

Understanding The Quality Of Administrative Action: Who And What Counts?

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ABSTRACT

To understand the quality of administrative action, it is crucial to incorporate the perspectives of those affected. This paper introduces and demonstrates a method for identifying stakeholders based on their urgency, legitimacy, and power, and examines stakeholders' interests using theories from motivational psychology. In the context of constitutive administrative acts, stakeholders were identified as applicants, third parties, public managers, elected officials, and the legislature. A combination of user experience sampling, interviews, and legal source reviews was used to determine stakeholders' urgencies, motives, and values, highlighting common priorities and potential conflicts. This approach advances the conceptualization and measurement of good administration.

Keywords - stakeholder, basic psychological needs, goal system, good administration, public service performance.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of administrative action can only be investigated, evaluated and understood by adopting a multiple stakeholders' perspective. This approach is not only methodologically advisable (Rossiter 2002; Rossiter 2008, 381), but consistent with the body of the literature on good governance or good administration (Bovaird and Löffler 2003, 323) and on public service performance (Andersen, Boesen and Pedersen 2016; Andrews, Boyne and Walker 2006, 14; Walker and Andrews 2015, 104). Thus, evaluating and improving the quality of administrative action requires the identification of stakeholders as well as understanding their respective perspective. As Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) point out in their theory of stakeholder identification and salience: We need to understand who and what really counts, in order to generate the suitable targets for performance measurement and effective management when dealing with the multiple stakeholders of public administration.

Who counts? Although public administration research lists various potential stakeholders (Graaf 2011; Hartley et al. 2017), studies have primarily focused on either citizens (e.g.,

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Neo, Grimmelikhuijsen and Tummers 2023) or managers (e.g., Hendriks 2014). Thus, we currently lack knowledge on the interests of other stakeholders and direct comparisons of stakeholder revealing shared and diverging interests. Shared priorities of all stakeholders contribute to a complete understanding of attributes of good administration, while diverging interests among stakeholders helps identifying and prevention goal conflicts which have been reported as stressor for the execution of administrative work (Chun and Rainey 2005; Pandey and Wright 2006; Rizzo, House and Lirtzman 1970).

What counts? Motivational psychology provides a broad theoretical and empirical basis for understanding what's important to stakeholders. In particular, ample research in the field of motivated cognition (Kruglanski 1996) shows that individuals' motivation shapes their perception and evaluation of their environment, situations, other individuals and – in this case – administrative action. Hence, stakeholders' needs, desires, and goals influence their perception and evaluation of administrative processes. Previous research on public values and public service performance has investigated what specific stakeholders value or expect from public service on a rather abstract level without relation to specific administrative action. Despite the valuable insights offered by this research, two important principles of motivational psychology have been neglected: (1) motivation's unconscious basis (Hassin, Bargh and Zimerman 2009; Kihlstrom 2019), in particular basic psychological needs (McClelland 1987) forming the foundation of behavior, and (2) context-dependency of motivation, in particular the situatedness (Custers and Aarts 2005) and interrelations of task-related goals (Kruglanski 2023; Kung and Scholer 2020) and their role in achieving overarching goals and needs (Austin and Vancouver 1996; Kruglanski, Fishbach and Kopetz 2023). The introduction and consideration of these principles will deepen the understanding of the interplay of motivational concepts within and between stakeholders.

The current article aims at partially contributing to this gap in the public administration literature by (1) suggesting an approach of identifying stakeholder of administrative action, thus defining relevant evaluator of administrative quality, (2) exploring stakeholders' motivation regarding administration, thus describing task-related goals, needs and values and their relations, and (3) examining similarities and differences between stakeholders' motivation, thus identifying shared priorities and potential conflict. In sum, the present study exemplifies answering who and what counts with regard to administrative action thereby deepening the understanding of administrative quality.

WHO COUNTS? IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS OF ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

According to Mitchell et al. (1997), stakeholders are defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives” (p. 869) and can be identified by their urgency, power, and legitimacy. Stakeholders possessing all three attributes are labeled as definitive and their interests will be prioritized by an organization.

Urgency is defined as “degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate attention” (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 869) due to their time-sensitivity and criticality. Regarding administrative action, time sensitivity (i.e. “the degree to which managerial delay in

attending to the claim or relationship is unacceptable to the stakeholder” (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 867) can be directly inferred from deadlines in administrative procedures as well as from the costs of delay. Criticality (“importance of the claim or the relationship to the stakeholder” (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 869) associates with the monopoly of public administration. A citizen intending to prevent a novel home construction or immigrants seeking recognition of their level of education can only do so via the responsible authorities. However, not only the norm addressees, but also the legislator depend on administration processing applications, inspecting buildings etc. to implement the law. In contrast, citizens, companies and authorities usually have the freedom to choose between several providers for non-sovereign services. Given all stakeholders’ dependence on public administration we conclude that all stakeholders’ claims from public administration with regard to sovereign actions should be considered as critical. Hence, all stakeholders of administrative action possess urgencies, although the nature of their claims may vary among different contexts (e.g., nature of administrative procedure) and between stakeholders (e.g., citizens, public managers).

Assuming urgency, we next focus on power defined as “a relationship among social actors in which one social actor, A, can get another social actor, B, to do something that B would not have otherwise done” and legitimacy defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, definitions” (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 864). Research on administrative performance, public value generation, and administrators’ loyalties highlights various potential stakeholders. These include public agents, managers, elected and appointed politicians, citizen service users, partner organizations, media, communities, and the law (Graaf, 2011; Hartley et al., 2017), all of whom certainly have power and legitimacy. However, both attributes may vary depending on contexts (e.g., nature of administrative procedure) and time thereby changing the number and composition of definitive stakeholders. Thus, to identify stakeholders, we must first specify the type of administrative action being analyzed. A lack of specificity can lead to nonspecific or biased responses (Rossiter 2002). Additionally, when individuals can assume different stakeholder roles, such as a citizen or government official, it is essential to define the role to prevent biased answers. Therefore, a tangible object of investigation is needed so stakeholders and their urgencies can be separately considered. Following this approach, we first specified the administrative action to be studied and then identified the stakeholders.

Specifying administrative action: Constitutive administrative acts

Potential objects for evaluating administrative action include public endeavors such as services, projects, programs, organizations, and collaborations (Hartley et al. 2017, 627). Specifically, this encompasses the “production of non-rival, non-excludable goods and services” known as public goods (Bryson, Crosby and Bloomberg 2014, 451). Given the importance of sovereign action and its associated urgency, we focused our investigation on constitutive administrative acts. These acts establish definite legal relationships between citizens and the state (Maurer and Waldhoff 2017) and include procedures like building permits and naturalization, covering a broad spectrum of administrative behavior.

To transform the processing of constitutive administrative acts into an observable and experiential object, the task-related administrative behavior must be specified and described in detail. Using business process models developed by digitalization labs for key administrative acts under the German Online Access Act (OZG), we used a reference process (see Figure 1) developed by Schorn, Kaesmayr and Steidle (2023). For each step, we defined actions within the jurisdiction of case workers, other public servants, or agencies, including their online portals. These actions are categorized into those that do not involve discretion and those that involve decisions made at the discretion of the case worker or agency (see appendix A). The execution and outcomes of these actions may or may not align with stakeholders' urgencies. This detailed specification allows for a task-specific consideration of stakeholder urgencies.

