The Virtues of Administration:
Understanding Public Service Values Through Narrative

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Abstract

The new accreditation standards adopted by NASPAA in 2009 place public service values at the core of the public administration curriculum. As individual programs seek to clarify the role that these values play in public administration education, a firm understanding of the role that they play in the day-to-day work of practitioners becomes all the more critical. To that end, this paper presents the findings of a mixed-methods study exploring the manner in which public service values influence the behavior and decision-making of public administrators. Using both survey data and in-depth qualitative interviews of fifty two state and local public administrators in the Midwest, a ranking of the values they found to be most important in their work is presented. Additionally, grounded theory methods were employed to develop a theoretical model that seeks to explain how public service values come to bear on the behavior and decision making of public administrators. On the basis of the theoretical propositions described in that model, we argue that public administrators act on a combination of ethical, professional, democratic, and human values as a way of maintaining legitimacy in the public administrative context. In that regard, legitimacy is understood by public administrators to be a combination of attitudes, behaviors, and skills that demonstrate personal credibility, professional competence, respect for democratic principles, and the ability to maintain positive relationships with citizens and colleagues. Finally, some suggestions are offered for ways in which public service values may be effectively incorporated into the public administration curriculum.
Introduction

In October of 2009 the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) adopted a new set of accreditation standards for degree programs in public affairs and administration. These new standards emphasize the importance of public service values as a way of distinguishing these programs from other types of professional degree programs, such as business administration. Under the new standards, “NASPAA expects an accredited program to be explicit about the public service values to which it gives priority; to clarify the ways in which it embeds these values in its internal governance; and to demonstrate that its students learn the tools and competencies to apply and take these values into consideration in their professional activities” (NASPAA, 2009, p. 4). In so doing, NASPAA seeks to employ the accreditation process as a means to promote public service values as the “heart of the profession” (p. 4).

Such a move should come as no surprise given the increasing attention that public service values are being given in the field (e.g., Van Wart, 1998; Jorgenson, 1999; Kernaghan, 2003; Menzel, 2003; Bozeman, 2007; van der Wal & Huberts, 2008; Christensen et al., 2011). Yet, despite this increased attention, there is no clear consensus about the specific role that values play in the day-to-day behavior and decision making of administrators. For example, a large body of research has emerged that explores the relationship between values, organizational culture, and the role that leadership plays in promoting particular values (e.g., Selznick, 1957; Schein, 1992, Fairholm & Fairholm, 2009; Getha-Taylor, 2009). In this vein, Posner and
Schmidt (1994) have argued that the values held by executives “serve as silent power for understanding interpersonal and organizational life” (p. 24). Other research, however, has found that the extent to which values can be managed within organizations is less clear (Rouillard & Giroux, 2005). Paarlberg and Perry (2007), for example, point out that “employees are motivated by broad societal and cultural values,” and will respond to managerial efforts to impose organizational values only to the extent that they are perceived as “being within the zone of these existing [societal and cultural] values” (p. 405).

Furthermore, the task of identifying a unique set of public service values has proven to be difficult (Rutgers, 2008). This may be due to the fact that public administrators have to contend with an array of competing values that may ultimately be incommensurable with one another (Wagenaar, 1999; Spicer, 2001). Along these lines, Goodsell (1989) identifies five value orientations that public administrators must seek to balance. These include a means orientation concerned with the values of efficiency, effectiveness, and expertise; a morality orientation concerned with values like equality, honesty, justice, and fairness; a multitude orientation concerned with values such as pluralism, inclusiveness, and responsiveness to citizens; a market orientation concerned with the values of entrepreneurialism, limited government, and free-markets; and a mission orientation in which the administrator is concerned with values such as institutional integrity, and the exercise of discretionary authority in the public interest. Thus, as Van Wart (1998) has argued, the challenge for public administrators is “to achieve a mixture of values in a workable gestalt or whole” that, in turn, requires an ongoing “dialectic because of legitimate competition of values and inevitable shifts in priority” (p. xviii).

