

# Advancing Ethics within Public Administration

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**Abstract:** *As agents of change between communities and organization, public managers help advancing ethics within public organizations. Rethinking the importance of ethics within public organizations helps to strengthen public managers as supporters of commitment and motivation at work of employees, and enablers of public values within society. Public managers help to drive public organizations towards future, promoting ethical behaviours and public values that contribute to maintaining public trust and improving democratic life. Rediscovering the value and practice of ethics enables the organisational dimension, leading to public managers as facilitators of collaborative processes that involve the citizenry and the community. Today, driving effective ethics-led public administration relies on the role of public managers as proactive supporters of ethical and socially responsible behaviours at work, within public administration and within society, driving the conduits that open up to shaping shared pathways for value creation and building wealthy communities and public spaces.*

**Keywords:** *ethics; public sector reform; public administration; public management.*

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## 1. Introduction

Rediscovering the value of ethics within a public, democratic and administrative space helps to drive public organisations to share with communities the commitment to public value creation, enabling public managers as facilitators and supporters between public organizations and communities within society (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2001; Moore, 1995). Today, the task of public administration is to ensure the development of democratic life and restore public trust and legitimacy by doing ethics (Frederickson & Rohr, 2015; Stoker, 2006). The future of public value creation relies on organizations and communities that promote ethical behaviours. Ethics is a source for public policies, promoting democratic and public values. Advancing ethics means to support employees at work, strengthening public value and public values [4]. Advancing ethics relies on public administrators who contribute to shared interests and shared responsibility (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2001). Organization is essential to ethics. The organizational ethics is necessary (Rhodes, 2022). Organizations support the role of management as a driver for effective and ethical performances of employees at work (Grigorescu et al., 2020).

The role of public management is to support public organisations to achieve the desired objectives and policies, improving the quality of life within communities (O'Flynn, 2007). Ethics is a key driver of behaviours, choices and policies within public value-oriented public organisations that interact with communities. Promoting ethics helps to enhance both the effective public administration and the role of public management as a key agent of organizational and cultural change. Public managers contribute to engendering ethics-led behaviours, promoting organisational values within public administration. As ethics-oriented actors, public managers are rediscovering both the importance of managerial profession and the role of the office as vocation (Du Gay, 2005). Public managers contribute to reinforcing loyalty, commitment and motivation at work of employees (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007).

Several studies have investigated the topic of public management reform with regards to performances of public administration. Thereby, still few studies have paid attention to the relationships between ethics and managerial behaviours and tasks as a *trait d'union* that enhances the organisational dimension of public administration. The research question refers to understand how public organisations are dealing with ethics by developing the managerial dimension, and enabling public management as a

driver for human capital improvement, and for motivation of employees at work.

The study aims to elucidate that advancing ethics within public administration relies on public sector reform as a means to support public managers to drive effective public administration as a service-oriented organisation which is meeting the needs of citizens, by supporting the motivation and commitment of employees at work, and aligning the individual objectives to the organizational mission of public administration. Public managers act as supporters between organization and society. Public managers are driving a sustainable public administration, empowering the employees and enhancing human resources as a key source for future advancements in engendering opportunities for value creation, supporting public values for better quality of life within communities.

## **2. Methodological section**

The aim of the study is to provide a literature analysis and review with regards to the role and importance of ethics as an enabler of managerial dimension and driver of public management effectiveness within public sector organizations. The articles and contributions are summarized and analysed, coherently with a narrative approach that opens up to new perspectives (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006), focusing on the role of public manager who is dealing with ethics in order to ensure better social performances and contribute to public values and value, promoting the organizational effectiveness of public administration as an organisation embedded within both society and communities.

The analysis is only descriptive. The study is structured in six sections. The introduction and methodological section help define the framework that refers to the relationship between ethics and public management. Understanding the ethics within public organizations is presented in the third section. In the fourth section, public management reform is a key driver of effectiveness and ethical conduit within public organizations. In the fifth section, the role of public managers as supporters between employees and community is presented. In the last paragraph, discussion and conclusions are presented.

