



# Organizational values in the Brazilian public sector

## An analysis based on the tri-axial model

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The paper aims to identify the prevailing values of the public sector in Brazil, based on the tri-axial model. The study proposes to capture the dynamics between different values axes of Brazilian public sector as well as to detect cultural differences between genders, level of commitment, and nature of work. An additional contribution is expected in understanding Brazilian values at public sector as a necessary approach to obtain a new order of public administration based on efficiency.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper opted for an exploratory study developed within the scope of a larger study aiming to understand the meaning of values in different cultures with an exclusive focus on the public sectors. Using a pre-validated questionnaire, 137 respondents, who work on Brazilian public sector, participated in the survey. A frequency analysis was conducted for various demographic variables. Descriptive statistics were used to understand the profile of the respondents in Brazil's survey. We have used the criteria recommended to all countries that participated in the study.

**Findings** – This empirical work demonstrate that the methodology based on the tri-axial model was able to capture the dynamics between different values axes of Brazilian public sector as well as to detect cultural differences between genders, level of commitment and nature of work. The dominant values perceived in almost every analysis, belong to pragmatic-economic axis such as professionalism, teamwork, adventure, knowledge, and challenge. This strong orientation to pragmatism is consistent with the needs of the Brazilian public sector to have a more entrepreneurial vision and focus on optimization the use of the financial resources.

**Research limitations/implications** – Because of the chosen sample approach, the research results may lack generalizability.

**Practical implications** – The paper includes implications for a management based on values as a model to obtain efficiency at public sector in Brazil

**Originality/value** – This research is part of an international project interesting in investigating values within different countries and cultures. It provides data from a country that belongs to an emergent group of world economy such as BRICs and has different scenery compared to traditional actors of global business.

**Keywords** Culture, Values, Brazilian public sector

**Paper type** Research paper



Values can be understood as “ideas about what is good, right, and desirable in a society” or as “conceptions of the desirable that guide the way social actors (e.g., organizational leaders, policy-makers, individual persons) select actions, evaluate

people and events, and explain their actions and evaluations” (Schwartz, 1999, p. 24). It is also possible to state that, essentially, values:

- are beliefs indissolubly linked to affect;
- refer to desirable goals that motivate action;
- transcend specific actions and situations;
- serve as standards;
- can be ordered to form relatively stable systems of priorities; and
- guide actions or attitudes (Schwartz, 2010, pp. 222-223).

The value of organizational values has been systematically and consistently stressed by studies focusing organizational settings. Smith *et al.* (2002), for example, investigated values in a sample of more than 7,000 middle managers in 47 countries and concluded that values predict significantly specific sources of guidance on which managers rely. In the same direction, Fischer *et al.* (2007) investigated organizational values in five countries (Germany, UK, New Zealand, the USA, and Brazil) and verified, among other aspects, that organizational values significantly predict how organizations allocate rewards.

The public sector has a substantial contribution to the Brazilian economy. The public sector spending increased from 25 to 40 percent of GDP between 1993 and 2007 (Martone, 2007). In fact, the Brazilian federal administration expenditures alone fluctuated around 20 percent of GDP, from 1980 to 2005 (Maciel and Arvate, 2010). Accordingly, the public sector is an important employer in Brazil. About 3 percent of full time employed population work for the public administration in cities with more than one million people. In Brazilian small cities about half of the labor force work for the local public administration (Maciel and Arvate, 2010).

Smola and Sutton (2002) investigated generational differences in values in a sample of 350 students enrolled in MBA and Executive MBA programs at a major university in the Southeastern USA. Findings indicated not only that work values do differ across generations but also that work values also change as workers grow older.

The relevance of the organizational values has also been studied by Brazilian investigators. Melo and Domenico (2012), for example, interviewed 720 workers at 271 branches of a bank company in different Brazilian states and concluded that organizational values impact significantly bank branches performance (evaluated as percentage of goals accomplished) in Brazil.

### **Dolan’s tri-axial values model**

Taking into account that values underlie judgment of what is right or wrong, scholars have investigated values in order to increase understanding about predictors of organizational behavior and better practices in modern management. The emergence of the Dolan’s tri-axial values model (Dolan, 2011, Dolan and Raich, 2013; Dolan *et al.*, 2006) and the management and coaching by values approaches (Dolan, 2012) are based on the assumptions that values systems drive the behavior of individuals, organizations and society.

Based on series of qualitative and quantitative studies, Dolan and colleagues (Dolan *et al.*, 2006; Dolan, 2011) developed a model to explain organizational cultures as

a combination of three different types of values: the tri-axial values model. The model it is also labeled 3Es tri-axial model and includes:

- (1) Economic-pragmatic values are supposed to be necessary to maintain and bring together various organizational sub-systems. They include values relating to efficiency, performance standards and discipline. These values guide such activities as planning, quality assurance and accounting. The way people behave in a group setting is guided by the ethical and social values the group's members share.
- (2) Ethical-social values are supposed to emerge from beliefs held about how people should conduct themselves in public, at work and in relationships. They are associated with such values as honesty, congruence, respect, and loyalty, to name a few. A person's ethical-social values are the rules to get to the end.
- (3) Emotional-spiritual values are supposed to be essential to create new opportunities for action. They are values related to intrinsic motivation, to what makes us excited and what makes us believe in a cause. Optimism, passion, energy, freedom and happiness are a few examples of such values. Without these values, people will not become creative or highly committed. Thus, it is essential to design a culture enabling people to do what they do best.