Assuming that public service values are indeed a distinctive feature of the profession, and notwithstanding the difficulties associated with the task, public administration educators,
students, and practitioners alike stand to benefit richly from research directed toward identifying
the range of public service values, along with the development of tools to incorporate them into
public decision making (Bozeman, 2007; Mandell, 2009). In fact, a growing body of literature
has emerged that addresses the importance of incorporating values into the public administration
curriculum, and describes numerous ways in which values may be creatively explored in the
classroom (e.g., Hartmus, 2008; Shareef, 2008; Peters & Filipova, 2009; Stout, 2009). The most
notable recent example here, of course, is found in the final report issued by the Task Force on
Educating for Excellence in the Public Administration Degree of the American Society for
Public Administration (Henry et al., 2009). The work of the task force, along with similar efforts
to place public service values at the heart of the curriculum, is an important step in further
refining our understanding of public administration as a profession. But all of this raises an
important question: What do we mean when we say “public service values?”

Defining Public Service Values

A particularly helpful way of thinking about public service values is the
conceptualization of them as what Dwight Waldo (1984) called “criteria for action” (Molina,
2009). As Denhardt and Denhardt (2006) have pointed out, public administration is action
oriented. Values not only inform our attitudes about the ends to which we should aspire, but
they also present standards of conduct that inform how we ought to go about achieving those
ends. As Rokeach explains (1968), “Once a value is internalized it becomes, consciously or
unconsciously, a standard or criterion for guiding action, for developing and maintaining
attitudes toward relevant objects and situations, for justifying one’s own and others’ actions and
attitudes, for morally judging self and others and for comparing oneself with others” (p. 16).
Kenneth Kernaghan (2003) has argued that the field of public service values may be grouped into four categories including ethical, democratic, professional, and people (human) values. It is worth noting that this categorization is consistent with the manner in which values are described in the new NASPAA standards. Moreover, in calling for degree programs to “demonstrably emphasize public service values” in their mission, governance, and curriculum, the new NASPAA (2009) standards reflect an action-oriented conceptualization of these four value categories. This is particularly clear where the standards state that public service values include “pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency” (democratic values); “serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity” (professional values); “acting ethically so as to uphold the public trust” (ethical values); and “demonstrating respect, equity, and fairness in dealings with citizens and fellow public servants” (human values) (emphasis added, p. 2). In short, NASPAA’s public service values involve more than beliefs, ideals, and principles, but also involve actions that are motivated by a concern for democratic, professional, ethical, and human values.

If NASPAA accredited degree programs are to successfully incorporate public service values into the curriculum, understanding the role that they play in the day-to-day work of public administrators is crucial. This paper seeks to contribute to that understanding. To that end, a mixed-methods research design utilized a survey instrument to identify the values considered most important by public administrators. Additionally, grounded theory methods were used to analyze narrative data gathered through in-depth qualitative interviews to develop a set of theoretical propositions about the role these values play in public service. Finally, a few examples of how public service values can be effectively incorporated into the classroom are discussed.
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Research Methodology

Participants

The participants for this study included fifty two state and local public administrators in the Midwest region of the United States. Participants were recruited utilizing theoretical sampling methods; a type of purposive sampling technique (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). This technique enables the researcher to select participants on the basis of their ability to contribute to the development of the theoretical constructs under study. In this case, the constructs include the range of public service values, and the role that these values play in the behavior and decision making of public administrators. Therefore, participants from a variety of public sector roles and organizational types were selected on the basis of their ability to provide breadth and depth to the sample. Table 1 presents the occupational distribution of the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Occupational Distribution of Participants (n = 52)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Government (n = 30)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Development and Planning Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Works Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Emergency Medical Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoning Enforcement Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Government (n = 22)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue and Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment and Natural Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Materials