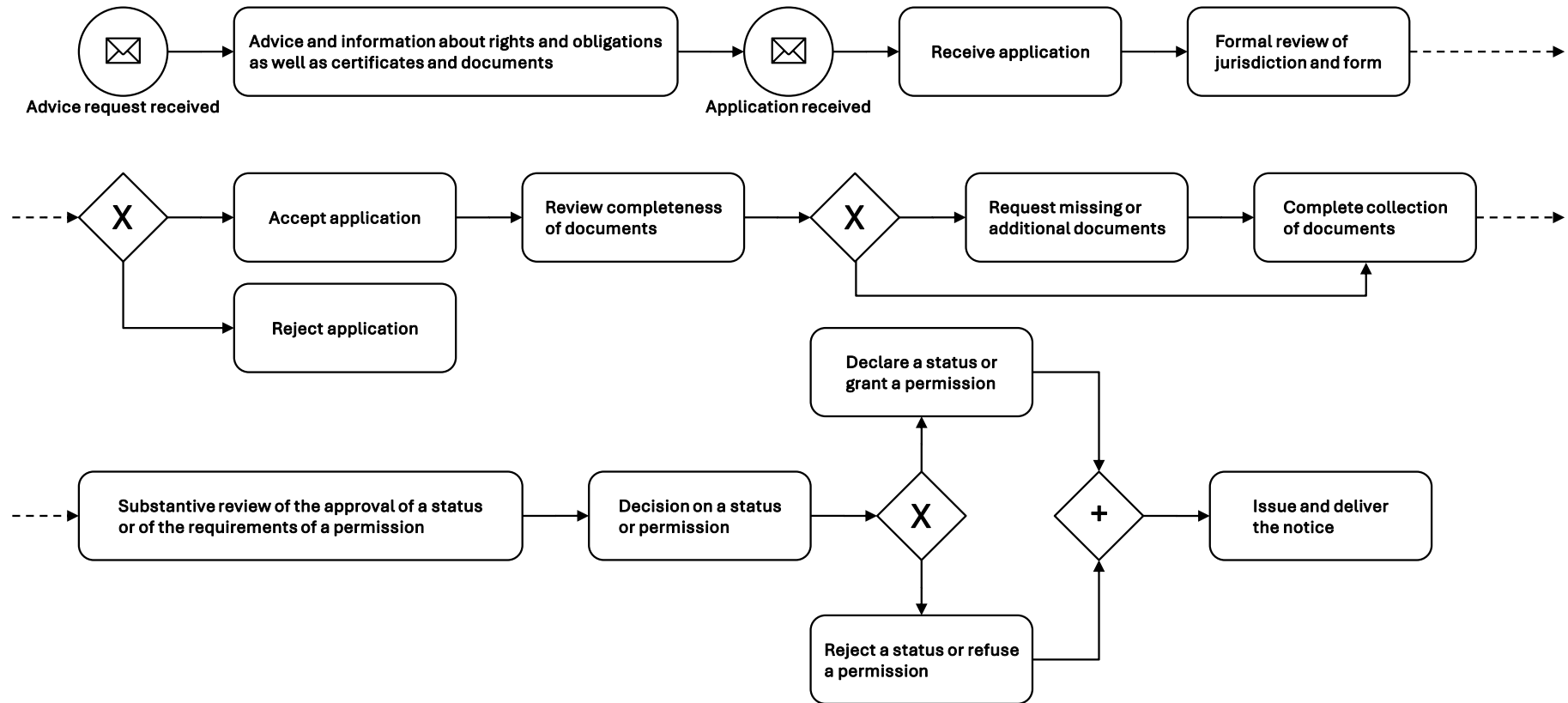
Identifying stakeholder of constitutive administrative acts

Based on constitutional and administrative law, we identified the following stakeholders as possessing both power and legitimacy in constitutive administrative acts:

- By law, applicants have the power and legitimacy to file applications, demand consideration based on their circumstances, and appeal against a decision of an authority.
- Third parties, ranging from individuals to larger groups, have the right to be involved in a procedure if it could affect their legal interests. In addition to legitimacy, these individuals are granted the power to assert their interests through available legal remedies, such as objections. Limiting this involvement to legal interests is essential to prevent anyone from claiming such rights merely based on personal concern.
- Public managers (i.e. appointed heads of department or office [German designation of the position *Amts- und Abteilungsleitung*]) have power and legitimacy according to their office. Within the framework of the underlying legal norms and service law in administrative procedures, they can issue instructions to employees on all aspects of a procedure.
- Elected officials such as mayors and department heads (*Bürgermeister* and *Dezernenten* in German), derive their power and legitimacy from their legal roles as superiors in municipal or departmental administration. They are seen as politically responsible for the executive branch. Unlike public managers, who are appointed, these officials are elected by citizens (in the case of mayors) or by the municipal council (for department heads).
- The legitimacy of the legislature derives from the constitution, which gives it the right to regulate procedure. Accordingly, it also has the power to change procedures if it is not satisfied with the actions of the administration.

In combination with the generally assumed urgency, these five stakeholders can be labeled as definitive stakeholders of constitutive administrative acts.

Figure 1: The reference process of a constitutive administrative act



Source: Schorn, Kaesmayr and Steidle (2023, 2)

WHAT COUNTS? EXPLORING STAKEHOLDER MOTIVATION

After clarifying who counts regarding constitutive administrative acts, we addressed the questions what counts or what is important for these stakeholders from a motivational psychology perspective. While in the previous chapter it was sufficient for a group to have an urgency to be considered a definitive stakeholder, this chapter raises the question of what exactly these urgencies are in detail. Both behavior and cognition is driven by motivation which is associated with individuals' needs, desires, and ambitions (Rabideau 2005). In our review of motivational theories, we focus on basic psychological needs as foundation of stakeholder urgencies and the relation between these needs, urgencies, and values within a hierarchical goal system.

Basic psychological needs

While in everyday life needs are considered as “desired attributes or outcomes” (Vansteenkiste, Ryan and Soenens 2020, 1), research defines needs as “tendencies to seek out certain basic types of psychosocial experiences, to a somewhat varying extent across individuals, and to feel good and thrive when those basic experiences are obtained, to the same extent across individuals” (Prentice, Halusic and Sheldon 2014, 73). Accordingly, individuals' well-being depends on the satisfaction of those needs. Thus, needs guide individuals' perception and behavior in various areas of their lives such as social interactions (Allen et al. 2022), work (Collins, Hanges and Locke 2004), health (Tay and Diener 2011) and consumer behavior (Mandel et al. 2017). Although the scientific discourse about the number and kind of needs is ongoing, the two dominant contemporary need theories describe three basic psychological needs centering around power, control, and autonomy (1), relatedness and affiliation (2), and achievement, accomplishment, and competence (3) (Deci and Ryan 2000; McClelland 1987; Prentice, Halusic and Sheldon 2014). Conditions, products and services that nurture and fulfill these basic needs elicit intrinsic motivation, well-being (Vansteenkiste, Ryan and Soenens 2020), and in public sector, they can be a foundation of public value generation (Meynhardt 2009; Meynhardt and Jasinenko 2021). Hence, we focus on these three basic intrinsic needs to describe the relevant need domains.

A second core principle of motivational psychology helps explain the variations in needs and different approaches to satisfying them: the distinction of approach and avoidance (Elliot 2013). Approach motivation refers to the energization of behavior by or the direction of behavior towards positive objects, events and possibilities while avoidance motivation refers to the energization of behavior by or the direction of behavior towards negative objects, events and possibilities. This distinction is reflected in McClelland's (1987) conceptualization as each of three basic needs can additionally be associated with either specific hopes or fears (Atkinson 1957, 360) yielding six motives: hope of success and fear of failure in the achievement domain, hope of affiliation and fear of rejection in the affiliation domain, and hope of power and fear of powerlessness/loss of control for in the power domain (see Table 1). This distinction is crucial due to the different behaviors it can yield, for instance, hope for success and fear of failure drive different behaviors in performance settings (see Pang 2010 for an overview). Moreover, individuals motivated

by hope opposed to fear tend to value growth over security, aspirations over duties and choose speed over accuracy (Higgins 2012; Steidle, Gockel and Werth 2013). This might affect stakeholders' perception and evaluation of administrative action. Taking stakeholders' hope for success as an example: this might lead to valuing speed over diligence, while stakeholders' fearing loss of control may favor diligence over speed. Accordingly, the six motives will be investigated regarding their relevance for stakeholders in the process of administrative actions.

Table 1: Six motives derived from basic needs

Basic psychological needs			
	Need for achievement	Need for affiliation	Need for power
Hope for	... success	... affiliation	... power and <i>control</i>
Fear of	... failure	... rejection	... powerlessness/ <i>loss of control</i>

Note. The terms in italics represent an enrichment by the SDT.

