2004). To affirm these voices and end a 40-year debate, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) adopted social equity as the fourth pillar of public administration in 2005.

Even though NAPA has committed to the equal treatment of social equity among the four pillars, the “equity of social equity” has been questioned (Norman-Major, 2011, p. 233). The institutionalisation of value-informed public service in public affairs and administration education programs will help ensure such equity among the recognised

standards of public administration. Social equity and related public values are the foundation of the reciprocity and mutually beneficial relationship between the government and the public (Bozeman, 2012). The commitment and professional competence of public administrators is an integral component of this relationship (Perry, 1989). Thus, the ideal public administrator simultaneously exhibits value-informed information literacy, the vocational professionalism unique to the public service, and the public service values that necessarily circumscribe the functions of a public servant (Turner, 2015).

11. Implications for public administration education

Despite continued economic uncertainty and a constantly evolving public domain, career and educational opportunities in public policy, public administration and more generally, public service are showing sustained growth and mobility. A continual source of conversation and tension among scholars and academics is the balance of theory and practice in related professional programs (Bernotsky et al., 2014). Leading scholar and practitioner in the field, Robert Denhardt (2001, p. 527) has identified the question of whether we “seek to educate our students with respect to theory or practice” as one of the most pressing questions for contemporary public administration educators. Proponents on both sides of this theoretical argument, however, seem to be gradually reaching agreement that a quality public service education is one that “balances practical applications with considerations of theoretical issues” (Henry et al., 2009, p. 124).

The progression toward competency-based assessment and accreditation of public affairs and administration degree programs reflects a tenuous resolution of this debate. Common ground between these two perspectives can be found where assessment processes evaluate students on their ability to translate theory into practice. The central focus of the debate surrounding the intersection of theory and practice is the skills and abilities needed by students in the field to effectively carry out their professional responsibilities (Bernotsky et al., 2014). Through the utilisation of a Value-Informed Public Service curriculum, the debate surrounding the appropriate integration of theory, research and practice can be put to rest and public administration educators can be confident that they are preparing competent civic professionals.

The revised accreditation standards adopted by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) in 2009 reinforce, in fact require, accredited public affairs and administration programs to emphasise a set of five action-oriented public service competencies. Programs must demonstrate that their curriculum and related student-learning outcomes prepare students to apply the concepts, tools and knowledge they have learned to real world problems. The standards specify that “students should be able to apply their knowledge, understanding and problem-solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader or multidisciplinary contexts related to public affairs, administration and policy” (NASPAA, 2009, p. 2).

The standards also instruct programs seeking accreditation to emphasise public service values in student-learning outcomes. As a precondition for accreditation review, NASPAA requires that programs “demonstrably emphasize” public service values in their curriculum. Programs should prepare future public administrators who are concerned with “pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency; serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity; acting ethically so as to uphold the public trust; and demonstrating respect, equity, and fairness in dealings with citizens and fellow public servants” (NASPAA, 2009, p. 2). Furthermore, a growing body of literature that predates NASPAA’s revised standards identifies public service values as the central feature of public administration (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007; Mandell, 2009). And, public service values have subsequently been recognised as the “heart” of public administration (Molina & McKeown, 2012). Molina and McKeown (2012) argue that educators, students and practitioners in the field will benefit from the acknowledgement of value pluralism within public service.

12. Conclusion

This paper has introduced the concept of Value-Informed Public Service, emphasising the critical interrelationship between public service values, professionalism and information literacy in the preparation and practice of 21st-century public administrators. Key findings reveal that public administrators operate in complex environments characterised by competing values and dynamic information needs, requiring discretion guided by a coherent value orientation, professional standards and strong information literacy skills. The integration of these elements forms a durable framework that enhances decision-making, legitimacy and responsiveness in public service.

Practically, this framework can be applied to improve public administration by fostering administrators who are not only technically competent but also ethically grounded and information savvy. Such professionals are better equipped to navigate conflicting values and complex information landscapes, promoting effective governance and citizen engagement.

Educational and governmental institutions should adopt the Value-Informed Public Service model by embedding its principles into curricula, training programs and organisational policies. Public affairs and administration education programs must ensure that students develop competencies that integrate public service values, professionalism and information literacy aligned with evolving accreditation standards and employer expectations. Government agencies should promote ongoing professional development emphasising these interconnected competencies to enhance public trust and service quality.

