



Creating Public Value Through Inter-Organizational Collaboration and Information Technologies

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ABSTRACT

Creating public value is becoming increasingly important for digital government projects. This article proposes and tests a research model to improve our understanding of how value is created. Using a survey and structural equation modeling, this research explores the interactions among institutions, collaboration, and value creation. Although exploratory in nature, the results suggest that regulatory frameworks have an impact on facilitating the development of effective organizations, increasing collaboration and improved information technologies. Additionally, inter-organizational collaboration and technology enactments have an impact on the creation of value, but enacted technology appears to be unrelated to collaboration. The results from these models allowed the authors to find two additional issues: first, that there is a negative effect of institutional arrangements on service quality and, second, that the positive impact of enacted technologies on public value found in the original model remained for productivity, transparency, and quality, but not for costs and effectiveness.

KEYWORDS

Digital Government, Institutional Theory, Interorganizational Collaboration, Mexico, Public Value, Public Value Management, Structural Equation Modeling, Survey

1. INTRODUCTION

Research in public management has shown a growing interest in public value (Bozeman, 2019; Bryson et al., 2015; O'Flynn, 2021; Stoker, 2006). This growing interest responds in part to the increasing complexity of both the problems faced by public managers (Bryson et al., 2014; Hartley et al., 2019) and the networked environment in which they need to operate (Bryson et al., 2014; Pardo et al., 2011).

DOI: 10.4018/IJEGR.288069

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Moreover, digital government has been associated with public value creation in the form of increased efficiency, improved quality of services, or creating a more democratic society (Bannister & Connolly, 2014; Cordella & Bonina, 2012; Panagiotopoulos et al., 2019; Wirtz et al., 2019). However, many digital government projects fail to deliver such value (Heeks, 2003; Karunasena & Deng, 2012; Luna-Reyes & Andersen, 2013). We still need to learn more about the factors and processes that promote not only the success of a digital government project, but also the different ways in which they interact to create public value (Dawes, 2017; Gil-Garcia & Flores-Zúñiga, 2020).

On the other hand, the complexity of public problems and the networked environment also promote collaborative approaches to the development of digital government (Hui & Hayllar, 2010; Pardo et al., 2011; Phuaphanthong, Bui, & Keretho, 2010; Picazo-Vela et al., 2018; Wirtz et al., 2019). While collaboration has always been appealing because of its potential benefits, it has also been difficult to achieve (McCaffrey et al., 1995; Vangen et al., 2015), and there is a need for better and more integrative theories of collaboration and the value associated with such organizational forms (Amsler & O'Leary, 2017; O'Leary & Vij, 2012; Phuaphanthong, Bui, & Keretho, 2010; Prentice et al., 2019).

A public value perspective enables linking insights from different analytical and conceptual perspectives (Smith, 2004). In this paper, we apply a public value perspective to create linkages between two different streams of research in digital government, research on inter-organizational collaboration, and research on “ensemble views” of technology. Our main thesis is that integrating these theories will yield a more integrative theory of public value creation through digital government. The main contribution of this approach consists of offering an understanding of public value creation as the result of social and technological aspects, exploring the interactions among organizational factors (goals, processes, and resources), institutional arrangements (laws and regulations), new technologies, and forms of collaboration in the process of value creation. In this way, the research question guiding this study is, what are the main interactions among organizational factors, institutional arrangements, technology, and new forms of collaboration in the creation of public value?

To answer this question, we surveyed public managers in the information technology (IT) areas at the state level in Mexico, using a structural model to assess the main impacts of the key factors previously mentioned. Our current model, although still exploratory, suggests that organizational factors, collaboration, and technology have an impact on the creation of value, and that institutional arrangements play an important role in shaping inter-organizational collaboration and specific technology uses in the public sector. The model also suggests that collaboration differs from other organizational resources in the way in which it interacts with technology to create value.

This paper is organized into seven sections, including this introduction. The second and third sections introduce the literature review and the theoretical model, respectively. Section four constitutes a description of our research methods. In section five, we present the main research results of our study, and in section six we discuss and explain the main implications for theory and practice. Section seven includes final comments, limitations, and future research possibilities.

2. A PUBLIC VALUE PERSPECTIVE OF THE COLLABORATIVE USE OF IT INNOVATIONS IN GOVERNMENT

The concept of public value was introduced by Moore in 1995 (Moore, 1995) as a way of translating principles of strategic thinking from the private into the public sector. The basic idea of the concept was public and private managers have different goals. In this way, instead of committing to create private (economic) value, public managers commit to create public (social) value. Therefore, from Moore's perspective, public value may be understood as a concept to refer to the outcomes of public management actions. There is a closely related but different body of literature that focuses on public values (Beck, Jørgensen, & Bozeman, 2007; Bozeman, 2007, 2019). This literature focus is on cataloguing public values, as well as understanding the ways in which society agrees on them. Although

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