The survey instrument was adapted from van der Wal and Huberts (2008) as a way of identifying which values were considered most important by the public administrators who participated in this study. In addition to providing a means by which the values could be ranked, the survey design was intended to provide a common understanding of the values under consideration. To facilitate this, each value was defined for participants in order to provide a uniform set of operational definitions. Twenty of the values included in this research were adapted from van der Wal and Huberts (2008), five of the values were adapted from Kernaghan (2003), and an additional five values were adapted from the American Society for Public Administration’s Code of Ethics. Following van der Wal and Huberts (2008), the values were given action-oriented definitions that described “important qualities and standards that have a certain weight in the choice of action” (p. 267). Table 2 presents the entire list of thirty administrative values used for the survey, along with the definitions provided to the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Set of Administrative Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountability</strong> To act willingly in justifying and explaining one’s actions to relevant stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benevolence</strong> To act in a manner that promotes good and avoids harm for citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collegiality</strong> To act loyally and show solidarity toward one’s colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Courage</strong> To confront fear and act rightly in the face of personal risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dedication</strong> To act with diligence, enthusiasm, and perseverance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong> To act in a manner that best achieves the desired results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency</strong> To act in a manner that achieves the desired results using minimal resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expertise</strong> To act with competence, skill, and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honesty</strong> To act in a truthful manner and to comply with promises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humaneness</strong> To act in a manner that exhibits respect, compassion, and dignity toward others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impartiality</strong> To act without prejudice or bias toward particular individuals or groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusiveness</strong> To act in a manner that includes citizens, customers, and other relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incorruptibility</strong> To act without prejudice or bias in favor of one’s own private interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Innovativeness</strong> To act with initiative and creativity in introducing new policies or products</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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| Integrity* | To act in accordance with relevant moral values and norms |
| Lawfulness | To act in accordance with existing laws and rules |
| Obedience | To act in compliance with the instructions of superiors |
| Organizational Interest** | To act in a manner that promotes the organization’s interest |
| Participative** | To act in a manner that promotes active citizen participation in administrative decision making |
| Pluralism** | To act in a manner that seeks to accommodate the interests of a diverse citizenry |
| Profitability | To act in a manner that achieves financial gains for the organization |
| Public Interest** | To act in a manner that promotes the public interest |
| Reliability | To act in a manner that is consistent, predictable, and trustworthy |
| Representative* | To act in a manner that is consistent with the values of citizens |
| Responsiveness | To act in a manner that is in accordance with the preferences of citizens, customers, and other relevant stakeholders |
| Self Interest | To act in a manner that promotes the well being and professional development of one’s self |
| Serviceability | To act in a manner that is helpful and provides quality service to citizens, customers, and other relevant stakeholders |
| Social Justice | To act in a manner that promotes a fair and just society |
| Sustainability | To act in a manner that seeks to protect and sustain nature and the environment |
| Transparency | To act in an manner that is open and visible to citizens, customers, and other relevant stakeholders |

Set of Administrative Values adapted from van der Wal & Huberts 2008
*See Table One in Kernaghan, 2003
**See ASPA Code of Ethics, Principles I, II, & IV

Through means of a 4 point Likert scale, the participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they rated each value as either unimportant (1), sometimes important (2), usually important (3), or always important (4) in their work as an administrator. Consistent with van der Wal’s (2008, pp. 199-200) approach, a final item on the survey instrument asked participants to list the top 5 values that they found important in their work as an administrator.

A structured interview guide was also developed and provided to the participants in advance to give them an opportunity to reflect on the survey and interview questions. For background information, participants were asked to first describe their organization, the services provided by the organization, the population for whom the services are provided, as well as their personal role and responsibilities within the organization. The interview guide next addressed the participant’s perception of which values were most salient by asking them about their top 5
selected values, and why they perceived those to be most important in their work. Participants were also asked about the extent to which they saw these values coming into conflict with each other, and how they went about reconciling those conflicts. Finally, they were asked if there were other values important to consider that were missing from the survey.

Procedure

Participants were interviewed in their workplace. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, transcribed verbatim, and then loaded into Nvivo8, a qualitative data analysis software program. Following the grounded theory methods described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), an initial open-coding procedure was utilized to identify the range of analytical concepts that could be drawn from the data. This procedure yielded sixty eight identifiable concepts which were subsequently re-analyzed using axial coding procedures. The process of axial coding provides a theoretical integration of the concepts derived from the data, and identifies the central concepts providing the greatest explanatory relevance. Our analysis resulted in the identification of a central theoretical concept, described below, that we term maintaining legitimacy.