McClelland's definition of the three basic needs (Motive Disposition Theory MDT; McClelland 1987) does not fully correspond to the needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy as defined by the Basic Psychological Need Theory (BPNT; Deci and Ryan 2008; Vansteenkiste, Ryan and Soenens 2020), which is which represents the most widely used approach in current research. Recently, Schüller et al. (2019) aimed at integrating the two approaches, highlighting the high contentual linkage in the themes of achievement/competence and affiliation/social relatedness and suggesting ways of integrating the apparently noncorresponding concepts of power and autonomy. The authors refer here to the common root of both needs in the concept of control. While MDT, in the sense of power, is more oriented towards controlling others, BPNT, in the sense of autonomy, focuses on control over oneself. Research on power strivings (van Dijke and Poppe 2006) reflects this idea by differentiating striving for personal power (freedom from other people, autonomy) and social power (power over other people) and show that strivings for personal power are stronger than strivings for social power in some contexts. Building on their common root in control and adopting a broad definition power including personal and social power (Lammers, Stoker and Stapel 2009), we integrate the need for autonomy in our conceptualization of the need for power (see Table 1). Due to the prevalence of the need for power in research on political leadership (e.g., McCann and Stewin 1987; Palanović and Kovačić 2024) and the constitutionally legitimated social power of the executive branch (for a general discussion on power and legitimacy of public administration: Benz 2018; Warren 1993), we retain the term need for power.

To our knowledge, no research has directly investigated the motives associated with either administrative actions or the evaluation of administrative performance among different stakeholder groups. Meynhardt (2009) is the only scholar who relates basic psychological needs to public value. Aligning with our concept of the motivational basis and the contextual nature of public performance assessments, Meynhardt et al. argue that basic needs form the foundation of public value, which is actively constructed in a specific

context based on the subjective experiences of the "public" (Meynhardt et al. 2017). Meynhardt's definition highlights the connection between individual needs as part of society. Unlike Meynhardt, we focus on the needs of individuals or specific stakeholder groups rather than the general public. Furthermore, Meynhardt et al. state that any "social entity, such as a government, state, nation, community, or organization can be an object of public value evaluation" (Meynhardt and Jasinenko 2021, 26). This paper offers a more nuanced perspective by concentrating on task-related behavior rather than organizational level evaluations. In summary, we posit that the value individuals attach to public actions or goods depends on their subjective perceptions and evaluations of how well these public actions or goods satisfy their basic needs.

Goal theories

To describe the relations of motives with urgencies, we build on research of goal systems and the context-dependency of goals. Goals generally are defined as "internal representations of desired states" (Austin and Vancouver 1996, 338). Hierarchical goal models propose that goals "can be [...] categorized into a hierarchical structure of levels ranging from concrete goals at lower levels to abstract goals at higher levels" (Cropanzano, James and Citera 1992). Abstract goals form the basis or lead to the adoption of more specific, task-related goals (Cropanzano, James and Citera 1992). As such, a heightened fear of failure may inspire administrators to adopt the goal to "process the application without errors". Applying this logic to stakeholders' goals concerning processing administrative actions, their respective motives may influence the adoption of task-related goals we comprehend as urgencies. To illustrate, reflecting the underlying motive hope for success an applicant may expect a positive decision on his building application. While basic psychological needs are supposed to be essential and rather stable, task-related goals and motivation are known to be context-dependent and can be part of and elicited by a mindset associated with social roles (see goal priming, Custers and Aarts 2005; deindividuation effect, Johnson and Downing 1979). In their managerial role determined by their agency a public servant will have prescribed quality objectives regarding administrative work (e.g., strict rule adherence), opposing personal goals when an applicant in an administrative procedure themselves (e.g., discretionary interpretation in one's own favor). Consequentially, task-related goals define stakeholder urgencies in that they detail the nature of their claims.

Public servants processing constitutive administrative acts face multiple, potentially conflicting urgencies raising the question: Which urgencies will be prioritized and guide their case work? Management plays a crucial role in setting, prioritizing, and resolving conflicts and ambiguities between goals or roles (Löbel and Latham 2015; Skogstad et al. 2014). In the present research, stakeholders include two types of principals (Moe 1984) determining organizational goals: public managers directing public servants and elected officials setting office goals and assuming political responsibility. Reviews on pursuing multiple goals (e.g., Kung and Scholer 2020) summarize conditions that increase the likelihood and severity of goal conflicts, such as a large number of goals (1), limited resources (2), and inherent conflicts (3) among goals related to values or identity. Given the numerous potential urgencies and limited public sector resources, the first two conditions likely affect administrative case work. However, it remains unclear whether the urgencies of the

two “management” stakeholders involve inherent goal conflicts. To clarify this, we need to move beyond urgencies as concrete task-related goals and identify the abstract goals they serve. Within hierarchical goal systems, both needs and values are rather abstract goals (Cropanzano, James and Citera 1992) and can be similar in content. The value of independence, for example, closely resembles a need of autonomy or power. However, “needs tend to focus on concerns of the individual and can be physiological or unconscious” (Cropanzano, James and Citera 1992, 284), whereas values refer to group-level rather than individualized and to explicit rather than implicit goals. This concurs with the definition of public values by Andersen et al. (2012, 716) as “the principles on which governments and policies should be based, or in other words, the values that are supposed to guide behavior in the public sector”.

RESEARCH APPROACH

In order to understand what counts for stakeholders, we first explored stakeholders’ urgencies in constitutive administrative acts and second analysed the motives and values reflected in these urgencies. This two-step process of defining the urgencies and deriving the underlying motives is based on existing research on the nature and assessment of these motivational concepts.

Firstly, urgencies, as explicit, task-related goals, are easily accessible for the stakeholders involved in the application process and can therefore be reported directly (e.g., for the measurement of explicit goals; Schultheiss and Brunstein 1999). The urgencies of a stakeholder group can change across the phases of the application process and may partially align with those of other stakeholders. According to the goal systems approach (e.g., Kruglanski 2023), stakeholders can have several urgencies at the same time, which support or hinder each other (Kung and Scholer 2020). When defining the urgencies, the aim is to uncover their diversity while also considering their respective significance.

Secondly, motives, as implicit needs, are only partially consciously accessible. Therefore, these motives are often assessed indirectly using associative or projective techniques (Schultheiss and Brunstein 2010). In line with the idea of goal hierarchies (Cropanzano, James and Citera 1992), which assumes that task-related goals reflect abstract needs, we argue that the urgencies expressed by stakeholders at different phases of the application process reflect their motives. This corresponds to Schultheiss and Schultheiss’s (2014) analysis of assessing implicit motives indicating that prototypical situational contexts (here: steps of constitutive administrative act) may be more or less associated with specific motives. In line with their analysis regarding the individual motive assessment via Picture Story Exercise, we argue that motive profiles across different process steps may provide information about the overall strength of specific motives of a stakeholder group as well as the context-dependency of these motives. Hence, this identification of the underlying motive requires an analysis of the respective urgencies.

To fully understand stakeholders’ urgencies and underlying motives, our research approach combines an open collection of all possible different urgencies in the generation phase and the condensation and verification of these urgencies in the consolidation and validation phases (see Table 2). In each of these three phases, the two-step process of

urgency definition and motivation analysis is carried out. Overall, the procedure comprises five phases: generation, consolidation, validation, aggregation, and reanalysis. In the aggregation phase, an overarching profile of the motives of the individual stakeholders is drawn. The final reanalysis phase connects our findings with established public values research. In sum this approach builds on Rossiter (2008) 's recommendation to ensure content validity.

Table 2: Summary of data collection and analysis process

	Phase 1: Generation			Phase 2: Consolidation		Phase 3: Validation	Phase 4: Aggregation	Phase 5: Reanalysis
Stakeholder group	Data collection	Data Aggregation	Result	Data Aggregation	Result			
Applicants	5 group interviews with 23 public management students	Group discussion	5 lists of urgencies and motives per step	Inspection and consolidation by authors	1 list of urgencies and motives per step			Not applied
Third parties	5 group interviews with 23 public management students	Group discussion	5 lists of urgencies and motives per step	Inspection and consolidation by authors	1 list of urgencies and motives per step	An expert workshop with 2 experts yielded a matrix of urgencies and motives by stakeholder and step of reference process (see Table 3)	Aggregation across steps yielded a matrix of urgencies by stakeholder and motive (see Table 4)	Not applied
Public managers	21 expert interviews done by 6 teams	Group discussion	6 lists of urgencies and motives per step	Inspection and consolidation by authors	1 list of urgencies and motives per step			Content analysis of urgencies yielded underlying public values (see Table 5).
Elected officials	21 expert interviews done by 6 teams	Group discussion	6 lists of urgencies and motives per step	Inspection and consolidation by authors	1 list of urgencies and motives per step			
Legislator	Review of legal sources	Not applied		Not applied	1 list of urgencies and motives per step			Not applied

Phase 1: Generation

The first goal in the generation phase was to capture the different urgencies of the individual stakeholders as comprehensively and completely as possible. Given the possible sources of information about the urgencies of five stakeholder groups, we used a multi-method approach combining interviews for the first four stakeholder groups and jurisprudential methods for legislature. The second goal of the generations phase was to identify the various motives underlying the generated urgencies.

