

Public administration contributes to happiness: a study on the relationship between public value and happiness in Switzerland

Public
administration

Timo Meynhardt

*HHL Leipzig Graduate School of Management, Leipzig, Germany and
Center for Leadership and Values in Society, University of St Gallen,
St Gallen, Switzerland*

Pepe Strathoff

*Center for Leadership and Values in Society, University of St Gallen,
St Gallen, Switzerland*

Jessica Bardeli

HHL Leipzig Graduate School of Management, Leipzig, Germany, and

Steven Brieger

University of Sussex Business School, Brighton, UK

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Abstract

Purpose – In public management research, the focus in the public value debate has been on public administration organizations' broader societal outcomes. Public value describes how public administrations form a vital part of the social context in which people develop and grow. However, there has not yet been an analysis of how public administration contributes to happiness in society.

Design/methodology/approach – In this study, we empirically analyze the relationship between people's happiness and the public value of public administration. Our approach is based on a unique Swiss survey dataset comprising 870 individuals.

Findings – We find a positive relationship between public administration's public value and happiness. We also find preliminary evidence with a moderation analysis that the relationship between a value-creating public administration sector and self-reported happiness is stronger for public administration employees.

Research limitations/implications – While correlation studies cannot claim causal explanations and common method bias may additionally limit any research in social science, we took a number of measures to mitigate related problem. We tested our model in two samples and took both several procedural techniques and a survey design minimizing common method bias.

Data availability: The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethical approval: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and also with ESOMAR code of conduct. (https://www.esomar.org/uploads/public/knowledge-and-standards/codes-and-guidelines/ICCES_OMAR_Code_English_.pdf). Our research is not a medical study conducted with the participation of patients; therefore, the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments are not applicable here.

Informed consent: This was a fully anonymous online study and the participants were informed about it and agreed to participate by clicking on the link in the invitation e-mail. We did not collect any other forms of informed consent.

Author contributions: All authors contributed to the study conception and design. All authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interest: On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no further conflict of interest.



Practical implications – The paper discusses implications for public sector performance measurement for public management and practitioners.

Social implications – This study calls for a more positive view on the multiple functions public administration performs for society. After an era of critical voices, our study helps reclaim public administration as a positive force for society at large in times of grand challenges, such as climate crisis, demographics and digitization.

Originality/value – This study has highlighted the importance between public administration's public value and happiness in Swiss public service organizations. The study also showed that an employment in the public administration contributes to the happiness of individuals and beyond to society.

Keywords Happiness, Public value, Public administration, Public administration performance

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The quality of institutions has proved to be an important factor in explaining people's life satisfaction and happiness. In several studies, economists have consistently demonstrated that individual-level factors, socioeconomic factors and macroeconomic conditions play a major role when it comes to explaining happiness (Chia *et al.*, 2020; Frey and Stutzer, 2007; Gärling and Gamble, 2017). At the same time, institutional factors, such as the development of democratic institutions and the degree of autonomy on the local level, are important to explain why certain people are happier than others (Frey and Stutzer, 2002). In this line of thinking, public administration should be regarded as one important actor to enable respective experience of people. In particular, public administration encounters different societal values and represents an institutional expression of society (Waldo, 1948/2007; Weber, 1947). It is their legal mandate to contribute to the common good by creating value for the collective. Therefore, it is curious to note that public management research has not explicitly acknowledged the importance of public sector organizations in discussions of people's happiness. There is a bit of research on how public sector organizations influence the well-being of their employees (e.g. Berry, 2010; Grubert *et al.*, 2022) and how well-being can be measured to design public policy (Forgeard *et al.*, 2011). However, research with regard to public sector organizations' external influence on the communities and societies they serve has been sorely lacking. Previously, the focus on creating public value has been connected to increased performance at the macro-level (Gartenberg *et al.*, 2019), but the outcomes of public value creation at the individual micro-level have not yet been adequately researched (Hartley *et al.*, 2017). This gap was also mentioned by Okulicz-Kozaryn (2016), who emphasized that happiness research is lacking in public administrations and, particularly, on how bureaucracy affects happiness. In order to close the gap between the macro-level (public administration's public value) and micro-level (individuals' happiness), it is important to understand the underlying processes. For these reasons, this study is examining the research question: What is the relationship between public administration's public value and happiness at the individual level? We address this question by systematically analyzing the impact of public administration's broader societal outcomes (public value) on individuals' happiness. In doing so, we include public sector institutions' perceived performance as measured by their public value, to expand the model that economists have developed in happiness research (Frey and Stutzer, 2002). Furthermore, it has been shown that the use of economic measures is no longer sufficient to adequately explain social well-being and happiness (Diener, 2006; Jones *et al.*, 2016). We propose using the concept of public value to link the debate in economics to public sector management, because public value focuses explicitly on the manner in which public administration creates value for society (Moore, 1995; Meynhardt, 2009, 2015). In this context, Meynhardt's approach (2009, 2015) describes the individual perception of an organization's contribution to the common good, so that the evaluation of the value can be positive or negative. Moreover, the public value approach

allows us to understand the underlying processes in order to analyze the proposed relationship between the public value of public administrations at the macro-level and happiness of Swiss citizens at the micro-level. Additionally, we investigated whether the relationship between public administration's public value and happiness is for employees working in the public administration stronger than for non-public employees. Previous studies have looked at the external impact of common good services of organizations (Glavas and Kelley, 2014), but the internal impact on employees, especially on public administration employees, has not yet been thoroughly investigated. As employees in public administration are an essential stakeholder in contributing to the common good through their work, we want to understand their perspective in the perception of public administration's public value and their happiness. For the purpose of our study, we applied a cross-sectional design with study data from public administration in Switzerland.

Accordingly, we contribute four-fold with our paper: First, we connect the discussion on public administration's public value with happiness of citizens. More precisely, we connect the fields of public sector performance measurement and happiness research through the public value concept to link the micro-with the macro-level. Our study goes beyond previous research on the public value in public administration, which measures public value as principles of public institutions, in consider citizens' evaluations of public administration. As public organizations can create public value by shaping and co-creating individuals' experiences of their social environment, they can affect people's attitudes towards public administration. In this context, we show from the perspective of Meynhardt's public value approach (2009, 2015) that public administrations contribution to common good is important for happiness of the population. Second, our study contributes to highlighting the role of employment in public administration for the relationship between the perception of public administration's public value and happiness. In this sense, we contribution to the research field by not only considering individual micro-level processes outside the public administration, but also at individual processes within the organization at the employee level. Third, this study is a further addition to the field of research on public value (Grubert et al., 2022; Meynhardt and Jasinenko, 2020; Ritz et al., 2022) that has also supported to bridge the gap between micro- and macro-level processes. More specifically, our study scientifically contributes to the research field of public value literature by drawing on the public value approach (Meynhardt, 2009, 2015), which considers public value creation through need-fulfillment and as performance measurement of public administrations and its association with individuals' happiness. Fourth, we show practitioners (e.g. policy maker, managers) what positive consequences public administration public value has on members of society, so that measures to create public value within public administrations and public organizations can lead to positive outcomes.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Public value