Survey Results

As noted above, one of the purposes of this study was to provide a ranking of the values that public administrators find most important in their work. Figure 1 presents the mean ratings assigned by participants, and Table 3 presents a summary score for each value. As can be seen, ethical values such as honesty and integrity were ranked highest with mean scores of 3.88 and 3.86 respectively. These were followed closely by lawfulness and benevolence, each with mean ratings of 3.82, incorruptibility (3.78), and accountability (3.73). Interestingly, the value of
efficiency – normally regarded as a core public administration value - ranked relatively low compared to ethical values with a mean score of 3.13. Not surprisingly, self-interest (2.59) and profitability (2.25) were ranked lowest.
### Table 3.
#### Ranking of Value Importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Unimportant (1)</th>
<th>Sometimes Important (2)</th>
<th>Usually Important (3)</th>
<th>Always Important (4)</th>
<th>SUMMARY SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawfulness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorruptibility</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serviceability</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humaneness*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impartiality</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. Interest**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Interest**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness**</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovativeness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralism**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participative**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Interest</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profitability</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Set of Administrative Values adapted from van der Wal & Huberts 2008*

*See Table One in Kernaghan, 2003*

**See ASPA Code of Ethics, Principles I, II, & IV**
As Figure 1 indicates, the participants tended to rate most of the administrative values included in the survey as important in their work. All but 4 of the values (participative, sustainability, self-interest, and profitability) received mean ratings greater than 3, indicating that they were “usually important.” As noted above, participants were also asked to identify the 5 values that were most important in their work, which provided some additional insight into which values were considered most salient. Figure 2 presents the frequency with which particular values were rated by participants as a top 5 administrative value. Though honesty (n = 37) and integrity (n = 26) remain at the top of the ranking, values such as lawfulness (n = 12) and benevolence (n = 7) fall in the ranking. There are a number of other differences between the ranking presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2. For example, two participants included profitability in their list of top 5 values, even though it received the lowest mean rating of importance in Figure 1. This highlights the importance of the context in which public service values are exercised, and the significance of the organizational role performed (see also Brudney et al., 2000; and Seldon et al., 1999). As a number of administrators reported, there are indeed some circumstances in which profitability may be an important value in their work. In other words, context matters. What is clear from both Figure 1 and Figure 2, however, is that the participants in this study found ethical values to be of most importance to them in their work as public administrators, but that other values such as professional, democratic, and human values also have great significance. In the section that follows, we present a model of public service values that seeks to illustrate why this is the case.
Figure 2.
Frequency of Value Ranked as Top 5 Administrative Value

- Honesty: 37
- Integrity: 26
- Accountability: 23
- Dedication: 17
- Reliability: 17
- Expertise: 12
- Lawfulness: 12
- Impartiality: 12
- Effectiveness: 9
- Serviceability: 8
- Incorruptibility: 7
- Humaneness: 7
- Efficiency: 7
- Courage: 7
- Benevolence: 5
- Transparency: 5
- Org. Interest: 4
- Inclusiveness: 4
- Public-Interest: 4
- Participative: 2
- Innovativeness: 2
- Sustainability: 2
- Responsiveness: 2
- Profitability: 2
- Collegiality: 1
- Social-Justice: 1
- Representative: 1
- Pluralism: 1
- Obedience: 1
- Self-Interest: 0
Model of Public Service Values

As members of society, public administrators internalize a broad range of values through sources such as personal experience, education, socialization, professional training, and religious tradition (Rokeach, 1973). The participants in this study reported that some of these values become more salient to them as public administrators because of the administrative context in which they operate. This context is characterized by interpersonal and interorganizational conflict, disagreement over the goals that they should pursue, and questions about their legitimacy as actors in the system of governance. In response, certain values, drawn from the overall range of values, manifest themselves as a combination of attitudes, skills, and behaviors that together constitute what participants regard as public service values. By acting on these values, public administrators are able to maintain legitimacy by establishing their own personal credibility, exhibiting professional competence, demonstrating respect for democratic principles, and maintaining positive relationships with citizens and colleagues. The Model of Public Service Values presented in Figure 3, and described below, depicts this relationship.
Figure 3. Model of Public Service Values

Range of Values

Accountability, Benevolence, Collegiality, Courage, Dedication Effectiveness, Efficiency, Expertise, Honesty, Humaneness, Impartiality Inclusiveness, Incorruptibility, Innovativeness, Integrity Lawfulness, Obedience Organizational Interest Participative, Pluralism, Profitability, Public Interest, Reliability, Representative, Responsiveness, Self Interest, Serviceability, Social Justice, Sustainability, Transparency

Public Administrative Context

Public Service Values

Ethical Values

Professional Values

Democratic Values

Human Values

Maintaining Legitimacy

- Personal Credibility
- Professional Competence
- Respect for Democratic Principles
- Positive Relationships With Citizens and Colleagues
Ethical Values

As noted earlier, the public administrators interviewed for this study were acutely aware of the need to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders, as well as the role that ethical values such as honesty, integrity, and accountability played in that regard. One city administrator stated the problem in these terms:

I do not think people trust or respect government. They do not feel that they have that level of honesty and good communications with them....I have regulations and I do have the responsibility of enforcing those. I think the best way to do that is to be honest about what it is we are implementing or what we are doing.