In the interviews, we utilized user experience mapping (UEM) which typically focuses on understanding users' journey by mapping their processes along with corresponding triggers and goals encompassing all activities and personas involved, including additional requirements (Endmann and Kessner 2016). However, instead of identifying areas for research and process design improvement, our goal was to understand stakeholders' urgencies and motives in relation to administrative procedures. Following, the UEM logic, the interviews involved examining the reference process and reflecting on the respective stakeholders in their roles. For each step and each stakeholder group, interviewees were asked to identify any relevant urgencies. The interviews were executed in strict adherence to the Ethical Guidelines outlined by the German Psychological Society (DGPs). Formal ethical endorsements for research of this nature (specifically, noninvasive in character, with no impact on physical or psychological integrity, privacy rights, or other pertinent personal entitlements) are not mandated by either the aforementioned guideline or prevailing German legislation. All participants conferred their informed consent to abide by the stipulations of the study. Stringent measures were implemented to uphold anonymity. No procedures of deleterious nature were enacted.

To investigate the urgencies and motives of *public managers and elected officials*, 42 semi-standardized interviews were conducted in November and December 2020 in with experts from 21 municipalities in Baden-Württemberg. In each municipality, the manager of municipal building agency and the responsible elected official were interviewed yielding a matched dataset which supports controlling for confounding organizational factors. Elected officials were five women and 16 men ($M_{\text{age}} = 52.190$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 6.353$; $M_{\text{tenure}} = 10.643$, $SD_{\text{tenure}} = 8.027$) and public managers seven women and 14 men ($M_{\text{age}} = 49.286$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.900$; $M_{\text{tenure}} = 8.214$, $SD_{\text{tenure}} = 8.518$). There were no differences between the two groups (gender: $\chi^2_{(1)} = 0.467$, $p = .495$; age: $t_{(40)} = 1.132$, $p = .265$; tenure at the current position: $t_{(40)} = 0.951$, $p = .347$).

We conducted individual interviews rather than group sessions to minimize social desirability bias, particularly when public managers and elected officials discussed their priorities. For standardization, participants were presented with a case vignette featuring a building permit application for a carpenter's workshop. This case was selected for its comprehensive nature, encompassing all procedural steps, and its representativeness of typical cases handled by building authorities in smaller municipalities (Appendix A). To assess urgencies, participants were asked: "What aspects of service provision are most important to you at each process step?". The interviews were conducted and analyzed by six student teams as part of their coursework. Prior to conducting interviews, students

received comprehensive training on the six motives (see Table 1) and the reference process (see Figure 1). Interview responses regarding urgencies were aggregated by process step and stakeholder group. The teams then analyzed these responses to identify underlying motives. For example, one team characterized public managers' urgencies in Step 1 as follows:

The public managers had the following urgencies in this step: At the top of their list is the provision of individual, concrete, personal advice, which is underpinned by the desire to comply with legal deadlines and to ensure a smooth process. No less important here is customer orientation and the identification of procedural difficulties before the start of the process and their explanation to the applicant. Transparent processes should also not be neglected, although it was noted that their design is easier in digital form.

The analysis team identified achievement motivation, manifested as both hope of success and fear of failure, as the underlying motive in this case. The teams ultimately compiled six comprehensive lists detailing urgencies and motives for both public managers and elected officials. This methodology aligns with a mixed purposeful sampling strategy focused on a typical case (Shaheen, Pradhan and Ranajee 2019).

The motives and urgencies of *applicants and third parties* were collected through five group interviews with 23 public management students who had also conducted the expert interviews as described above. While this represents a convenience sample, interviewing these particular students offered distinct advantages, for they had accumulated applied work experience across four different municipal agencies. This equipped them with broad insight into the expectations of applicants and third parties involved in administrative processes. In contrast, typical citizens have only occasional interactions with such procedures, likely resulting in more case-specific concerns and expectations, which would have required a much larger sample size. Following established focused group interview methodology, we conducted group rather than individual interviews for three primary reasons (Schulz, Mack and Renn 2012): (1) The collective knowledge, mutual stimulation, and group dynamics were expected to generate a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of stakeholder urgencies. (2) Social desirability and demand effects were minimized since participants weren't defending their own role performance, having no direct responsibility for case handling. (3) Group interviews offered greater time efficiency. This approach aligns with a mixed purposeful sampling strategy, incorporating both a homogeneous convenience sample and typical cases (Shaheen, Pradhan and Ranajee 2019), as evidenced by students' diverse administrative experiences.

Prior to the expert interviews, participants were divided into five groups of four or five members. Each group was tasked with identifying applicants' and third parties' urgencies across all eight process steps, considering supplementary information and drawing from their administrative experience. The guiding question was: "What aspects of service provision are important to applicants/third parties at each process step?" (see Phase 1 in Table 2). The underlying motives were then identified for each step and stakeholder group. These focused sessions, lasting approximately 30 minutes, produced five comprehensive matrices of urgencies for both applicants and third parties.

The urgencies of the *legislature* were extracted through systematic analysis of the German Constitution, the Administrative Procedures Act (VwVfG), and its accompanying explanatory memorandum. For each step in the reference process, we identified legislative priorities by examining these legal sources through the lens of administrative action requirements. For example, the legislature mandates that agencies adhere to rule-of-law procedures, specifically emphasizing citizens' right to be heard:

"In accordance with federal legislative efforts to establish a substantive foundation for rule-of-law-based administrative procedures, § 24 [currently § 28] requires administration to provide affected individuals the opportunity to be heard before implementing decisions that impact their rights." (Deutscher Bundestag 1973)

Although not immediately apparent, legislators' underlying motives can be inferred from statutory language and explanatory documentation. In the example above, we can identify a fear-based motive (fear of rejection) – specifically, legislators' concern that citizens who perceive unfair treatment by authorities might withdraw support from political parties or develop mistrust toward state institutions altogether.

Phase 2: Consolidation

In the consolidation phase (Phase 2, Table 2), the authors examined and merged the matrices for each stakeholder group into single stakeholder-specific matrices. This process involved aggregating statements by process step and stakeholder group, followed by generalization. From these generalized statements, specific urgencies were identified. For instance, in Step 1, 68 public manager statements were collected and categorized into fifteen groups. The most prominent categories were "legal security" (ten statements), "closeness to citizens" (nine statements), and "speed" (eight statements). These generalized statements were summarized as follows:

Public managers want to provide good service, avoid effort and risk without pre-committing to a procedure, and limit the time required depending on the volume of work.

The authors then analyzed each stakeholder's urgencies per step to determine which three needs were primarily addressed and whether they reflected approach or avoidance motivation, in order to identify the underlying motives. For example, regarding public managers, "speed", "provision of good service", and "effort avoidance", correspond to the need for achievement and incorporates both hope for success and fear of failure. "Risk avoidance" represents emphases an avoidance motivation related to both needs for achievement and power and thus implying fear of failure and powerlessness/loss of control as the underlying motives. Hence, hope for success, fear of failure and powerlessness were identified as underlying motives for public managers in Step 1.

Phase 3: Validation

In Phase 3, a workshop discussed the matrix of urgencies of all five stakeholders with two experts in municipal administration, jurisprudence, and political science. The experts generally agreed with the analysis. Their general approval and feedback led only to minor

corrections. As an example of a corrections, the experts added in Step 7 that public managers are willing to approve applications if possible. Hence the urgency was reformulated, and the idea of a positive response was added: "Public managers want to complete the procedure in a timely and expeditious manner with a positive decision without any points of attack for contestability or annullability.". The authors conducted a final adjustment of the underlying motives. This yielded final matrix of urgencies and motives by stakeholder and step of the reference process (see Table 3). The expert consensus on the analysis indicated data saturation and sufficiency (Shaheen, Pradhan and Ranajee 2019).

Phase 4: Aggregation

Building on this final matrix, we reanalysed the urgencies and aggregated them over the steps. For example, public managers' urgencies in the eight steps (Table 3) were summarized into three urgency statements based on the underlying motives. This aggregation yielded a matrix of urgencies by stakeholder and motive (Table 4).