These three axes would represent the sum total of the so-called "culture" of an organization. A culture would be a relative configuration of these axes. Furthermore, Dolan (Dolan *et al.*, 2006; Dolan, 2011) also related the three axes with three key concerns of most organizations today: survival, sensitivity (sometimes refers to as social sustainability) and creativity or innovativeness.

In this scenario it is possible to state that an accurate understanding of the employee's values is fundamental. It is a key element for modern management. Taking into consideration the relevance of the public sector for the Brazilian economy, the current investigation was primarily conducted to identify prevailing values in this sector in Brazil. In addition, the analyses of the prevailing values in the Brazilian public sector were based on the tri-axial model.

### Method

The present study is part of a larger investigation, the Values Across Cultures Project (VAC), that was coordinated by the Future of Work Chair at the Escuela Superior de Administración y Dirección de Empresas (ESADE, Spain). The project was conducted to evaluate organizational values in 13 countries with an exclusive focus on the public organization.

### Participants

A total of 145 adults (53.8 percent females, 46.2 percent males) who were working for public organizations in Brazil participated in the investigation. Ages ranged from 20 to 69 (mean = 42.4). Participants' formal education was distributed as follows: about 6.9 percent of the respondents did not graduate, 65.5 percent graduated, and 27.6 percent had postgrad education (e.g. MBA, Master education, etc). About 42.7 percent of the participants were working in the education, cultures, sports, science and technology sector, 24.8 percent were working in the economy, trade and industry sector, 6.9 percent were working in the health sector, and 25.5 percent were working in several

other industries (e.g. Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries). About 44.1 percent of the participants were single, while 55.7 percent were married.

*Procedure*

The original Spanish and English versions of the questionnaire developed for the Values Across Cultures Project were translated and back-translated to produce the Brazilian version of the instrument. Problems related to the translation were discussed with the global coordination of the project. The questionnaire included a brief description of the tri-axial values model and a list of 60 values. The survey was conducted online over the internet. The authors sent several invitations to the study with links to the questionnaire.

Participants were asked to classify each of the 60 values in one of the three axes of the model (economic-pragmatic values, ethical-social values, and emotional-spiritual values). In the sequence, participants were asked to select the five most important values in their organization. Based on participants' responses values were assigned to the three axes.

A value was assigned to a specific axe when:

- it was assigned to that axe by a minimum of 50 percent of the participants (absolute parameter); and
- the difference between the first and the second more frequently assigned axe for each value was equal to or greater than 15 percent points.

When a value did not reach the assignment criteria it was categorized as "undecided" and was excluded from any subsequent analysis.

The top five values, values that were categorized in one of the three axes and were among the five more frequently indicated as "most important" by the participants, were employed to construct an initial tri-axial portrait of the organizational values in Brazil.

**Results**

Table I presents the five values that were more frequently indicated by employees who were working in the Brazilian public sector. It was observed a predominance of economic-pragmatic values. Males and females presented values slightly different. Males also indicated two ethical-social values.

Professionalism and teamwork were the two most frequently indicated value for employees. The prevalence of economic-pragmatic values and ethical-social values (observed in males) can characterize a culture that emphasizes factors that are more

Total		Female		Male	
Value	Axe	Value	Axe	Value	Axe
Professionalism	Pragmatic	Professionalism	Pragmatic	Professionalism	Pragmatic
Teamwork	Pragmatic	Teamwork	Pragmatic	Teamwork	Pragmatic
Knowledge	Pragmatic	Adaptability	Pragmatic	Honesty	Ethical
Adaptability	Pragmatic	Challenge	Pragmatic	Credibility	Ethical
Challenge	Pragmatic	Knowledge	Pragmatic	Knowledge	Pragmatic

**Table I.** The five values that were more frequently indicated by employees by gender

immediately linked to the survival. Analyses also revealed that in Brazil, females perceive the sector as more pragmatic-economic and less ethical-social when compared to males. Anyway both views of culture are characterized by survival.

In the sequence differences between single and marriage workers were explored. Analyses revealed that committed Brazilian employees perceived the sector as more pragmatic-economic while singles valued not only pragmatic-economic values but also ethical-social and emotional-developmental values. The committed group presents a survival culture, while singles give us an idea of a value system more balanced between the three axes. It is possible to speculate that a more balanced value system could be more directly linked to higher levels organizational wellbeing. Table II presents the five values that were more frequently indicated by single and marriage employees.

Values shared by the 40 younger participants of study (26.8 percent of the sample) were compared to the values shared by the 40 senior participants to explore generational differences in organizational values. Younger participants had no more than 33 years (mean = 27.3) while senior participants had 51 or more year of age (mean = 56.9). Table III presents the five values that were more frequently indicated by younger and senior participants.