The public value lens may offer additional perspectives on how public administration contributes to happiness. The perennial roots of public value are based on the work of Mark Moore's and his book *Creating Public Value* (1995). Specifically, Moore focused on the public manager's tasks in creating public value. Moreover, the public value concept has expanded beyond the work of Moore through other scientific approaches by the authors Bryson et al. (2014), Bozeman (2002, 2007), Benington (2011, 2015) as well as Meynhardt (2009, 2015). According to Bryson et al. (2014) another perspective in public administration is emerging, which goes beyond New Public Management. Against this background, public value has been viewed not only as a paradigm, a rhetoric or a narrative but also as a performance perspective (Alford and O'Flynn, 2009; Williams and Shearer, 2011). Furthermore,

Bozeman (2002) extended the concept beyond the public managers who had been the focus of Moore's (1995) work. His perspective implied that, public and non-public organizations have a responsibility and an impact on society (Bozeman, 2002). Moreover, Bozeman (2007) argued that every society has a set of agreed-upon public values which are essential for the functioning. Benington (2011, 2015) supplemented the topic with the abstract idea of the public sphere as the space in which public value is created by social actors. In his perspective only what is considered valuable by the public can create public value (Benington, 2011). Meynhardt's public value approach (2009, 2015) takes a broader perspective on how organizations can create public value for society. Thus, the concepts of Bozeman (2002, 2007) and Benington (2011, 2015) are contained parallels to Meynhardt's approach, such as, firstly, the extended responsibility of the private and public sectors and, secondly, the requirement of holding a value for society in order to create public value. However, the main difference in Meynhardt's (2009, 2015) approach is how the grounding of public value in psychological realities is a necessity in order to derive measures that can relate public value experience on a subjective level. Moreover, the concept of public value is closely related to the concept of public values (Bozeman, 2007; Hood, 1991; Jørgensen and Bozeman, 2007). Moore (1995) conceptualized public value as an outcome dimension of public sector activity that can be considered as a subjective but substantive measure of government performance (Meynhardt and Bartholomes, 2011; Brodsky, 2014; van Dooren *et al.*, 2010). However, the plural, public values, have been defined as "those providing normative consensus about (1) the rights, benefits, and prerogatives to which citizens should (and should not) be entitled; (2) the obligations of citizens to society, the state, and one another; and (3) the principles on which governments and policies should be based" (Bozeman, 2007, p. 13). In other words, public values deal with the normative principles guiding governmental action and therefore give direction to public sector employees' behavior (Andersen *et al.*, 2013; Bozeman and Su, 2015; Pandey *et al.*, 2016). Like the concept of public value, this concept is context-dependent, as it depends on what citizens and political actors value about an organization's actions (Moore, 2013; Vandenabeele *et al.*, 2013). Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) identified public values characteristics, e.g. fairness, justice and integrity. Public values, frequently influenced by political considerations, not only guide the course of public policy but also mold the identity of individuals and organizations (Andersen *et al.*, 2021; Hood, 1991). However, the public value term is, in contrast to the divisible public values, conceptualized as the totality of an organization's actions in the context of the values (Moore, 2013). Our study aims to evaluate the overall public value of the public administration and not only a specific set of public values from the citizens' perspective. Therefore, we focus on Meynhardt's public value approach which conceptualizes public value as a perceptual construct that manifests itself in an organization's contribution to the common good, which is perceived as the organization acting decently, contributing to social cohesion and quality of life in its environment and performing well in its core business. The individual evaluation in this approach is based on psychological need theory. Psychology has identified four basic needs that serve as a frame of reference to evaluate this experience. To that end, Meynhardt (2009) has translated these basic needs into four public value dimensions, referring to Epstein's cognitive-experiential self-theory (Epstein, 1993, 2003) as summarized in Table 1:

Public value can be measured in terms of these basic needs by the individual's experience, and functions as a resource for the individual (Meynhardt, 2009). If the basic needs are satisfied, this contributes to the individual's well-being. Public value is therefore created through individual experience and perception (Meynhardt, 2015) and can be created or destroyed depending on the individual's positive or negative evaluation (Meynhardt and Bartholomes, 2011). Meynhardt (2009) described the value dimensions – without hierarchy – as follows: Firstly, the basic need for positive self-evaluation refers to the moral-ethical basic value dimension. Secondly, there is the basic need for maximizing pleasure and avoiding pain, which

			Public administration
Basic need for ...	Translation into a motivation for ... (examples)	Basic value dimension	
Positive self-evaluation	• Positive self-concept and self-worth • Consistent relationship between self and environment • Feeling of high self-esteem (in social comparison)	Moral-ethical	
Maximizing pleasure and avoiding pain	• Positive emotions and avoidance of negative feelings • Flow experience • Experience of self-efficacy due to action	Hedonistic-aesthetical	
Gaining control and coherence over one's conceptual system	• Understanding and controlling one's environment • Predictability of cause-and-effect relationships • Ability to control expectations to cause desired outcomes	Utilitarian-instrumental	
Having positive relationships	• Relatedness and belongingness • Attachment, group identity • Optimal balance between intimacy and distance	Political-social	

Source(s): Table courtesy of [Meynhardt \(2009, p. 203\)](#)

Table 1.
Relationship between
basic needs and basic
value dimensions

refers to a hedonistic-aesthetical basic value dimension. Thirdly, the need to gain control and coherence over one's conceptual system translates to a utilitarian-instrumental value dimension. Fourthly, there is the need for having positive relationships, which refers to a political-social value. This dimensionality, as well as the existence of a second-order factor, namely public value, has been empirically corroborated ([Meynhardt and Jasinenko, 2020](#)). According to [Meynhardt's \(2009, 2015\)](#) public value operationalization, a person assesses the extent to which the four public value dimensions are fulfilled by the organization in order to determine the organization's contribution to the common good. In this sense, public value is created or destroyed when the experiences and behaviors of individuals and groups are influenced in a way that (de)-stabilizes social order evaluations, the sense of community or self-determination in a societal context and when organizations contribute to the fulfillment or satisfaction of basic human needs ([Meynhardt, 2009, 2015](#); [Meynhardt and Bartholomes, 2011](#); [Meynhardt and Gomez, 2016](#)). To illustrate this with a practical example: The regional employment agency in Switzerland (*Regionales Arbeitsvermittlungszentrum*) as a public administration supports individuals and society through appropriate measures. The public administration's public value contribution in our example is two-fold: First, for the individual the public administration supports with a job offer. Second, the society as a whole to keep the unemployment rate low and to support citizens in difficult times. In this context, the individual in society perceives the public administration and their services and uses un-(conscious) processes to evaluate the public value in several dimensions (see [Table 1](#)), such as how the public administration contributes with the services to social cohesion in Switzerland. Consequently, the public value of this public administration for the individual citizen in Switzerland is high, if the dimensions are evaluated positively and lead to the satisfaction of needs. We consider in our study public value as a public sector performance, whereby we do not take a closer look at productivity aspects in the performance perspective. An argument for excluding productivity aspects such as costs is provided by [Meynhardt and Fröhlich \(2019\)](#), who point out that "predominantly financial value concepts can be challenged regarding the extent to which they help create true psychological value for individuals, groups, organizations, and society as a whole" (p. 35).