Phase 5: Reanalysis

To identify public values reflected in the urgencies, we conducted a secondary analysis of the expert interviews with public managers and elected officials. Using content analysis methodology (Mayring 2020), we examined each step of the administrative procedure, processing a total of 728 statements. Our analysis involved extracting, transforming, and generalizing these statements, followed by categorization and elimination of redundant responses. Through inductive categorization, we identified 19 distinct subcategories. These subcategories were then consolidated into eight broader categories of related or interdependent urgencies, with each category labeled to reflect its underlying public value. As an illustration, we grouped urgencies related to legal compliance, legal certainty, and data protection into a category termed "legal adherence." For each participant, we tracked the frequency of urgencies associated with specific public values across all eight procedural steps. We then aggregated these frequencies to create a comprehensive score for each public value.

Table 3: Stakeholder urgencies and motives in the steps of the procedure regarding a constitutive administrative act

Step	Applicants want ...	Third parties involved want to ...	Public managers want ...	Elected officials want ...	The Legislature ...
1) Advice/ information on rights, obligations & documents	to avoid making mistakes, because if they do, they will suffer a loss, and they want to speed up the process whenever possible.	be consulted in accordance with § 13 II VwVfG and not presented with a fait accompli.	to provide good service, avoid effort and risk without pre- committing to a procedure, and limit the time required depending on the volume of work.	low-threshold, customer-centric and clear support according to political opportunity that respects the well-being of the community as well as has economic benefits and is resource-efficient.	wants the authority to take care of the citizen as well as to provide transparency and planning security and to exhaust the options for accelerating the procedure (Deutscher Bundestag 1973; Deutscher Bundestag 07.10.2008) and also to involve the public if necessary.
	<i>Hope of success, fear of failure</i>	<i>Fear of powerlessness</i>	<i>Hope of success, fear of failure and powerlessness</i>	<i>Hope of power</i>	<i>Hope of success, power and affiliation, fear of failure</i>
2) Receive application	to have easy access to a verifiable application and start the process as early as possible.		to be certain that the application can be processed quickly (keyword "electronic application receipt").	to score points with citizens by providing good service.	
	<i>Hope of success</i>		<i>Fear of failure</i>	<i>Hope of affiliation</i>	
3) Inspection of formal correctness and jurisdiction	clarity, to have the substantive review start as early as possible, and not to start all over again because of a formal error.		to avoid formal errors that block time resources.	to ensure speedy, "unbureaucratic" (frustration-free) and media-discontinuity-free processing of applications in the interests of the applicants, that avoid unnecessary process steps slowing down procedures.	
	<i>Hope of success</i>		<i>Fear of failure</i>	<i>Fear of failure and rejection</i>	

Step	Applicants want ...	Third parties involved want to ...	Public managers want ...	Elected officials want ...	The Legislature ...
4) Review of completeness of documents	to avoid wasting time and/or money on elaborate or costly documents by providing additional documentation or involving other agencies.	see more documents in the procedure considered or expert opinions in case of doubt.	to gather all the necessary evidence to ensure legality and the fulfillment of tasks, but want to keep the effort of the authority (keyword "resource bottleneck") for this low.	See step 3	expects the expeditious review and collection of evidence and holdings that meet the legislative objective, but no more.
	<i>Fear of powerlessness</i>	<i>Fear of powerlessness</i>	<i>Fear of failure and powerlessness</i>	<i>Fear of failure and rejection</i>	<i>Hope of success and power, fear of failure</i>
5) Conclude collection of documents or request additional	to avoid starting the process all over again because of a missing document.		to continue or complete the process quickly.	See step 3	expects the authority to follow a procedure in accordance with the rule of law, which is the purpose of the hearing (Deutscher Bundestag 1973).
	<i>Fear of failure</i>		<i>Fear of failure</i>	<i>Fear of failure and rejection</i>	<i>Hope for success and power, fear of rejection</i>
6) Substantive examination of status recognition or requirements for a permit	to have their application reviewed expeditiously with consideration of the individual case and a "citizen-centered" interpretation of regulations	see their interests being accommodated.	an accuracy review while appreciating the authority's mission, the individual case, and meeting deadlines without being pressed for time.	to conduct a legally sound examination that serves political expediency and/or conviction with the participation of third parties and equal treatment of all applicants, while maintaining transparency and deadlines but at the same time do not represent any decision to the public that costs approval and/or is against their conviction.	wants an expeditious decision in terms of the requirement of the law.
	<i>Hope of success and affiliation</i>	<i>Hope of affiliation</i>	<i>Hope of success, fear of failure</i>	<i>Hope of success and power, fear of rejection</i>	<i>Hope of success and power, fear of failure</i>

Step	Applicants want ...	Third parties involved want to ...	Public managers want ...	Elected officials want ...	The Legislature ...
7) Status determination or granting respectively refusing a permit	to know why a decision was not made in their favor and want a chance to solve the issue or at least hope for a concession from the authority.	know why a decision was not made in their best interest and, as stakeholders, draw attention to their interests and at least mitigate a loss.	to complete the procedure in a timely and expeditious manner with a positive decision without any points of attack for contestability or annullability.	See step 6	expects the authority to be accommodating using ancillary provisions (Maurer and Waldhoff 2017, 379) as well as a procedure in accordance with the rule of law, which includes justification, hearing and (limited) inspection of files (Deutscher Bundestag 1973).
	<i>Fear of powerlessness, hope of affiliation</i>	<i>Fear of powerlessness, hope of affiliation</i>	<i>Hope of success, fear of failure</i>	<i>Hope of success and power, fear of rejection</i>	<i>Hope of affiliation, fear of rejection</i>
8) Issuing and delivering the notice	receive the (positive/negative) notice without errors and in a timely manner.		to ensure notices are forgery-proof and also arrive at the applicant's door	tamper-proof notices to arrive safely at applicants' doors.	
	<i>Hope of success</i>		<i>Fear of failure</i>	<i>Fear of failure and rejection</i>	

Table 4: Urgencies by stakeholder, motive, and step

	Applicants want to ...	Third parties involved want to ...	Public managers want to ...	Mayors /heads of department want to ...	The legislature wants to ...
Hope for success	realize their project as quickly and easily as possible.		issue lawful applications and fulfil the agency's mission.	provide the citizens with the most correct decisions, considering their individual cases as well as the common interest of the community.	achieve the objectives of the law and ensure due process of it.
	<i>Steps 1, 2, 3, 6, 8</i>		<i>Steps 1, 6, 7</i>	<i>Steps 6, 7</i>	<i>Steps 1, 4, 5, 6</i>
Fear of failure	avoid making mistakes that could jeopardize their project or generate unnecessary costs.		keep deadlines, minimize effort, avoid errors in the procedures or other points of attack of contestability.	avoid procedural delays, stay on budget, and avoid mistakes.	prevent procedural delays or other unnecessary burdens on citizens.
	<i>Steps 1,5</i>		<i>Steps 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</i>	<i>Steps 3, 4, 5, 8</i>	<i>Step 1, 4, 6</i>
Hope of power				ensure the administration's responsiveness to local political interests.	ensure the administration's responsiveness to the intent of the law.
				<i>Steps 1, 6, 7</i>	<i>Steps 1,4, 5, 6</i>
Fear of powerlessness/loss of control	be informed about the status of the procedure or the reasons for a possible rejection, and do not want to lose time and money by having to submit further documents or deal with the authorities repeatedly.	not be presented with a fait accompli and have all the consequences of a decision that are onerous for them included in the proceedings, as well as the reasons for a decision not in their favor.	minimize risks, remain in control of the process and not make unnecessarily binding commitments.		
	<i>Steps 4, 7</i>	<i>Steps 1, 4, 7.</i>	<i>Steps 1, 4</i>		

	Applicants want to ...	Third parties involved want to ...	Public managers want to ...	Mayors /heads of department want to ...	The legislature wants to ...
Hope of affiliation	have their particular case considered and, in the event of a refusal, wish for authorities to be accommodating and to have the opportunity to rectify the problem. <i>Steps 6, 7</i>	see the valuation of their interests reflected in the proceedings and, if necessary, draw attention to this again and at least mitigate any loss. <i>Steps 6, 7</i>		achieve satisfaction of the citizens with the service of the administration. <i>Step 2</i>	bring about the satisfaction of the citizens with the achieved goals. <i>Steps 5, 7</i>
Fear of rejection				represent only decisions that gain community approval and avoid mistakes that work against it. <i>Steps 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</i>	avoid dissatisfaction of citizens with the implementation of the law. <i>Step 7</i>

Note. Constantly accessible urgencies are printed in bold.