In response to this mistrust, participants clearly found that ethical values such as honesty, accountability, and integrity were essential for maintaining their personal credibility as a public administrator. As a school superintendent put it,

I think they’ve got to be just at the foundation of everything you do. For example, honesty and integrity – if you don’t have that, basically you have no credibility as a leader... You have to have that honesty and integrity one hundred percent of the time in order to build trust, because you have to have trust in order to be a leader.

In contrast to some other public service values, ethical values were perceived to be generally important in all areas of life, and not just in an administrative context. In effect, participants viewed ethical values as essential traits of a person with good character. As one administrator put it, “those [ethical values] are important to me personally in who I am and what I stand for, and I think that carries through in my day-to-day life. I am not a different person at home than I am at work.” The focus of this study, however, was on the role that these values play in the
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administrative context, and participants clearly expressed the view that ethical values were instrumentally significant in their ability to be effective in their work. One public administrator described the relationship between ethical values and effectiveness by saying,

*I’ve just got to be honest. People don’t do things unless they trust that you’re telling them the straight story. And you need people to do things, I mean you need other people to do things, you can’t do everything. You need to persuade other people to do things and I think trust is the most important advantage that one can bring to asking someone to do something.*

*Professional Values*

Importantly, participants noted that ethical values were not sufficient in themselves to maintain legitimacy as a public administrator. Rather, they report that these values must be exercised in combination with professional values such as expertise, dedication, and reliability. A lack of expertise, for example, gives the appearance of incompetence, and compromises the administrator’s ability to give good reasons for their actions and decisions. As one city administrator explained in discussing the need to have expertise,

*I have to be able to explain [my actions], and there's the expertise. You need to be an expert in what you do, that's what I really need to do. I need to be able to explain using my expertise and be able to explain to people why I choose what I choose and back that up... I always have examples for people so they understand what I am doing.*

By establishing their personal credibility (by acting on ethical values) and their professional competence (by acting on professional values), administrators are able to develop a reputation as a legitimate authority which, in turn, enables them to more effectively perform their work.
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Democratic Values

In addition to the ethical and professional values already discussed, administrators also described democratic values as important in the public administrative context. Along those lines, values such as inclusiveness and transparency were described by administrators as primary tools used to encourage communities to (a) trust their department or local government and to (b) elicit stakeholder buy-in for policies and projects. For example, a police chief reflected, “…if you do not include your stakeholders from the get-go, then you are not going to have success.” In particular, those administrators who had regular contact with the public emphasized the importance of allowing stakeholders to be heard in the decision making process. While these participants strongly acknowledged the intrinsic worth of democratic values such as inclusiveness and transparency, they also recognized their instrumental worth. In this vein, a state parks administrator acknowledged the benefits of citizen participation, even though his managers were “blown away” by citizen comments that the park should have signs to help drivers navigate the park and security lights. He explained, “Our managers are outdoor type of people and they hate signs….[but] we are here to provide service. You may not like their comment about security lights but I think it’s a valid point to provide a safe place for people.”

As we saw with ethical and professional values, administrators described the public service values which were most salient in their work as interrelated and mutually supportive. Similarly, the public administrators that we spoke with saw a clear connection between democratic values such as transparency, and ethical values such as integrity. One city administrator described the connection in this way,

*I think integrity is very important in city government. Integrity also to me is part of being transparent in government. I think that is very important. The public needs to know what*
you are doing and be able to get at information. Obviously, there are some things that are not open to the public but for the most part, I think open government is a real important thing and you need to have the integrity to do that.