## **3. Understanding ethics within public organizations**

The task of public organisations is to act in order to ensure the public interest. As accountable institutions, public organizations are supporting the continuity and effectiveness of democratic life, engaging citizens and communities (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2001). Public organizations have greater

goal complexity and ambiguity than business firms (Rainey & Bozeman, 2014), and outcome-oriented service ethos in managerial and decision-making style (Brereton & Temple, 1998). Ethics has been defined as a set of principles that provide a framework enabling the individuals for right action in accordance with that set of principles (Lawton et al., 2013). Advancing ethics within public organisations helps to reduce organizational ambiguity and shape managerial responsibility and autonomy (Pandey & Wright, 2006). The future of public organisations is to advance towards ethics as a set of principles and values driving actions and behaviours of management and employees at work (Macaulay, 2020). Ethics-driven public organizations helps increase democratic values and purposes, achieving a mixture of values (Frederickson & Rohr, 2015; Van Wart, 1998). Ethics refers to the way administrators have to think about their practice. It is incorporated in the employees' everyday behaviour (Svara 2021). Managerial, ethical and political values shape the strategy and exert influence on the behaviours of public administration. The ethics of public administration is related to behaviours of public servants who attend to law and community values in order to help citizens to meet their shared interest (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2001). Ethical issues refer to judgement of right and wrong behaviours and acting, and outcomes for both individuals and the organizations they work. Lawfulness, incorruptibility and impartiality emerge are related to public sector organizational values (Van der Wal et al., 2008). Public sector ethics concerns the relationships between organizational processes, environments outside organization, ethical decision making and unethical behaviours, and individual variables (Maesschalck, 2004). The actions of government are judged with regards to personal integrity (Dobel, 1998). The successful future of public administration relies on building professional ethical frameworks and promoting congruent values that concern citizens, politicians and public employees (Goss, 1996). Public management and administration enable people and communities to live wealthy and safe, and contribute to better quality of life, supporting public values (Dobel, 2006). Values are enduring beliefs that influence the choices about means and ends. As an essential aspect of public service, ethics guides the attitudes and behaviour of public managers and employees. Public managers are ethical agents in their work environments and within communities (Stewart, 1985).

#### **4. Public management reform as a driver of effectiveness and ethical conduct within public administration**

Public management reform helps to improve the functioning of public organisations that enable better performances, and serve the community, by restoring public sector values as drivers of ethical conduct and performance. The role of public sector reform is to introduce and strengthen both managerial and public values, continuously shaping public interest-driven behaviours, by identifying new ways for change, leading towards a new public service as an approach to public management. Public organizations are rethinking value-oriented and collaborative processes within communities, bringing together effectiveness, ethics and accountability, enabling the employees who construct a shared dialogue and values with citizens (O’Flynn, 2007). The issues of *New Public Management* relate to both government as a facilitator of public services and accountable managers who are responsible to provide answers to the communities with great delegated autonomy with regards to liberal and constitutional values (Parker & Gould, 1999). In particular, the issues of public management reform help public administration to restore public trust and legitimacy by building open government, long-term commitments, promoting leadership styles, inclusive stakeholder networks, strengthening collaboration, driving performances’ programs that are goal-oriented. With public sector reforms enabling managerial autonomy as a means for better performance, public organizations design managerial innovation in order to restore the legitimacy of public conduct (Verhoest et al., 2007).

Responsive public administration is developing publicness as an organizational attachment to public sector values (Antonsen & Jørgensen, 1997), supporting people to manifest their preference through trust and cooperation (Lynn, 1998) and promoting human capital growth (Mathiasen, 1999). The issues of public sector management reform support both the changing boundaries between state and civil society (Bevir et al., 2003). Public organizations are developing ethically-oriented pathways interacting and searching for a dialogue with communities within society, moving from an organizational view to an ecosystem approach, abandoning a managerialist setting (Dumay et al., 2010). The future of public administration relies on the governments as conductors and mediators between the citizens and nongovernmental actors (Holzer, 2022), leading to responsive public administration, and enabling public administrators who are able to engage in communication with the public, by supporting democratic accountability (Strivers, 1994). Despite of optimistic promises of public sector management reform, public management requires a new paradigm of democratic

accountability (Behn, 1998). Social equity, democratization and humanization support fair treatment and behaviours for inclusiveness in organization; democratization relates to empowerment of citizens and employees; humanization facilitates the quality of life for citizens (Wise, 2002). Public sector reform issues relate to a manager who has discretionary powers and freedom to act (Hood & Peres, 2004) in order to promote accountability and restore the public trust of citizens, following a management view to public value (Stoker, 2006).

### **5. The role of public managers as *supporters* between community and organization**

Promoting ethics helps to enhance effective public sector organisations and public management as key drivers of organizational and cultural change. Effective public management relies on an adequate administrative culture and managerial values of public sector employees. Ethics-oriented public organizations tend to enhance the role of managers who are able to support both commitment and motivation at work of employees, driving them to public value creation, and meeting the needs and sharing goals and responsibility with communities. As ethics-led and responsive organisations, public institutions contribute to public wealth, enabling public managers to drive collaboration with citizens as partners, strengthening collaborative responsiveness (Bryer, 2007).