RESULTS AND INITIAL DISCUSSION

Stakeholder urgencies

The present analysis of urgencies shows the number and diversity of goals present during an administrative procedure which creates multiple and potentially conflicting expectations towards public agents handling cases (see Tables 3 and 4). Several urgencies were mentioned in more than one step of the reference process. Although the relevance of an urgency cannot solely be deduced from its presence in numerous or all steps of the reference process, a constant accessibility still signals an important active goal (Förster, Liberman and Higgins 2005). Following this idea, three urgencies of three stakeholders were identified that are present in the majority, hence more than four of the eight steps of the reference process (see Table 4): (1) Applicants want to realize their project as quickly and easily as possible. (2) Public managers want to keep deadlines, minimize effort, avoid errors in the procedures or other points of attack of contestability. (3) Elected officials want to represent only decisions that gain community approval and avoid mistakes that work against it. These constantly accessible urgencies indicate applicants and elected official may be partially in sync (at least public opinion is not in contrast to the application) since both want to ensure application's satisfaction with the processing and decision of their case, while public managers may prioritize the correctness of administrative action.

Whether or not urgencies of different stakeholders are in sync or not, only partly depends on the nature of administrative behavior or underlying motive. For instance, both elected officials and legislature want to ensure administration's responsiveness towards their overarching goals (local political interests for elected officials and the intent of the law for legislature). Hence, if local political interests differ from the intent of the law, this may yield goal conflict despite the similarity of the two urgencies. Similarly, both applicants and third parties hope for consideration of their interests, which may be in sync, if their interests converge, or yield conflict in case of conflicting interests. On the other hand, public managers want to avoid errors and risks affording a detailed, thorough and (perhaps lengthy) examination which may at first glance conflict with applicants' urgencies of realizing their project as quickly and easily as possible. However, legally wrong decisions or errors in procedures may pose an even greater risk to applicants' project than a lengthy examination. This example shows that the reported pattern of urgencies can be interpreted following the principles of goal systems in which some goals serve as means of attaining other goals (Kruglanski 2023). Moreover, a thorough examination without errors should also ensure that interests of all involved parties will be considered. Hence, public managers' urgency of avoiding errors and minimizing risks may serve as means to achieve some of applicants' and third parties' urgencies which describes the phenomenon of multifinality that one means or goal promotes the attainment of multiple overarching or related goals which increases the likelihood of prioritizing these goals (Kruglanski 2023).

In sum, goal systems theories may help interpreting the reported pattern of urgencies and help uncovering potential goal conflicts. However, as our examples also showed the actual emergence of specific goal conflicts that can be seen at this level of analysis largely

depend on contextual factors such as the actual interests of specific stakeholders in a given situation of case supporting our notion of the context-dependence of urgency conflicts. Nevertheless, the identification of context-independent, stable conflicts apparently requires analyzing more stable motives and values related to specific urgencies.

Motives underlying stakeholder urgencies

Our analysis of motives reveals similarities and differences between stakeholders. Except for third parties, stakeholders are motivated by performance, both hoping for success and fearing failure, although the nature of their urgencies differ. The stakeholders agree on striving for lawful decisions which should support their respective long-term goals and avoiding failures and unnecessary burden. Moreover, our analysis revealed a distinct picture for the need of power: The hope component of power motivation is pronounced for legislators and elected officials as politically responsible of executive, both hoping to ensure the administration's responsiveness to their respective goals. In contrast, the other three stakeholders should rather fear powerlessness or loss of control over the process or the outcomes. With regard to the need for affiliation, our analysis revealed substantial differences between the stakeholders: with the exception of the public managers, all should hope for affiliation either by fulfilling their own wishes or those of others. Only the "political" stakeholders (elected officials and legislature) should fear rejection, as they are dependent on the approval of the other stakeholders.

In summary, the underlying motives suggest an intriguing clustering of stakeholders into three groups based on their motives. These clusters are derived from the characteristics of the power and affiliation motives: The first "citizen" cluster, composed of applicants and third parties, fears powerlessness and hopes for affiliation. The second cluster, consisting of public managers, fears only the loss of power and control. The third "political" cluster, made up of elected officials and legislature, hopes for power and affiliation and fears rejection, showing the strongest need for affiliation. This clustering simplifies stakeholder analysis by reducing the number of perspectives from five to three. However, it is important to note that such simplification can potentially overlook important urgency conflicts. These reported differences in urgencies and associated motives among stakeholders align with the value conflicts reported in public organizations (Graaf, Huberts and Smulders 2016) and loyalty conflicts among public servants (Graaf 2011). Particularly relevant for the direction of the agency and management of public servants is the division of public managers and elected officials into two different clusters. This will be further examined by exploring the public values underlying the urgencies of "management" stakeholders.

Public values underlying "management" stakeholders' urgencies

As discussed, good administration can be particularly hindered by value conflicts between the two key principals of an agency: public managers and elected officials. Table 5 summarizes the public values and their respective frequencies for these two stakeholder groups. An analysis of variance with stakeholder as between-factor (public manager vs. elected officials) and public value category as within-factor yielded a significant main

effect of public value category ($F(7) = 21.75, p < .001$) and a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 7) = 3.747, p = .003$), but no main effect of stakeholder ($F(1) = 0.76, p = .387$).

Table 5: Public values underlying urgencies of public managers and elected officials

Categories	Subcategories	Public manager				lected officials	
		<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i> -value	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i> -value	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i> -value
Customer orientation	Service, closeness to citizens, collaboration, communication	3.36 (2.06)		3.29 (2.00)	1.148	3.43 (2.16)	.225
Rule adherence	Legal compliance, legal certainty, data protection	3.24 (2.01)	.078	3.95 (2.04)		2.52 (1.75)	4.476*
Promptness	Response and processing time	2.95 (1.53)	1.557	2.24 (1.14)	13.981*	3.67 (2.56)	
Professionalism	Diligence, completeness, initiative	2.86 (1.96)	2.852	2.57 (1.60)	8.806*	2.86 (1.96)	2.520
Transparency and clarity	Transparency, clarity	2.17 (1.48)	10.702*	2.10 (1.34)	8.802*	2.24 (1.64)	8.646*
Efficiency	Effort avoidance, cost effectiveness	1.05 (0.99)	36.370*	0.86 (0.73)	44.804*	1.24 (1.18)	30.528*
Societal impact	Political interests, third party participation	1.00 (.38)	39.377*	0.48 (0.75)	59.542*	1.52 (1.66)	20.187*
Fairness	Fairness, equal treatment	0.86 (1.12)	44.781*	1.10 (1.30)	37.855*	0.62 (0.87)	70.988*

Note. * $p < .05$; Dominant values are printed in bold. Simple contrast analysis tested the difference of each frequency score from the highest frequency score (i.e. customer orientation for the overall comparison, rule adherence for comparison among public managers and promptness for comparison among elected officials).

Post-hoc analysis testing simple contrasts revealed that many urgencies were underpinned by public values such as rule adherence, customer orientation, promptness, and professionalism. Fewer urgencies reflected values like transparency, clarity, efficiency, fairness, and societal impact. Consistent with the motive and urgency analysis, dominant public values were related either to achievement motivation (e.g., professionalism and rule adherence) or to both achievement and affiliation motivation (e.g., customer orientation and promptness). Separate contrast analyses highlighted each stakeholder's dominant public values: rule adherence and customer orientation for public managers, and promptness, customer orientation, and professionalism for elected officials. This result may reflect public managers' fear of failure and elected officials' hope for power and affiliation.

In sum, this content analysis of urgencies reported by administrative and political agency management yielded eight values reflecting several attributes used in the literature on public service performance (Boyne 2002), good governance (Hendriks 2014), and public value dimensions (Andersen, Boesen and Pedersen 2016; Neo, Grimmelikhuijsen and Tummers 2023). The partial differences in dominant values between public managers and elected officials substantiate their shared and divergent priorities regarding case work.

