How can city leaders promote public value through soft metagovernance?

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Soft metagovernance

- The aim of this article is to explore the opportunities and challenges of employing ‘soft’ metagovernance to promote public value in city networks.
- Soft metagovernance involves making an emotional connection with people through a collaborative endeavour (rather than employing bureaucratic hierarchy).
Public value

• Public value describes the value an organisation or network contributes to society.
• The term was originally coined by Mark Moore (1995) who saw it as providing public managers with a tool to contribute to the common good.
• Now, the concept is no longer limited to the lone public manager.
• Attention is often focused on creating public value through networking and collaboration.

Moore’s strategic triangle

- Legitimacy & Support
- Operational capacity
- Public Value

Examples of soft metagovernance across the strategic triangle

- The Public Value proposition
  - Founding members used soft metagovernance to create an innovative public value proposition.
  - But, informality led to confusion amongst partners about focus & direction.
- The authorising environment
  - Soft metagovernance was used to selectively inform & empower critical actors & galvanise support in the city & beyond.
  - But, authorisation derived from high-trust, inter-personal relationships are vulnerable to changes in the formal institutional environment.
- Operational capacity
  - Reflexive thinking energised junior staff with a new sense of ‘agency’.
  - But, leaders need to join up ‘informal intelligence’ to be effective.
Conclusions

• This article provides new insights into how public value is (de)constructed as a consequence of soft metagovernance in city networks.
• It has explored the informal activities of city leaders in the creation of public value.
• Findings suggest that:
  • Relational leadership should not be viewed as a consequence of serendipity or chance.
  • A better understanding of how soft metagovernance functions can allow leaders to align their soft activities across the strategic triangle.
  • Aligning these soft activities more purposefully can maximise the potential to create public value & mitigate the risks of public value destruction.