Public management refers to choices that involve ethical commitments and decisions. Ethics is significant for managerial discretion (Dobel, 1998), for enhancing public service motivation as positively related to organizational commitment (Potipiroon & Ford, 2017), and supporting ethical organizational climate and culture, enabling the employees to develop ethical behaviours (Arar & Saiti, 2022). The ability of public manager is to identify needs of citizens, and communicate actively with them, involving the decision makers in the management process, providing assistance to them, and empowering the employees to build up a team work (Reichard, 1998). Managerial autonomy is a vehicle for ensuring both better performance and innovation-led views to benefit the organization (Verhoest et al., 2007). The role of public manager is to help ethics, advancing processes that involve public administration and communities towards public value creation. Managers are explorers who nurture innovation, playing a key role in networked governance framework (Hartley, 2005).

Organizations contribute to shaping an environment that supports employees to feel to commit to public services and public good [9]. Public managers have to drive public administration in advancing towards sustainable

future, empowering the employees to contribute to organizational and community goals, and support public values. Managers have to foster consultation and external communications in order to better understand and manage the organizations' environment and promote public administration as a responsive organization (Aucoin, 1990). Public managers contribute to the organizational change, establishing more clearly the determinants of performance (Boyne, 2002). The role of public managers is to make effective public organisations that contribute to public value creation (Moore, 1995), and support employees to be committed to the organizational mission. Public managers support the motivation at work of employees (Wright et al., 2013). Public managers play a key role in achieving multiple objectives, supporting both public trust maintenance. The public manager is at the centre of the relationships between public organization and society, by interpreting community values as related to public values (Grigorescu et al., 2020), developing leadership capabilities in order to communicate to employees the importance of the organisational mission, aligning employees' behaviours, supporting both motivation and commitment of public employees to values and goals of public organisations (Wright et al., 2013). A public value leadership agenda and policy paradigms are shaping the functioning and dynamics of behaviours within public organizations (Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010). As leaders, public managers contribute to ethical effectiveness, promoting ethical behaviours at work, motivating the employees to commit to public values, promoting a responsive public administration, and aligning the organization to the needs of communities (Hassan et al., 2014).

## **6. Conclusions**

Ethics does matter for effective public organization which supports better quality of life and value creation. Advancing ethics relies on people, commitment and motivation to public values. The future of public administration relies on fostering organizational ethics and promoting ethics-oriented policies and practices that contribute to the effectiveness of public organisations. Rediscovering the organisational and behavioural dimension of public administration enables the public manager to develop leadership roles and to address public sector management reform as a means to drive value creation processes by interacting with communities. Rediscovering the leadership and managerial roles as key drivers of both effective public organizations and public service motivation helps to shape cultural and organizational change within public administration. Successful public organizations rely on the role of public management as the agent of change and supporter of motivation at work of employees who are committed to

public services and values. Public managers support and address behaviours and attitudes of employees to ethical values, leading to public organisations that are building a dialogue with citizens, sharing initiatives and policies to drive public services co-production and shape collaborative pathways for value co-creation and co-innovation processes.

In the study only a theoretical analysis is presented with regards to advancing ethics within public organizations, strengthening the role of public management playing a role of a supporter between communities and organizations, developing managerial and leadership roles and capabilities, and enhancing public service motivation to engender aware ethical behaviour of employees at work, and drive public value advancements in order to build value-driven relationships between public administration and society

Rediscovering the importance of ethics within public and societal spaces helps public organisations to identify virtuous pathway in order to develop human resource management practices that enhance the employees as individuals who are committed and motivated to public services. Rediscovering the public service motivation as a key driver of employee's behaviours at work helps to develop the ethical dimension within public administration.

Reinforcing the leadership and management roles helps public organizations to enable employees who are identified in public and ethical values. Ethics-oriented employees serve both the public trust the public interest within value creation spaces. Ethics-oriented public organizations aim to select a sustainable pathway, developing the potential of human, social and organizational capital within work environments and public spaces open to the communities. This study has some limitations. There are no reported empirical cases. The study aims only to provide theoretical considerations on the evolving role of public manager between society and organization. Within future research investigating how local public organizations are redesigning human resource management policies, following an ethical view to personnel management, strengthening the role of public managers as effective leaders driving and training the employees for public value.

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