OVERALL DISCUSSION OF STAKEHOLDER MOTIVATION

Our findings shed light on what different stakeholders prioritize in the processing of constitutive administrative acts, helping to identify shared priorities and potential goal conflicts. Here, we discuss the similarities and differences between applicants, public managers, and elected officials by analyzing their urgencies, motives, and public values based on our results and previous research. We focus on key stakeholders from each of the clusters identified above, who play significant roles in processing administrative acts:

1. Applicants aim to realize their projects quickly and easily, reflecting a hope of success. This urgency aligns with citizens' core values of ideal public servants, such as serviceability, responsiveness, and dedication, which are essential for helping applicants achieve their goals (Neo, Grimmelikhuijsen and Tummers 2023).
2. Public managers focus on meeting deadlines, minimizing effort, and avoiding procedural errors or other contestable points, reflecting a fear of failure. Their dominant public values are rule adherence and customer orientation.
3. Elected officials seek to represent decisions that gain community approval and avoid mistakes that could lead to rejection, reflecting a fear of rejection. Their dominant public values are customer orientation, promptness, and professionalism.

All three stakeholders agree that case agents should be loyal to citizens as their customers. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that public administrators view citizens as an important object of loyalty (Graaf 2011) and that public service motivation is a central motive in the public sector (Ritz, Brewer and Neumann 2016). However, there is often a discrepancy between what applicants want and what public administrators believe applicants need, highlighting the importance of legally guaranteed participation in decision-making processes.

Despite the similarities between public managers and elected officials, their key urgencies, motives, and dominant public values differed indicating a potential for conflict: in line with their assumed fear of failure public managers emphasize rule adherence, while elected officials motivated by fear of rejection seek to meet citizen approval by meeting their expectations through prompt and professional service delivery. The reported values appear plausible due to different paths of advancement within a bureaucratic system or through election by an electorate. This may also reflect an either legalistic, coercive or managerial administrative tradition, promoting ideas of public administrations and servants as either administrators or service providers (Peters 2021). Since both stakeholders

are directing public servants' actions, their different urgencies and values may cause goal, value, and role or loyalty conflicts among public servants which has been reported to be an important stressor in public sector (e.g., Chun and Rainey 2005). However, since public organizations by definition need to pursue multiple goals, assigning different or even partially contradicting goals to different managers could also be seen as a balance strategy (Grote, Kolbe and Waller 2018) ensuring both goals influence administrative action. Further research will be necessary to determine the actual occurrence of conflicts, their relation to different stakeholder expectations, and their consequences in order to determine the need for and nature of respective measures.

Our approach possesses strengths and limitations. The analysis was qualitative and explorative in nature including different available data based on focused group interviews with public management students, expert interviews with agency management, and a review of legal documents. Despite its advantages, the sample sizes in the interviews were rather small, which may impede data quality. However, applying triangulation by combining interviews, document analysis and workshop with two experts should reduce this risk of low data quality. Moreover, the matched data set of public managers and elected officials helps controlling confounding organizational factors and allows attributing differences to the position in the organization. Despite the advantages, using a sample of public management students to derive the urgencies of citizen stakeholders may be influenced by their identification with case workers and the agency, but the large differences in urgencies between citizens and public managers, along with the alignment of citizen urgencies with public values (Neo, Grimmelikhuijsen and Tummers 2023), suggest this is not a significant issue, although direct validation of these urgencies by applicants and third parties is still recommended. In sum, our approach mainly serves to formulate hypotheses awaiting further testing using representative sample, quantitative methods, and longitudinal design.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Building on the premise that understanding and evaluating the quality of administrative action necessitates a multi-stakeholder perspective, this research proposes and demonstrates an approach to address the questions of significance and criteria. Drawing from behavioral public administration (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2017), our approach integrates insights from public administration, marketing, and motivational psychology. In answering "who counts," we apply Mitchell et al.'s (1997) stakeholder theory to constitutive administrative acts, identifying five stakeholders based on urgency, legitimacy, and power. To address "what counts," we analyze stakeholders' urgencies, motives, and values, advancing prior research by incorporating basic psychological needs and exploring the interplay between task-related goals and abstract motivations and values.

The present study contributes to public administration stakeholder theory. In their literature review, Gomes et al. (2024) identify four theoretical bases of concepts used in this field: collaborative governance, stakeholder salience, legitimacy, and wicked policy problems. The current paper builds on the concept of stakeholder salience as introduced by Mitchell et al. (1997). To the best of our knowledge, the present

study presents the first to propose and exemplary demonstrate a procedure of identifying definitive stakeholders for an administrative action in a context-specific way. This addresses the concerns expressed by Gomes et al. (2024). On the one hand, the authors consider Mitchell's approach, in combination with others, to be a suitable “theoretical line of how public organizations should prioritize their decision-making and policy-making processes.” (Gomes et al. 2024, 15). On the other hand, they fear that determining the importance of individual stakeholders will prove difficult and that the effort and complexity involved will make implementation difficult in real life. At least in the present case of constitutional administrative procedures and building on their respective legal regulation, we could clearly identify five definitive stakeholders. Following our idea of forming stakeholder cluster based on the underlying basic needs could help to reduce the number of stakeholders from five to three key stakeholders. However, this measure carries the risk that legitimate interests will not be sufficiently taken into account, which is considered a major advantage of stakeholder salience accounts (Gomes et al. 2024). Further testing of our approach to identifying stakeholders of different public goods and endeavors is necessary. An interesting challenge would be public authorities, as stakeholder identification and performance assessment in this case are located at the meso level rather than at the micro level of individual public services.

Our findings contribute to the conceptualization and assessment of good administration and public service performance. By identifying stakeholders' primary urgencies and values, the results provide a basis for better understanding the positions and dynamics in a “negotiation by all the stakeholders in an issue (or area),” (Bovaird and Löffler 2003, 316) which is a prerequisite for determining criteria for good governance and good administration. Secondly, knowledge of the fundamental concerns of stakeholders can serve to critically examine the criteria for measuring public service performance (for criticism on performance measures, see, for example, Andersen, Boesen and Pedersen 2016) and to counter the „identification problem“ in the field of public values (knowing a public value when we see it; Fukumoto and Bozeman 2019, 641).

To answer this problem of what counts regarding the quality of administrative action in public agencies, we build on and relate two fundamental theoretical lines of motivational psychology: basic psychological needs and goal systems theory. Both approaches have already been used to a certain extent to describe and explain administrative quality, but our theoretical considerations and analyses go beyond this. In his seminal work, Meynhardt (2009) was the first to argue that public value is created by satisfying basic psychological needs. We build on this assumption and open up a more differentiated perspective by focusing on the satisfaction of the needs of different stakeholders through specific public actions or goods, rather than the satisfaction of the needs of the general public by a social entity. In addition, unlike Meynhardt, we base our definition of basic psychological needs on an integration of MDT (McClelland 1987) and BPNT (Deci and Ryan 2008), which represent the most widely used approaches in current research. This allows us to link the present results to related research questions, such as the motives of managers in public sector (e.g., McCann and Stewin 1987; Palanović and Kovačić 2024) and product evaluation in consumer psychology (e.g., Hassenzahl et al. 2015). Secondly, by drawing on goal system theory (Kruglanski 2023) and distinguishing between different

goal concepts, we create a theoretically consistent framework for the complexity arising from the different stakeholder concerns, values, and needs. The role of goal systems or multiple, potentially conflicting goals has been investigated in public administration research before (Chun and Rainey 2005; Pandey and Wright 2006). Our introduction goal systems theory and the implicit nature and basis of goals provides insight to the cognitive and affective basis of goal emergence and pursuit which enables the most relevant conflicting goals at the level of values or motives to be identified, along with possible solutions.

Our approach thus prepares the ground for theoretical and practical considerations on policy making and public service delivery. Based on the urgencies identified, it is possible to identify potential conflicts of interest that are prerequisites for a principal-agent problem (Waterman and Meier 1998) and are also of significant importance in research on street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 2010). The findings also have practical value for policy advice. By disclosing the concerns based on the motives, assumptions can be made about the behavior of the groups involved. Only then can a behavioral model be determined that is essential for fulfilling the advisory function of science (Bizer 2011; Bizer and Gubaydullina 2007). By applying theoretical approaches and findings from marketing research and motivational psychology to the question of the quality of administrative action, we overcome existing knowledge silos in separate strands of research and contribute to the development of a comprehensive understanding of the quality of administrative action. This inclusive, multidisciplinary approach to understanding administrative quality can be included in the emerging field of behavioral public administration (Grimmelikhuisen et al. 2017).