Similarly, a state administrator reflected on the connection between transparency and effectiveness,

*I have worked for some people who I thought were very transparent... it's just remarkable what you can achieve when you're willing to explain to people why you're doing it and how you're doing it so they can see both sides of it. It's just something that I really value... I just think that people buy into something when they feel like they have an opportunity to see why you're doing something. That's just something that's really important to me.*

**Human Values**

Democratic values such as transparency and inclusiveness are believed to promote the common interest and are easily justified within the context of our political tradition. What may be less clear, however, is the role that human values – values such as benevolence and humaneness – might play in the public administrative context. Therefore, it is interesting to note that the participants in this study described human values as critically important in their work as public administrators, especially with respect to establishing positive relationships with citizens and colleagues. Importantly, the participants reported that these values manifest themselves principally through the exercise of interpersonal skills such as conflict mediation and good listening (on listening, see also, Stivers, 1994). For example, a municipal public works director, in talking about humaneness, stated,
A lot of times I think what people appreciate most about a municipal government is to just to take the time to listen to them. A lot of times they want nothing more than to give you their opinion... A lot of times it’s just patience, take the time and let them explain their issues and knowing that I’m maybe not going to resolve every one of them but it is important that they think that you sincerely listened to them. I think that it goes a long way to helping the image of our department.

Similarly, a police chief described the importance of humaneness in establishing positive relationships with citizens in this way,

_Humaneness - everyone is a person. You can’t be a bully in police work. You can’t use excessive force. We found that out through the years that the more humane you are to people, the better you treat people, the better they are to us._

In addition to humaneness, the participants also described benevolence as an important value in their work (on benevolence, see also, Frederickson and Hart, 1985). Notably, several participants commented on the importance of benevolence as a defining characteristic of public service, and the role human values generally play in establishing positive relationships with citizens and colleagues. For example, a state administrator discussing the differences between working in the public sector and working in the private sector stated,

_I have been with the state almost five years, but it has taken me a while to really figure out, what is our role? I guess that’s where benevolence comes in. I still kind of have a private sector mind set. I just never really thought about, you know... if you have a child with a disability, what happens to them? You know, where do they go? Where do you get services? So, I think you become very aware of that when you work for state government, and certainly in my department, and just knowing that there are a lot of individuals in_
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our communities that need assistance. We just need to work together to better our society and provide better services so as a whole we can be better communities and better humans.

In similar terms, a public works director discussed the importance of benevolence in serving the public by putting it this way,

_I think when I looked at this [benevolence], “To promote good and avoid harm for our citizens,” as I mentioned before, we are services. I am the one who is going to pick up your garbage. I am the one who is going to ensure that your water is safe to drink. I am the one who is going to build the new park... We are always trying to make our community better and provide nicer and more accommodations for our citizens. At the same time, I feel very responsible for their safety. A lot of my responsibilities involve responding to emergencies; whether it’s a flood or a blizzard. That is a big responsibility that we get placed upon us - to provide that safety issue for them. So I felt [benevolence] was important._

To sum up, participants generally found the entire range of values included in the survey to be good and helpful characteristics of public service, but the administrative context in which they are exercised has an influence on the level of importance they have in particular situations. Because the administrative context for public administrators is characterized by conflict, disagreement over the goals they should pursue, and questions about their legitimacy, the participants of this study emphasized the importance of public service values as a way of maintaining legitimacy. In that vein, we offer the following set of theoretical propositions:
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• **Theoretical Proposition One:** Ethical values such as honesty and integrity are instrumental in allowing administrators to establish personal credibility.

• **Theoretical Proposition Two:** Professional values such as expertise and effectiveness are instrumental in allowing administrators to establish professional competence.

• **Theoretical Proposition Three:** Democratic values such as inclusiveness and transparency are instrumental in allowing administrators to establish a commitment to democratic principles.

• **Theoretical Proposition Four:** Human values such as humaneness and benevolence are instrumental in allowing administrators to establish positive relationships with citizens and colleagues.

• **Theoretical Proposition Five:** In the public administrative context, acting on public service values (i.e., ethical values, professional values, democratic values, and human values) is instrumental in allowing public administrators to maintain legitimacy by establishing personal credibility, professional competence, commitment to democratic principles, and positive relationships with citizens and colleagues.