References

- Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2005). *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. American Library Association. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-1-84334-065-2.50016-3>
- Bernotsky, R. L., Osgood, J. L. & Saint-Germaine, M. (2014, November). *Faculty Expertise and Course Objectives: Defining Competencies from the Bottom-up*. Paper presentation. Annual Meeting of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, November 4–6, 2014, Albuquerque, New Mexico.
- Bozeman, B. (2012, June). *Public Values Concepts and Criteria: The Case for “Progressive Opportunity” as a Criterion*. Paper presentation. Center for Integrative Leadership. Creating Public in a Multi-Sector, Shared-Power World, Minneapolis, MN.
- Breivik, P. S. & Gee, E. G. (1989). *Information Literacy. Revolution in the Library*. American Council on Education/Macmillan.
- Calarusse, C. & Raffel, J. A. (2007, May–June). *Transforming Public Affairs Education through Accreditation*. Paper presentation. Leading the Future of the Public Sector: The Third Transatlantic Dialogue conference, University of Delaware, Newark, DE, USA, May–June 2007.
- De Graaf, G., Huberts, L. & Smulders, R. (2014). Coping with Public Value Conflicts. *Administration & Society*, 48(9), 1101–1127. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399714532273>
- Denhardt, R. B. (2001). The Big Questions of Public Administration Education. *Public Administration Review*, 61(5), 526–534.
- Denhardt, R. B. & Denhardt, J. V. (2000). The New Public Service: Serving Rather than Steering. *Public Administration Review*, 60(6), 549–559. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-3352.00117>
- Frederickson, G. H. (1990). Public Administration and Social Equity. *Public Administration Review*, 50(2), 228–237. Online: <https://doi.org/10.2307/976870>
- Haras, C. & Brasley, S. S. (2011). Is Information Literacy a Public Concern? A Practice in Search of a Policy. *Library Trends*, 60(2), 361–382. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2011.0041>
- Henry, N., Goodsell, C. T., Lynn, L. E., Jr., Stivers, C. & Wamsley, G. L. (2009). Understanding Excellence in Public Administration: The Report of the Task Force on Educating for Excellence in the Master of Public Administration Degree of the American Society for Public Administration. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 15(2), 117–133. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2009.12001548>
- Jørgensen, T. B. & Bozeman, B. (2007). Public Values: An Inventory. *Administration & Society*, 39(3), 354–381. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399707300703>
- Kaufman, H. (1956). Emerging Conflicts in the Doctrines of Public Administration. *American Political Science Review*, 50(4), 1057–1073. Online: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1951335>
- Kernaghan, K. (2003). Integrating Values into Public Service: The Values Statement as Centerpiece. *Public Administration Review*, 63(6), 711–719. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6210.00334>
- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street Level Bureaucracy. Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. Russell Sage Foundation. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610447713>
- Mandell, M. B. (2009). Public Values as a Core Element of NASPAA. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 15(3), 261–267. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2009.12001560>
- Molina, A. D. & McKeown, C. L. (2012). The Heart of the Profession: Understanding Public Service Values. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 18(2), 375–396. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2012.12001689>
- NASPAA (2007). *Surveys*. Online: http://www.naspaa.org/naspaa_surveys/main.asp
- Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) (2009, October 16). *Accreditation Standards for Master’s Degree Programs*. Online: <https://www.naspaa.org/accreditation/doc/NS2009FinalVote10.16.2009.pdf>
- Norman-Major, K. (2011). Balancing the Four Es; or Can We Achieve Equity for Social Equity in Public Administration? *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 17(2), 233–252. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2011.12001640>

- Obama, B. (2009, October 1). *Presidential Proclamation National Information Literacy Awareness Month*. Online: <https://tinyurl.com/v2xupxrn>
- Perry, J. L. (1989). The Effective Public Administrator. In J. L. Perry (Ed.), *Handbook of Public Administration* (pp. 575–601). Jossey-Bass.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. The Free Press.
- Shafritz, J. M. & Russell, E. W. (1997). *Introducing Public Administration*. Addison Wesley Longman.
- Shapiro, J. J. & Hughes, S. K. (1996). Information Literacy as a Liberal Art: Enlightenment Proposals for a New Curriculum. *Educom Review*, 31(2), 1–6. Online: <http://net.educause.edu/apps/er/review/reviewArticles/31231.html>
- Svara, J. H. (2009). Introduction to the Symposium: The Nature of Public Professionalism and the Future of ASPA. *Public Administration Review*, 69(6), 1037–1039. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2009.02060.x>
- Svara, J. H. & Brunet, J. R. (2004). Filling in the Skeletal Pillar: Addressing Social Equity in Introductory Courses in Public Administration. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 10(2), 99–109. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2004.12001351>
- Turner, A. H. (2015). Instilling Public Service Values and Professionalism through Information Literacy. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 21(1), 41–54. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2015.12001815>
- Witesman, E. & Walters, L. (2014). Public Service Values: A New Approach to the Study of Motivation in the Public Sphere. *Public Administration*, 92(2), 375–405. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12000>
- Wooldridge, B. (1998). Protecting Equity While Reinventing Government: Strategies for Achieving a Fair Distribution of the Costs and Benefits of the Public Sector. *Journal of Public Management and Social Policy*, 4(1), 67–80.
- Wooldridge, B. & Gooden, S. (2009). The Epic of Social Equity: Evolution, Essence and Emergence. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 31(2), 222–234. Online: <https://doi.org/10.2753/ATP1084-1806310205>

This page intentionally left blank.