In addition to these mainly theoretical contributions, the present study offers practical implications for policy makers and public managers aiming to boost demand-oriented public value creation. On a general level, our approach underscores the need for a comprehensive assessment of public service performance, akin to 360° assessments in management, which consider perspectives from customers, employees, colleagues, and superiors. Building on Rossiter's C-OAR-SE approach (Rossiter 2002), our research establishes a basis for a content-valid framework of conceptualizing of good administration by identifying stakeholders (i.e., raters) and attributes (i.e., values) specific to constitutive administrative acts.

On a more concrete level, we can outline four steps for policy makers and public managers striving to implement this approach:

1. *Define and prioritize your objects.* Research has proposed public goods as “non-rival, non-excludable goods and services”(Bryson, Crosby and Bloomberg 2014, 451), public endeavours such as services, projects, programs, organizations, and collaborations (Hartley et al. 2017, 627), and social entities such as a government, state, nation, community, or organization (Meynhardt and Jasinenko 2021, 26) as objects of evaluation. Only a precise definition of the objects allows identifying stakeholders and unbiased measurements. However, given the number and differences in abstractness of the potential objects ranging from specific services to nations, the purpose and objective of the assessment must be carefully considered and selected.

2. *Define your stakeholders* serving as raters. Applying Mitchell et al. (1997) logic to rather specific objects such as certain services allows for relatively straightforward identification of definitive stakeholders. However, this becomes more challenging when addressing larger, more abstract entities like nations, communities or government organizations. Even after stakeholder identification, accessing and integrating diverse perspectives presents practical challenges. Finally, depending on administrative legislature the legitimate stakeholders may differ.
3. *Define your relevant attributes*. Attributes relate to specific qualities attached to goal-concepts such as urgencies, values, and motives. Depending on the level and object of assessment, finding an appropriate level and set of attributes and designing suitable measures presents a challenge. Our contextualized approach focusing on constitutive administrative acts ensures data quality and avoids biased responses, but limits the generalizability of the results. The derived attributes in the form of urgencies and underlying public values refer only to the object in question. Stakeholder motivations, urgencies, motives, and values may vary across different legal and cultural contexts, such as the administrative roles in Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, and East Asian cultures (Peters 2021). Recent work by Neo, Grimmelikhuijsen and Tummers (2023) suggests partial universality in values across countries, supporting generalizations. In line with an interdisciplinary approach, the urgencies identified here could be examined against criteria for good administrative action that can be identified in the laws of countries from different legal and cultural backgrounds combining normative legal and positive empirical analyses. This would represent a further step toward a universal set of attributes of good administration. The findings to date at least indicate that some of the attributes identified here are enshrined in the constitutions or high-ranking laws of European countries (Venice Commission 2011) and also of the US (Mashaw 2007). Nevertheless, further investigation into the differences and similarities is necessary.
4. *Conduct the evaluation*. Depending on the purpose of an assessment of administrative quality, various strategic management approaches and performance management tools can be used ranging from performance auditing and inspection (e.g., Downe et al. 2010) to international benchmarks within the European Union based on the European Semester, the recent EUPACK project, or the standards developed by SIGMA OECD (e.g., Nemec 2023). Research shows that performance management in public organizations does not automatically increase effectiveness (e.g., Gerrish 2016), but represents a wicked problem opening a related but new field of research beyond the scope of this paper.

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the quality of administrative action fundamentally depends on clarifying who and what counts as relevant stakeholders and their diverse demands. This study establishes a context-specific procedure for stakeholder identification and integrates motivational psychology to capture stakeholder urgencies, motives, and values with greater precision. Our approach demonstrates both the analytical benefits of stakeholder clustering and the governance risks inherent in overlooking legitimate interests. Furthermore, the framework provides policymakers with structured evaluative guidance that remains sensitive to contextual variations. These findings confirm that administrative quality can only be meaningfully assessed when multiple stakeholder perspectives are systematically integrated into both theoretical frameworks and practical implementation.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Overview of the steps and respective actions in a procedure regarding constitutive administrative acts

Step	Actions within the jurisdiction of a case worker, other public servants, or agencies, including their online portals, without discretion	Decisions at the discretion of the case worker or the agency
1) Advice/ information on rights, obligations & documents	Information about the responsible contact person Discussion, advice or information on required documents Provision of any information required for the application (e.g., development plan in the case of a building permit) Provision of application forms	Decision on the necessity and scope of the consultation or information as well as the availability of information (website) and accessibility Assurance that recognition or permission is not required
2) Receive application	Recording and saving the application data Managing the application and documents Mandatory confirmation of receipt of application	Acceptance of an application for the issuance of a preliminary decision, unless regulated by law Voluntary confirmation of receipt of application Information on the expected duration of the procedure and completeness, insofar as this serves to accelerate the procedure
3) Inspection of formal correctness and jurisdiction	Verification of jurisdiction and form (e.g., signature for written form) Mandatory notification to applicant	Speed of the examination Possible notification to applicants Forwarding of an incorrectly addressed application Assistance in case of erroneous form
4) Review of completeness of documents	Comparison with the compulsory documents Query of evidence to be obtained by the agency itself Checking the involvement of further agencies, departments or other bodies	Request for additional documents to clarify a matter the case worker considers to be necessary (e.g., translations of submitted documents or confirmations of entities involved) Request for documents the authority can obtain itself Speed of the examination
5) Conclude collection of documents or request additional	Notification to applicant about missing documents	Giving the opportunity to be heard in case of missing documents before refusal according to § 28 VwVfG (VwVfG, 2003/21.06.2019) Setting a deadline for the submission of requested documents
6) Substantive examination of status recognition or requirements for a permit	Review of prerequisites or reasons for refusal (e.g., entries in the Federal Central Register)	Speed of the examination (also by option of extension of the deadline) Evaluation of the criteria for granting a status (e.g. if legal terms such as “reliability” are indeterminate) or permission criteria (e.g. deviations from legal standards if the purpose is met in another way)

Step	Actions within the jurisdiction of a case worker, other public servants, or agencies, including their online portals, without discretion	Decisions at the discretion of the case worker or the agency
7) Status determination or granting respectively refusing a permit	Reasoning in case of an encroachment on the rights of the party involved (e.g., refusal of recognition or refusal of a permit) with an explanation of the exercise of discretion (§ 39 VwVfG) If necessary, supplementary information (e.g., explanation of existing qualifications in the case of rejection of a foreign training certificate for a specific qualification)	Giving the opportunity to be heard in the case of a negative review (§ 28 VwVfG) Scope and content of reasoning and advice Partial approval Providing an administrative act with ancillary provisions (addition or restriction of a time limit, condition or requirement as well as a reservation of revocation or a reservation of conditions) Assurance that a permit or approval will be granted under the terms of which the permit or approval is granted
8) Issuing and delivering the notice	Prepare and send notice and notice of charge (if necessary, notify in advance) If necessary, mandatory notification to other agencies	If necessary, notification to other agencies

Appendix B. Case vignette of a building permit procedure and interview guidelines

Case vignette:

"In ... (insert the city your expert comes from here), is a vacant and undeveloped property in a mixed (use-)area. The company of master carpenter "Wood" is doing well, but the premises have become too small. Mr. Wood submits a building permit application for his workshop and carpentry business with two employees for the undeveloped property. In his permit he states no hazardous waste is produced and therefore no special building is needed."

Questions and instructions to interviewer:

"What is your overall priority in such building permit? We are not interested in what others think you should consider important, but what is a particular and pressing concern to you as ... (mayor/head of department, etc.)."

Instruction to interviewer: Wait for a response. Possibly special features of the authority might be mentioned. Please pay attention to such notions and address them henceforth.

"Such an approval procedure consists of various process steps. We would now like to go through the individual steps with you and ask you ...

-what is particularly important to you in each step of the process and ...

-what you would like to pass on to the person responsible for this step, so that he or she can base his or her actions on it."

Instruction to interviewer: You can mention that there are no right or wrong answers, if you con this is necessary. Add, if necessary:

"Please remember, your perspective and assessments are valuable for the further development of the research approach. Thus, there are no right or wrong answers."

"What is important to you in the ... (see Appendix A) procedural step regarding service delivery?"

Instruction to interviewer: Ask about special requirements and or peculiarities in the procedure

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