Public value and happiness

As social beings, humans need to be part of a functioning social collective to live prosperous and satisfying lives. As an embodiment of the collective's will to achieve joint objectives, public administration shapes individuals' experiences with the collective. We assume that public administrations are not value-free (quasi-mechanistic) providers of public goods and services. Meynhardt's public value approach gives an important role in evaluating the assessment of task fulfillment but complements it with a moral, political and hedonic perspective. In this view, public administration connects the individual to the social collective, and it is public value that measures its performance in terms of how well it does. We assume, that the perception of public administration's public value of the individual embedded in society can lead to different intra-individual effects. In our study, we focus on the effects on individuals' happiness. The measurement we use to assess public administration's relationship on individuals' happiness fall into the subjective indicator category. Therefore, subjective indicators are based on the premise that to measure happiness, it is necessary to measure individuals' cognitive and affective reactions which relate to the whole life or individual areas of life (Diener and Suh, 1997). Consequently, these indicators focus on individuals' experience of their own lives. Following Robertson and Cooper (2011), happiness is comprised social, psychological and physical well-being. Moreover, it is worth noting that the term happiness includes both an emotional (Were you happy yesterday?) and an evaluative (Are you happy with your life as a whole?) component (Helliwell *et al.*, 2013). We focus on the latter, because we seek to understand how public administration contributes to happiness overall. Accordingly, we use the terms happiness and life satisfaction as synonyms.

The previous focus of happiness research refers to studies which have shown that socio-demographic factors and personality dispositions are major determinants of happiness (Diener, 2000; Diener *et al.*, 1999; Frey and Stutzer, 2000; Lu *et al.*, 2001; Lü *et al.*, 2014; Oerlemans and Bakker, 2014; Welzel and Inglehart, 2010). But, to our best knowledge, there is a lack of studies on happiness in the research field of public administration, so that our study aims to bridge the gap between macro-level (public administration's public value) and micro-level (individuals' happiness) phenomena, which was also postulated by Bailey *et al.* (2017). Therefore, happiness should be seen as an important social outcome that should be directly monitored and improved (Diener and Seligman, 2018). We base our assumption on the public value theory (Meynhardt, 2009, 2015) that organizations that contribute to the common good can satisfy individuals' basic needs, which can lead to positive attitudes and behaviors (Epstein, 2003). As Meynhardt (2009) described, public value can positively or negatively affect the way individuals' experience the fulfillment of their basic needs, which in turn affects individuals' motivation, attitudes and behavior. Ultimately, public value measures how positively an individual perceives the impact of the public sector (as a whole or of particular organizations) on his or her experience of the social collective. Public value creation entails strengthening the social collective that serves as a resource for the individual and will therefore increase its self-reported happiness. Previous studies figured out that satisfaction of basic needs is a predictor of life satisfaction (Greguras and Diefendorf, 2010). Another study by Meynhardt *et al.* (2020) identified a positive relationship between organizational public value and employee life satisfaction. Furthermore, Wang *et al.* (2022) examined 30 economic, political as well as social indicators to measure public value. Three indicators that belong to the superordinate area of social values capture happiness. Further, Denters *et al.* (2016) found that satisfaction with administrative services, especially the accessibility and performance of their administrators, is high in Switzerland, which probably leads to higher life satisfaction. Our aim is to capture the value contribution of public administration to society which can contribute to individual happiness. Given the widespread and growing scientific support as well as theoretical considerations, we suggest that public value, and in particular

Meynhardt's public value approach (2009, 2015), serves as an appropriate instrument for the understanding how individuals' happiness can be positively influenced through public administration's public value. Hence, we formulate our first hypothesis as follows:

- H1. The individuals' perception of public administration's public value is positively related to their self-reported happiness.

The moderating role of public administration employment. We continue by investigating that the positive relationship between public administration's public value and happiness is even stronger for individuals who work in public administration. In particular, we consider employment in public administration to investigate whether there are differences in the perception of public administration's public value of public and non-public employees and the positive consequences for their self-reported happiness. So far, there is no research about how public administration's public value affects happiness and especially on how the relationship is moderated by employment in public organizations. Hence, we assume that the public value of the public administration play a key role in the evaluation and identity formation process for public administration employees. We base our assumptions on the social identity theory (Ashfort and Meal, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1985) which suggest that the identification with the employment organization, as in our study the public administration, depends on the internalization of group membership and that members who identify with a group also try to behave in accordance with the norms and values of the group. Moreover, it was also shown that belonging to the organization has an effect on the individual self-concept. Thus, organizations that contribute to the greater good enable individuals a better self-awareness of their own group as well as positive expectations of how others perceive their own group. Therefore, public administration employees can benefit from more positive recognition from the population, so that we believe it can lead to a higher perception of public value of their organizations and also a higher level of happiness. A study supports our assumption and showed that employees who work for organizations that contribute to the common good receive a positive acknowledgement from society, which influences their self-concept positively and leads to more life satisfaction (Vlachos *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, we assume that the moderating effect of public administration employment depends also on the Public Service Motivation (Perry and Wise, 1990) of the employees. Public Service Motivation means the willingness to contribute to society as a whole and to service the public interest through an employment in public organizations (Ritz *et al.*, 2022). In this context, research has shown that individuals who choose to work in the public sector do so (partly) out of a motivation to serve the public interest and to do something good for society (Rainey and Steinbauer, 1999; Perry and Hondeghem, 2008; Vandenabeele, 2008; Perry *et al.*, 2010; Vandenabeele *et al.*, 2014; Ritz *et al.*, 2016). This motivation distinguishes public sector employees from private sector counterparts (Clark, 1996; Perry, 2000; Van der Wal *et al.*, 2008). A study from Homberg (2017) showed evidence about a higher level of happiness of public sector employees. Moreover, the research found out that employees with higher levels of work engagement also exhibited higher levels of life satisfaction (Bakker *et al.*, 2008; Caesens *et al.*, 2014; Grawitch and Barber, 2010; Hakanen and Schaufeli, 2012). We argue that employment in the public administration plays an essential moderating role in the positive relationship between public administration public value and self-reported happiness. Therefore, we hypothesize that individuals who work in the public sector link their happiness more strongly to the public sector's contribution to the public value. When such individuals make public value evaluations, they also indirectly evaluate themselves and their work. For them, public value evaluations are linked to their self-concept and identity, since they consider themselves as guardians of the common good. Furthermore, quite obviously, the public sector – being a workplace and a service provider – plays a much bigger role in public administration employees' lives than in the lives of people working in other sectors. The public sector is therefore an even more important

shaper of the collective experience from which value is drawn. Accordingly, we formulate our second hypothesis as follows:

- H2.* The relationship between the individuals' perception of public administration's public value and their self-reported happiness is stronger for individuals employed in public administration than for individuals who are not employed in public administration.