**Discussion**

This paper has presented the findings of a mixed-methods study conducted in the Midwest region of the U.S. that explored the role that values play in the work of public administrators. The findings reported here lend empirical support to NASPAA’s recent decision to make public service values a core element of how the field of public administration is distinguished. If effectively incorporated into the public administration curriculum, public service values serve as a powerful tool for educating public administrators who will be
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classified 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). Because public service values are exhibited broadly in the behaviors, attitudes, and skills of public administrators, it follows that they should also be incorporated broadly into the public administration curriculum. To that end, the best approach is one that draws linkages between public service values on the one hand, and the behaviors, attitudes, and skills that public administration programs seek to impart on the other.

One example of how public administration programs may draw such a linkage is within the context of a unit, possibly situated within a course in administrative law, exploring what has been called the “bureaucracy in a democracy” problem (Hall, 2005). Numerous administrative law cases may be framed from the perspective of how the courts have required public administrators to balance bureaucratic values such as efficiency and effectiveness against democratic values like due process, transparency and accountability (e.g., Goldberg v. Kelly, 1970; Department of Air Force v. Rose, 1976). Additionally, legislation such as the Administrative Procedures Act (1946) and the Federal Tort Claims Act (1946) may be considered from the standpoint of how Congress has sought to impose democratic values onto the work of public administrators.

As noted above, honesty has been identified by administrators as the most important value in their work. This raises the question of whether it is ever justified to be dishonest as a public administrator, and, if so, under what circumstances? Along these lines, a unit within an administrative ethics course may explore the contrasts between deontological and utilitarian approaches to the question of honesty. Whereas a deontological perspective, such as that
espoused by Immanuel Kant (1998), would argue for the duty to tell the truth in all instances, a utilitarian perspective, such as that espoused by Jeremy Bentham (1988), would emphasize the importance of taking the consequences of truth telling into account. Students could be given a set of cases to consider in which telling the truth may result in undesirable consequences, and then be asked to reason their way through, using both deontological and utilitarian approaches, to resolve the situation. Would truth telling in a particular case result in personal embarrassment or damage the reputation of their agency? What about circumstances in which truth telling may result in the loss of innocent life? In that regard, a historical case such as the Danish civil service’s effort to protect its Jewish citizens from the Nazis during World War II may be illustrative. The point would be to provide students with opportunities for reflecting on the role that honesty plays in public service.

Of course, the integration of public service values into the public administration curriculum need not be confined to obvious choices such as courses in administrative law or administrative ethics. Courses such as public budgeting and personnel management are among the key venues in which public administration programs emphasize the importance of professional values such as efficiency and expertise. However, a course in public budgeting may also integrate a democratic value like transparency by establishing a learning objective in which students acquire the skills to present budgets that are readily accessible and easily interpreted by citizens and elected officials. Apart from these technical skills, the course may also contain a unit exploring the democratic values that underlie the public budgeting process. A learning objective such as this can be helpful in developing a public service attitude on the part of students about the role of such values in our political system.
Likewise, a unit within a public personnel management course may explore the historical development of the U.S. Civil Service system by exploring the tensions that exist between the professional values of a merit-based system, and the Jacksonian democratic values reflected in the system of patronage that it largely replaced. In a more contemporary vein, students may also be asked to consider contrasts between the values associated with the system of political appointees in the executive branch, and the values associated with the system of career civil servants. Additionally, courses in public personnel management, along with courses in organizational management and leadership are particularly good settings for integrating human values into the public administration curriculum. For example, learning objectives that focus on the skills associated with conflict resolution and interpersonal communication allow students to acquire the skills they need to perform effectively in the high conflict environment that often characterizes the work of public administrators.

The key here is for degree programs in public affairs and administration to establish a set of direct measures for assessing the extent to which their students acquire the attitudes, behaviors, and skills required for them to incorporate public service values into their professional activities (NASPAA, 2009). This starts, of course, with ensuring that these same values are embedded in the internal governance of the program. As an example, program faculty should actively seek to include relevant stakeholders in the process of discerning and articulating the core values of the program, including not only the faculty teaching in the program, but also students and representatives from the organizations where they work. In other words, programs must not only “talk the talk,” but also “walk the walk” when it comes to public service values. By ensuring that they themselves act on ethical, professional, democratic, and human values in
serving the public interest, degree programs in public affairs and administration can more effectively promote public service values as the heart of the profession.
References


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