Analyses revealed several noticeable differences between younger and senior participants. Senior Brazilian employees subscribed pragmatic and ethical values while younger participants indicated pragmatic and developmental values. Senior employees indicated more frequently respect as a value while younger mentioned more frequently playfulness as a value. These results are consistent with the literature. Table III presents the five values that were more frequently indicated by senior and younger employees.

Differences in values associated with industry were also explored in the present study. Analyses focused differences in two industries (education, cultures, sports, science, and technology and economy, trade and industry). Although employees of

**Table II.**  
The five values that were more frequently indicated by employees by marital status

Value	Total		Value	Single		Value	Marriage	
	Axe			Axe			Axe	
Professionalism	Pragmatic		Professionalism	Pragmatic		Teamwork	Pragmatic	
Teamwork	Pragmatic		Teamwork	Pragmatic		Professionalism	Pragmatic	
Knowledge	Pragmatic		Honesty	Ethical		Adaptability	Pragmatic	
Adaptability	Pragmatic		Playfulness	Developmental		Knowledge	Pragmatic	
Challenge	Pragmatic		Challenge	Pragmatic		Challenge	Pragmatic	

**Table III.**  
The five values that were more frequently indicated by employees by age

Value	Total		Value	Youngers		Value	Seniors	
	Axe			Axe			Axe	
Professionalism	Pragmatic		Teamwork	Pragmatic		Professionalism	Pragmatic	
Teamwork	Pragmatic		Professionalism	Pragmatic		Adaptability	Pragmatic	
Knowledge	Pragmatic		Playfulness	Developmental		Challenge	Pragmatic	
Adaptability	Pragmatic		Discipline	Pragmatic		Respect	Ethical	
Challenge	Pragmatic		Intelligence	Pragmatic		Teamwork	Pragmatic	

both industries indicated a pragmatic-economic view of the organizational values, it was possible to detect dissimilarities among the values that were subscribed. These results indicated that investigators should also consider differences in values as related to the type of industry. Table IV presents the five values that were more frequently indicated by industry.

**Discussion**

Some characteristics of the Brazilian public sector have been frequently cited in the scientific and economic literature. It is frequently pointed, for example, that the sector has no commitment to effectiveness and efficiency. Governmental regulations greatly hinder an efficient management of personnel. It is very complicated to contract people. It is almost impossible to fire bad employees.

Another important feature of the Brazilian public sector is interference of representatives at the federal, state and local levels in the administration of the state. The recruitment of personnel to key positions in the public administration has been greatly relied on political criteria and not by meritocratic methods. Over the last years, thousands of skilled technical professionals have been replaced by officers indicated by politicians.

The present investigation indicated that prevalent values in the Brazilian public sector are prominently pragmatic-economic. The values identified as most important were professionalism, teamwork, knowledge, adaptability, and challenge. All these values point are linked to the recovery or pursuit of money-related values.

The values are the guiding principles of a culture and operate not only at the individual level, but also at the collective level. A superior commitment to ethical and social values would be extremely important to public sector workers or public servants. This commitment could drive public workers to focus on serving people instead off on serving the state itself.

Another important point to mention is related to very limited identification of emotional-spiritual values at public sector. Incentives that are intrinsically motivators, such as the relevance and the impact of the efforts of workers in the public sector, should be primarily valued, especially in areas like health, education, security and basic services. Another interesting finding refers to the differences related to gender. Findings suggest that Brazilian women that work on public sector believe that their organizations are less ethical when compared to men evaluations.

This exploratory study opened several windows to further investigations. Differences and similarities in values endorsed by public and private Brazilian

Value	Total		Industry 1		Industry 2	
	Axe	Value	Axe	Value	Axe	Value
Professionalism	Pragmatic	Teamwork	Pragmatic	Knowledge	Pragmatic	
Teamwork	Pragmatic	Professionalism	Pragmatic	Teamwork	Pragmatic	
Knowledge	Pragmatic	Adaptability	Ethical	Discipline	Pragmatic	
Adaptability	Pragmatic	Belonging	Developmental	Professionalism	Pragmatic	
Challenge	Pragmatic	Challenge	Pragmatic	Usefulness	Pragmatic	

**Notes:** Industry 1 – education, cultures, sports, science and technology; Industry 2 – economy, trade, and industry

**Table IV.**  
The five values that were more frequently indicated by employees by industry

workers should be explored and the tri-axial values model seems to be a very useful tool. Furthermore, cross-national investigations should also be stimulated.

### Conclusions and limitations

The present empirical work demonstrated that the methodology based on the tri-axial model is suitable to capture the dynamics between different values axes of Brazilian public sector as well as to detect cultural differences associated to gender, age, and industry.

It is also important that the present investigation enrolled a relatively small number of participants. In addition the study was based on a convenience sample. The development of a new project involving a larger number of participants and probabilistic sampling procedures are being considered by the authors.

Finally it is important to stress the importance of the present study in the effort to increase our knowledge of the prevalent values at public sector in Brazil. This knowledge is especially useful to managers and policy-makers. In addition, the present work is also part of an international and collaborative project. Projects like this increase collaboration across the world. The development of economic blocks should also stimulate the development scientific blocks in the service of workers around the world.

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