Methods

Data collection

Our empirical research is based on data collected within the framework of the Swiss Public Value Atlas ([Public Value Atlas Switzerland, 2014, 2019](#)). The Public Value Atlas includes Meynhardt's public value theory, which aims to present the evaluation of the contribution from private and public organizations, as well as public administrations, to the common good in Switzerland ([Public Value Atlas Switzerland, 2014, 2019](#)). Intervista, a market research institute, collected the dataset during the spring of 2014, and 2019 respectively. Prior to the main study, a quantitative ($N = 60$) and qualitative pretest showed that the questions were well understood and the length of the survey was adequate. The sample comes from the Swiss population – 4,483 subjects – and the participants used an online survey. The sample was representative of the Swiss population in terms of gender, age, level of education and region of residence. The participants for the survey were asked to evaluate the public value of major Swiss organizations and sectors based on the four public value dimensions. This study considers those 870 randomly selected respondents who evaluated public administration in the online survey. Out of the sample's 870 individuals who evaluated the public administration sector, 87 are likewise employed in the Swiss public administration. Overall, the distribution of socio-economic characteristics corresponds to that of the Swiss population, indicating a comparatively representative sample. After completing the socio-demographic data, participants were asked to complete the survey, which included instruments that test our hypotheses.

Measures

Public value

The public value of the Swiss public administration sector is our major explanatory variable. We used single-item measures for each public value dimension, which represent a short version of a 12-item public value scale ([Meynhardt and Jasinenko, 2020](#)). The respondents were asked to evaluate the Swiss public administration sector, along with clearly defined public value dimensions ([Meynhardt, 2009](#); [Meynhardt and Bartholomes, 2011](#)) by stating whether they agreed with specific statements on a Likert scale from 1 (full disagreement) to 6 (full agreement). The public value of the Swiss public administration was calculated as the mean of the four public value dimensions. In [Table 2](#), we report the items we used to measure public value.

Although our approach to measuring the four public value dimensions relies on single-item measures, we aggregated these measures to obtain a respondent's overall public value perception (Cronbach's alpha of 0.91). This approach fits the public value construct's multidimensionality. Importantly, when we considered the sector variable public value of public administration, we relied on people's individual evaluations. As shown in [Table 3](#), the Swiss public administration is evaluated as having an average public value of 4.36 ($SD = 1.08$), which suggests that the respondents are relatively satisfied with it. The utilitarian-instrumental dimension is considered positively (4.45), while the moral-ethical dimension shows the lowest score (4.25).

Happiness

Self-reported happiness as the dependent variable is based on the following single-item measure: How satisfied are you in general with your life (Helliwell *et al.*, 2013). The respondents were asked to evaluate this question by using a six-point Likert scale ranging between two extreme values (completely dissatisfied – 1 and completely satisfied – 6). This item is used as a standard in many studies and was furthermore confirmed as valid and reliable (Myers, 2000; Di Tella and MacCullich, 2006) to measure overall life satisfaction (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007; Wanous *et al.*, 1997). Figure 1 shows that with an average of 4.7 (SD = 0.99) out of six points, the sample population of Swiss respondents has a very high level of self-reported happiness. Approximately 16% of the respondents perceive themselves as completely satisfied (6), 54% report a 5, and 18% a 4, while only 1% are completely dissatisfied (1); 3 and 7% of the respondents chose options number 2 and 3, respectively.

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Control variables

Based on numerous studies identifying factors that influence happiness, we included selected socio-demographic and economic control variables in our calculation. We controlled for age (seven groups, ranging from 29 years and younger to 80 years and older); gender (male = 1, female = 2); degree of formal education (three groups, ranging from low education to high education) and the only economic control variable individual's per capita monthly gross income (six groups, ranging from less than CHF 3,000 to more than CHF 12,000).

Dimension	Item Public administration . . .
Moral-ethical	. . . behaves in a decent manner
Hedonistic-aesthetical	. . . contributes to the quality of life in Switzerland
Utilitarian-instrumental	. . . does good work in its core business
Political-social	. . . contributes to social cohesion in Switzerland

Source(s): Table courtesy of Meynhardt and Jasinenko (2020)

Table 2.
Items for measuring
public value

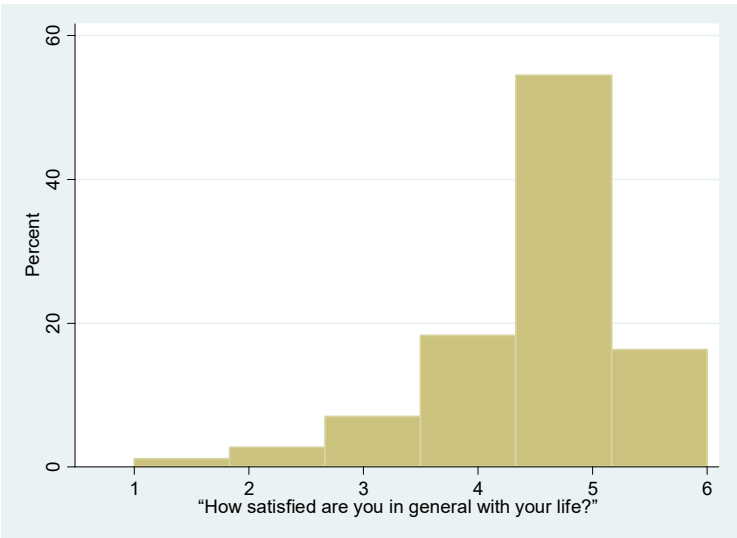
	Moral- ethical	Political- social	Utilitarian- instrumental	Hedonistic- aesthetical	Public value	<i>N</i>
Public administration	4.25	4.36	4.45	4.37	4.36	870
<i>Percent distribution</i>						
1 – full disagreement	2.18	2.76	1.38	1.72		
2	6.67	5.98	5.86	5.17		
3	16.21	14.37	14.02	16.78		
4	27.24	25.17	23.45	24.60		
5	34.25	33.10	35.98	34.48		
6 – full agreement	13.45	18.62	19.31	17.24		

Note(s): Public value equals (moral-ethical + political-social + utilitarian-instrumental + hedonistic-aesthetical) divided by 4

Source(s): Authors' own creation, Public Value Atlas Switzerland (2014)

Table 3.
Means and distribution
of public
administration's public
value evaluation

Figure 1.
Distribution of
happiness



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Analysis and results

Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations for the variables happiness, public value of public administration and all control variables. The correlation coefficients are all in the anticipated direction.

Moreover, the correlation analysis indicates significant positive correlation between public administration's public value and happiness ($r = 0.28, p < 0.05$). Sex ($r = 0.09, p < 0.01$), age ($r = 0.22, p < 0.01$), education ($r = 0.08, p < 0.05$) and monthly per capita gross income ($r = 0.10, p < 0.01$) are positively related to happiness. The results with the control variables confirm that socio-demographic and economic factors have a positive relationship to happiness, as shown in Table 5.

Table 6 shows the results of the institutional variable of public administration's public value. We ran an ordinary least squares regression with robust standard errors to show the positive relationship between public administration's public value as an independent variable and happiness as a dependent variable. The result indicates that public

Table 4.
Descriptive statistics
and correlations
between variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Happiness	4.71	0.99	1	6	1					
2. Age	2.61	1.51	1	6	0.23***	1				
3. Sex (female = 1)	0.41	0.49	0	1	0.09***	-0.23***	1			
4. Education	3.86	1.23	1	6	0.08**	-0.03	-0.07**	1		
5. Per capita gross income	4.04	1.28	1	6	0.10***	-0.02	-0.11***	0.26***	1	
6. PV public administration	4.36	1.08	1	6	0.28***	0.14***	0.05	0.07**	0.04	1

Note(s): *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; $N = 870$
Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation; Max, maximum; Min, minimum
Source(s): Authors' own creation, [Public Value Atlas Switzerland \(2014\)](#)

Happiness statistics mean			SD	N	Public administration
Age 29 and younger	4.46		1.16	101	
Age 30–39	4.52		1.06	117	
Age 40–49	4.51		0.99	167	
Age 50–59	4.63		0.97	208	
Age 60–69	5.03		0.79	194	
Age 70–79	5.17		0.75	76	
Age 80 and older	5.00		0.57	7	
Male	4.64		1.04	513	
Female	4.82		0.89	357	
Low education	4.73		1.20	49	
Middle education	4.63		1.03	531	
High education	4.86		0.98	290	
Unmarried	4.35		1.13	185	
Concubinage	4.75		0.69	84	
Married/with partner	4.88		0.87	482	
Married but living alone	4.38		1.38	26	
Divorced	4.47		1.15	72	
Widowed	5.05		0.86	21	
Employed (non-executive)	4.59		0.91	268	
Employed (executive)	4.70		0.92	218	
Self-employed	4.86		0.80	63	
Student	4.66		1.23	32	
Homemaker	4.47		1.10	59	
Retired	5.09		0.81	209	
Unemployed	2.95		1.46	21	
Gross income less than CHF 3,000	4.48		1.28	27	
CHF 3,000–4,500	4.47		1.22	86	
CHF 4,501–6,000	4.68		1.05	160	
CHF 6,001–9,000	4.71		0.91	272	
CHF 9,001–12,000	4.80		0.88	204	
More than CHF 12,000	4.83		0.94	121	
PA Employee	4.95		0.84	87	

Note(s): Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation

Source(s): Authors' own creation, [Public Value Atlas Switzerland \(2014\)](#)

Table 5.
Happiness means by
socio-demographic
categories

administration's public value relates positively to happiness ($b = 0.216, p < 0.01$), suggesting that a value-creating public sector increases the likelihood of reporting higher happiness. When excluding the control variables in this regression model, the hypothesized association remains statistically significant. Furthermore, we control for heteroscedasticity by using robust standard errors.

We also ran the regression analysis with all four public value dimensions separately (see [Table 6](#)), which yielded similar results. All coefficients were positive and significant. This result is consistent with our first hypothesis that a higher public value of public administration increases self-reported happiness. Hence, [Hypothesis 1](#) is confirmed.

Furthermore, we find evidence that the relationship between the public administration's public value and self-reported happiness is stronger for individuals employed in public administration than for individuals who are not employed in public administration. As shown in [Table 7](#), the public value of public administration's interaction term with the public employee variable is significant in predicting happiness ($b = 0.210, p < 0.05$). Moreover, the analysis includes sex, age, education and income as covariates, and an equally robust standard error. In terms of this, the relationship between public administration's public value

Table 6.
OLS regression

Dependent variables	Independent variables			
	Public administration's public value	Public administration's public value moral-ethical dimension	Public administration's public value political-social dimension	Public administration's public value utilitarian-instrumental dimension
Happiness	0.216*** [0.030]	0.184*** [0.028]	0.140*** [0.027]	0.178*** [0.027]
Age	0.149*** [0.021]	0.148*** [0.021]	0.156*** [0.022]	0.157*** [0.022]
Sex (female = 1)	0.290*** [0.065]	0.294** [0.065]	0.305*** [0.066]	0.304*** [0.066]
Education	0.117** [0.058]	0.124** [0.059]	0.121** [0.059]	0.115 [0.059]
Per capita gross income	0.072*** [0.026]	0.075*** [0.027]	0.072*** [0.027]	0.072*** [0.027]
Constant	2.531*** [0.232]	2.666*** [0.227]	2.814*** [0.229]	2.631*** [0.225]
N	870	870	870	870
R ²	0.147	0.141	0.123	0.138
Adjusted R ²	0.142	0.136	0.118	0.133
F	24.82	23.38	18.96	24.92
Note(s): ***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; standard errors in parentheses				
Source(s): Authors' own creation, Public Value Atlas Switzerland (2014)				
				2.635*** [0.231]
				870
				0.140
				0.135
				22.81

	Public employee model	Interaction model	Public administration
<i>Independent variable</i>			
PV of public administration	0.211*** [0.031]	0.200*** [0.032]	
<i>Moderator</i>			
PA employee	0.086 [0.092]	−0.965* [0.528]	
<i>Interaction</i>			
PV of public admin × PA employee		0.210** [0.101]	
<i>Controls</i>			
Age	0.149*** [0.021]	0.150*** [0.021]	
Sex (female = 1)	0.293*** [0.066]	0.296*** [0.066]	
Education	0.116** [0.058]	0.118** [0.058]	
Per capita gross income	0.072*** [0.026]	0.069** [0.027]	
Constant	2.543*** [0.232]	2.588** [0.236]	
<i>N</i>	87	87	
<i>R</i> ²	0.147	0.150	
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.141	0.143	
<i>F</i>	20.90	19.90	

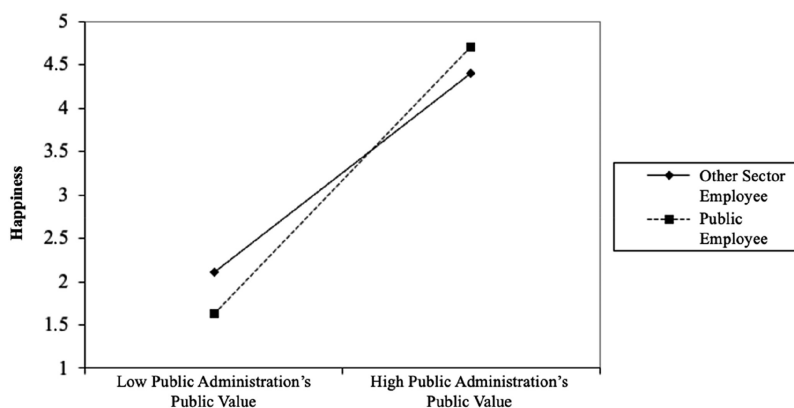
Note(s): DV, Happiness; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$; standard errors in parentheses
Abbreviations: PV, public value; PA, public administration
Source(s): Authors' own creation, [Public Value Atlas Switzerland \(2014\)](#)

Table 7.
Result of moderated regression analysis

and happiness is stronger when employees work in public administration (see [Figure 2](#)). [Hypothesis 2](#) is therefore also confirmed.

Endogeneity concerns and robustness analysis

To partially solve the endogeneity problem, which could affect our results, we investigate whether the relationship between public administration's public value and happiness differs between social groups. Social groups were defined in accordance with per capita gross income, current profession, education and marital status. To investigate the differences between social groups when it comes to the relationship between public administration's public value and happiness, four individual moderation analyses were calculated. As shown



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 2.
Interaction between public administration's public value and public employee for the prediction of happiness

in Table 8, each of the four moderator analyses shows significant results. Against this background, we assume that Swiss public administration contributes to the Swiss population's happiness.

To investigate the robustness of our results, we used an ordered logit approach to determine the relationship between public administration's public value and happiness. Following hierarchical regression logic, we analyze how socio-demographic and economic factors affect happiness in the first model. The second model adds public value of public administration as an explanatory variable. Using the likelihood-ratio test to compare the two models' goodness-of-fit levels with each other, we analyze whether the public value model fits the data better than the standard happiness model (see Table 9).

All coefficients were positive and the estimated positive effect is strong. The public value variable increases the goodness-of-fit measure in the second model. McFadden's pseudo R^2 increases from 0.08 to 0.10. The results of the likelihood-ratio test indicate that the public value model fits the data significantly better than the standard happiness model (LR χ^2 change of 45.14, $p < 0.001$).

To strengthen the robustness of our results, we conducted further analyses by analyzing the relationship between selected organizations in the public administration's public value and the population in Switzerland's self-reported happiness. For this purpose, we choose the study of the Public Value Atlas 2019 for Switzerland (Public Value Atlas Switzerland, 2019), which also collected data through an online survey. Furthermore, we measured happiness using Diener *et al.* (1985) five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale.

For our analysis, we selected *Regionales Arbeitsvermittlungszentrum (RAV)* and *Alters- und Hinterlassenversicherung (AHV/IV)*, which were evaluated in the data set. The RAV is a state institution for unemployed people in Switzerland and supports finding a new job. AHV/IV is the compulsory pension insurance in Switzerland and is responsible for securing subsistence. Firstly, we correlated the public value of the Swiss public administration organizations RAV and AHV/IV with the happiness scale. Both correlations are positive and significant for each organization, as shown in Tables 10 and 11.

	Happiness
<i>Independent variable</i>	
PV of public admin	0.342*** [0.074]
<i>Moderator</i>	
Per capita gross income	0.585** [0.244]
<i>Interaction</i>	
PV of public administration $\times$ per capita gross income	-0.102* [0.052]
<i>Controls</i>	
Age	0.146*** [0.021]
Sex (female = 1)	0.285*** [0.065]
Education	0.120** [0.058]
Constant	2.108*** [0.370]
<i>N</i>	870
<i>R</i> ²	0.152
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.147
<i>F</i>	20.70

Table 8.
Moderated regression
analysis

Note(s): DV, Happiness; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; Standard errors in parentheses
Abbreviations: PV, public value; PA, public administration
Source(s): Authors' own creation, Public Value Atlas Switzerland (2014)

	(1) Standard model		(2) Public value model	
	Coefficients	z-statistics	Coefficients	z-statistics
Age 29 and younger	Reference group		Reference group	
Age 30–39	0.146	(0.49)	0.122	(0.41)
Age 40–49	0.020	(0.07)	–0.011	(–0.04)
Age 50–59	0.138	(0.47)	0.101	(0.34)
Age 60–69	0.781**	(2.26)	0.760**	(2.21)
Age 70–79	1.037**	(2.31)	1.094**	(2.44)
Age 80 and older	0.288	(0.35)	0.140	(0.17)
Male	Reference Group		Reference Group	
Female	0.760***	(5.05)	0.658***	(4.32)
Low education	Reference Group		Reference Group	
Middle education	–0.532*	(–1.69)	–0.453	(–1.41)
High education	–0.287	(–0.86)	–0.248	(–0.73)
Unmarried	Reference Group		Reference Group	
Concubinage	0.532**	(2.04)	0.589**	(2.23)
Married/with partner	0.798***	(3.78)	0.788***	(3.72)
Married but living alone	0.127	(0.28)	–0.060	(–0.13)
Divorced	0.105	(0.36)	0.0464	(0.16)
Widowed	0.890*	(1.80)	0.935*	(1.88)
Employed (non-executive)	Reference Group		Reference Group	
Employed (executive)	0.190	(1.02)	0.111	(0.59)
Self-employed	0.417	(1.46)	0.573**	(1.99)
Student	0.651	(1.53)	0.567	(1.34)
Housewife	–0.806***	(–2.70)	–0.766**	(–2.54)
Retired	0.585**	(2.07)	0.373	(1.32)
Unemployed	–2.549***	(–5.50)	–2.300***	(–4.86)
Gross income less than CHF 3,000	Reference Group		Reference Group	
CHF 3,000–4,500	–0.386	(–0.86)	–0.376	(–0.84)
CHF 4,501–6,000	0.004	(0.01)	–0.017	(–0.04)
CHF 6,001–9,000	–0.035	(–0.08)	–0.091	(–0.22)
CHF 9,001–12,000	0.294	(0.69)	0.229	(0.54)
More than CHF 12,000	0.340	(0.77)	0.253	(0.57)
Public value of public administration	–	–	0.430***	(6.65)
McFadden R^2	0.080	–	0.100	–
LR χ^2	176.6***	–	221.7***	–
Δ LR χ^2	–	–	45.14***	–
N	870		870	

Note(s): DV: Happiness (six-point scale); *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$

Source(s): Authors' own creation, [Public Value Atlas Switzerland \(2014\)](#)

Table 9.
OLS logit regression

Variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Happiness	4.63	0.88	1	6	1					
2. Age	3.09	1.70	1	6	0.15**	1				
3. Sex (female = 1)	0.56	0.49	0	1	–0.02	–0.19**	1			
4. Education	6.69	1.55	1	6	0.11	–0.05	–0.05	1		
5. Per capita gross income	3.73	1.46	1	6	0.09	–0.25***	–0.17**	0.46***	1	
6. Public value AHV/IV	5.31	1.00	1	6	0.28***	0.35***	–0.16**	0.05	–0.02	1

Note(s): *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; $N = 173$; Gross income $n = 138$

Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation; Max, maximum; Min, minimum

Source(s): Authors' own creation, [Public Value Atlas Switzerland \(2019\)](#)

Table 10.
Correlation between
public value score of
AHV/IV and happiness

Table 11.
Correlation between
public value score of
RAV and happiness

Variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Happiness	4.42	0.97	1	6	1					
2. Age	2.51	1.79	1	6	0.18***	1				
3. Sex (female = 1)	0.56	0.49	0	1	−0.13	−0.20**	1			
4. Education	6.95	1.74	1	6	0.16	−0.10	0.02	1		
5. Per capita gross income	3.56	1.42	1	6	0.22**	−0.02	−0.11	0.28***	1	
6. Public value AHV/IV	4.26	1.34	1	6	0.32***	0.21**	0.08	−0.04	0.04	1

Note(s): *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; $N = 129$; Gross income $n = 108$
Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation; Max, maximum; Min, minimum
Source(s): Authors' own creation, [Public Value Atlas Switzerland \(2019\)](#)

Moreover, we performed an ordinary least squares regression for both organizations to prove the relationship between public administration's public value and happiness. Furthermore, we controlled for the variables gender, age, education, as well as gross income per capita. *AHV/IV*'s public value related positively to happiness ($b = 0.191, p < 0.05$). *RAV*'s public value is also positively associated with happiness ($b = 0.236, p < 0.01$). Both regressions are highly significant at the 1 and 5% level and support our result of [Hypothesis 1](#) (see [Table 12](#)) and also validate the robustness and generalization of our findings in the Swiss population.

Discussion

A core tenet of public value theory is that public administration and its managers create value for individuals in society ([Meynhardt, 2009](#); [Moore, 2014](#)). So far, public management research has not sufficiently explored the importance of public sector organizations in discussions about citizens happiness. While previous studies focused on how public sector organizations affects the well-being of their employees ([Berry, 2010](#); [Grubert et al., 2022](#)) and how well-being can be measured to shape public policy ([Forgeard et al., 2011](#)), the impact on society's happiness has remained largely unexplored. Therefore, a holistic understanding of the interplay of value creating processes at the micro- and macro-level is important, as there is still a lack of research in public administration and management, especially for the concept of value ([Meynhardt et al., 2016](#); [Osborne et al., 2021](#)). To understand the underlying phenomena

Table 12.
OLS regression for
AHV/IV and RAV

Dependent variables	Independent variables	
	Public value AHV/IV	Public value RAV
Happiness	0.191** [0.089]	0.236*** [0.085]
Age	0.063 [0.057]	0.121* [0.067]
Sex (female = 1)	−0.142 [0.155]	0.036 [0.219]
Education	0.063 [0.127]	0.385* [0.201]
Per capita gross income	−0.001 [0.002]	0.001 [0.002]
Constant	3.439*** [0.615]	2.207*** [0.660]
N	117	71
R^2	0.108	0.211
Adjusted R^2	0.067	0.150
F	2.30	4.40

Note(s): *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$; standard errors in parentheses
Source(s): Authors' own creation, [Public Value Atlas Switzerland \(2019\)](#)

at the macro- (public administration's public value) and micro-level (individuals' happiness), we use Meynhardt's public value approach (2009, 2015), which conceptualizes organizational value creation for the common good. It is the first study to our knowledge, which investigated the relationship between public administration's public value and happiness of citizens. Thus, we tried to contribute to bridge the gap to understand the value creation processes at the micro- and macro-level by investigating the potential benefits of public administration's public value, which positively affects the individual level. Our study contributes novel empirical evidence to the role public administration's public value plays for individuals' happiness using a Swiss citizen sample. In our first step, we hypothesized that the perceived public administration's public value is positively related to self-reported happiness. Indeed, the significant positive direct effect of perceived public administration's public value on individuals' happiness supports our view. In our second step, we hypothesized that the relationship between the perceived public administration's public value and self-reported happiness is stronger for individuals employed in public administration than for individuals who are not employed in public administration. We argue on the basis of social identity theory (Ashfort and Meal, 1989) that public sector employees identify more with their organization and feel more relevant to society when their employer contributes to the common good. Moreover, we assume that public sector employees have a motivation to work in the public service and that their work contribution to the common good. As studies have already shown, subjective experiences such as individuals belonging to a group and their social relationships have a positive effect on happiness (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2018; Steel *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, we found evidence that working in the public administration moderates the relationship between public administration's public value and self-reported happiness. However, it is worth considering further mechanisms of the public administration's public value-happiness experience association beyond our specified model, especially for our second hypothesis. Hence, the perception of the public value of public administration employees could also be influenced by their public value awareness which "refers to the extent to which an individual considers specific social units and their basic needs as relevant in evaluations" (Brieger *et al.*, 2020, p. 317) and the competence of a subject to recognize the relevance of the evaluation of a value category (Meynhardt and Fröhlich, 2019).

Overall, our research leads to several key findings: First, public administration's public value is a positive force for individuals and society as a whole. Public management and administrations contribute to the common good by providing individuals and society with services and solutions for grand challenges such as inequality and security (Meynhardt and Bartholomes, 2011). Second, the employment in public administrations provides employees with a positive work environment in which they can serve society with their work and develop their own identity by identifying with the organization. Third, a holistic understanding of the complex interplay of value creation processes at the micro- and macro-level is important, as the concept of value itself is still under-researched and under-theorized in public administration research (Meynhardt *et al.*, 2016; Osborne *et al.*, 2021). In this context, we used public value theory (Meynhardt, 2009, 2015) and the application of the public value scale (Meynhardt and Jasinenko, 2020) in our study. Both support the subjectivist conceptualization of value by basing value creation on the fulfillment of basic needs across the need dimensions as outlined in Epstein's cognitive-experiential self-theory (1993, 2003).

Limitations and avenues for further research

Despite the strength of our findings, our analysis inevitably has a number of limitations. Since happiness and the public value of the Swiss public administration are self-reported and

measured in the same survey, common method bias might influence the results of our statistical analysis (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). For this reason, we attempted to mitigate common method bias by employing several procedural techniques (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) and a survey design that minimizes it as well as followed established recommendations (Jakobsen and Jensen, 2015; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). First, to avoid common method bias at the comprehensive stage and to avoid socially desirable behavior (Crowne and Marlowe, 1964) we reduced the respondents' evaluation apprehension by guaranteeing them full anonymity and informing them that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. Moreover, we explicitly requested honest personal evaluations. Second, we made sure that all items were formulated precisely by conducting a qualitative and quantitative pretest. Third, we rotated the items at random to minimize any ordering effect (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Fourth, we used proven measures (Meynhardt and Jasinenko, 2020) that earlier studies had tested in qualitative and quantitative settings. Fifth, we used different scales to measure our independent and dependent variables. Sixth, our study included several objective control variables, such as age, gender, education and monthly gross income, which allowed us to control. Seventh, in a preliminary analysis we used a Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1976) for endogeneity and to assess retrospectively the presence of common method bias (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). These procedures found that common source bias was not an issue, as a common factor would extract 34.2% of the variance on average, which is below the recommended threshold (<50%) (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). However, considering all methods, we concluded that bias from common methods did not pose a significant threat to our data for the analysis. We used sufficient variance and a relatively large sample of 870 individual respondents from the general population of Swiss citizens. In addition, to reduce the threat of common source bias we recommend for future studies to collect the data with two separate serial surveys that would split the variables with temporal delay to ensure that the items of public value do not affectively affected the follow-up responses to the dependent variable happiness (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Additional limitations are that other factors might have influenced the perception of public administration's public value. Moreover, the study design did not allow for detecting causality between the relationship of public administration's public value and happiness. Thus, we hope researchers will address this issue and examine this relationship for example in long-term studies and with an experimental design. Our results show that people who evaluate public administrations more positively are more likely to report higher happiness. However, this correlation does not establish causality, as happier people may, for example, simply regard their institutions more benevolently. Additionally, future studies should include the type of the public organization, as our study did not distinguish between the respective public organizations, so that the participants evaluated an organization of their choice. Furthermore, problems of self-assessment and cognitive bias can exist by the subjective happiness evaluation (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006). Nevertheless, studies found that subjective happiness measures are reliable and valid (Myers, 2000; Di Tella and MacCulloch, 2006).

Moreover, the public value scale (Meynhardt and Jasinenko, 2020) used in our study indicates some limitations, even if it has already been used and validated in other studies. As Meynhardt and Jasinenko (2020) have already described, one possible limitation could be that depending on the cultural context, the preference for the value of one of the four dimensions of the scale may differ (Meynhardt, 2009), so that the preference in more affluent societies, such as Switzerland, could be on the hedonistic-aesthetical dimension. In addition, there are a further limitation in the sense that an individual's perception of the public value of an organization increases the more positive their attitudes and behavior towards this organization will be. This could lead to a distortion of the self-report, so that the personal feeling of happiness could also be rated higher. Furthermore, according to Meynhardt (2009), each individual evaluation of public value is connected to the individual's relationship with

the public and defines what is valuable on a collective level. But individual evaluations differ based on individual experiences, available information or personal preferences (Meynhardt, 2009). Accordingly, it can be stated as a limitation that not every individual in society can evaluate for the entire population (e.g. Switzerland), which is the best public value. Since we cannot assume that each citizen in Switzerland is sufficiently informed about the public value of public administrations, there may be limitations to an optimal evaluation of the public value. This leads to another limitation that asking different individuals or groups could lead to different evaluations of public value (Meynhardt and Jasinenko, 2020). For example, employees of the public administration or politicians, have more insight and information about current challenges (Brammer *et al.*, 2019) organizations and the public are confronted with and would therefore evaluate the public value from a different perspective. To partially bridge this limitations further studies should determine public value through the perspective of democratically elected representatives rather than the perspective of citizens. In this context, a further study should consider beside Meynhardt's public value approach (2009, 2015) the topic on customer value to enhance the perceived value of a service (e.g. Day and Crask, 2000), which is represented in research in the non-public sector. Also the use of qualitative interviews provide a better understanding of the perceived public value from different perspectives and the relationship to self-reported happiness.

However, our findings suggest that the relationship between the constructs is quite complex and warrants further (conceptual and empirical) enquiry. Further research might examine whether the relationship between public sector performance, in terms of public value, and citizens' happiness also holds when objective performance measures are used. Research could adopt a multilevel perspective (Hitt *et al.*, 2007) that would allow more differentiated research on the impact and importance of different levels of public administration. A systematic enquiry into the relationship between public sector performance and well-being therefore requires an analysis of the relationship between objective public sector performance and subjective well-being. In further research it would be interesting to analyze whether the relationship we discovered is also found in other countries, especially in a non-European context. Such research is especially relevant, given that the relationship between trust in a government and happiness might be limited to Europe (Veenhoven, 1993; Frey and Stutzer, 2002).

Implications

Our central insight that individuals who assign a higher public value to public administration tend to be happier offers important implications for the public management and policy makers. Objective performance measures focus on measuring of specific public agency outputs, which these agencies mostly generate themselves (Dalehite, 2008; Schachter, 2009; Behn, 2014). New Public Management proponents embrace such measures. This is so, as there is an assumption that the latter allows public sector management to be based on objective assessments to detach public management from the political process and thereby allow efficiency gains (Diefenbach, 2009). This poses a challenge for governance and leadership because not everything that is valuable in terms of public value can be measured through objective facts. Beyond that, Garengo and Sardi (2021) already mentioned that performance measurement and management in public organizations should evolve from isolated strategic planning activities to a comprehensive strategic management approach. Thus, creating public value requires creative and innovative actions by the entrepreneurs and public managers (Hijal-Moghrabi *et al.*, 2020). In contrast, subjective performance measures are derived from surveys of a particular service's clients or a sample of the general population (Dalehite, 2008; Schachter, 2009), regarding their satisfaction with public agencies' performance. Our finding that public value has a significant positive relationship on people's happiness can be viewed as an argument favoring subjective measures

of public sector performance. Moreover, as our study shows, the social impact of a public organization is perceived and valued by the citizens of Switzerland. This gives rise to further scope for development for public management and public managers to create a balance between the performance of public organizations and their contribution to the common good. Hence, given the positive effects of public value at the micro-level, it is useful for public organizations to participate in public value activities. Specifically, if public agencies concentrate their efforts on creating public value and even engage in public value entrepreneurship (Meynhardt and Diefenbach, 2012; Kearney and Meynhardt, 2016), it means that business practices are carried out to create public value. More specifically, it involves proactive efforts by companies and their managers to overcome social challenges, improve wellbeing and contribute to the common good. Consequently, they can contribute to the subjective happiness of people in the communities they serve. Furthermore, Meynhardt's four-dimensional public value construct has been proposed as a performance measure for corporate entrepreneurship strategies in the public sector (Kearney and Meynhardt, 2016). Moreover, public management should use multiple perspectives of external feedback to determine the holistic perception of public value in society and to identify further opportunities to increase public organization's public value. Public managers and policy makers should consider the expectations and need of society, what could increase the public value perception, by using transparent and regular internal and external communication with the public employees and citizens. In this regard, a previous study showed that interpersonal communication and organizational communication have a positive impact on citizen satisfaction (De Matteis *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, in this context, public managers can emphasize the public value externally to society in order to present a collective impression to involve citizens. In addition, beside the communication of the public value contribution outside the public organization it can be useful to integrate it into external project through the participation of the society (Kurkela *et al.*, 2023). In addition, transparency in public management decision-making processes and comprehensive disclosure of information also support to strengthen citizens' trust in public administration and public managers.

Based on our second hypothesis we were able to show that public administration employees have a stronger relationship between public administration's public value and happiness. Study findings investigated that public sector employees are motivated by serving the public and making a contribution to the common good (Perry and Vandenabeele, 2015). In this sense, one could also argue that public values represent intentions driving (part of) the public service motivation, which, in turn, enables public managers to create public value. A further implication of our research is that public managers should seek to align their organizations public value activities more closely with its core business. Focusing on the public value contribution public organizations makes to society, through its core activities and creating awareness of these contributions, could support public managers, public organization employees and also society member to recognize the contribution better.

Conclusion

Public administrations matter in people's lives. In this study, we found evidence for the positive relationship between public administration's public value and individual happiness. Additionally, our findings have investigated that the positive relationship between public administration's public value and self-reported happiness is stronger for public administration employees than for non-public employees. Future happiness research should not ignore this connection, since it extends existing models that explain the drivers behind happiness. Research on public management may benefit from a public value perspective, which captures broader societal outcomes that are otherwise not considered from a performance perspective. This approach would do justice to the value-infused nature of institutions. The study findings suggest that public organizations and public managers

should focusing on the public value contribution of the organization externally and internally in order to increase the happiness of the population they serve and their own employees. In summary, our study helps reclaim public administration and management as a positive force for society at large in times of grand challenges.

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Corresponding author

Timo Meynhardt can be contacted at: Timo.Meynhardt@hhl.de
