

Article Reviewed:

Pesch, Udo, "Administrators and Accountability: The Plurality of Value Systems in the Public Domain", *Public Integrity*, Fall, 2008, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 335-343.

The article, "Administrators and Accountability: The Plurality of Value Systems in the Public Domain", by Udo Pesch seeks to address how accountability and value systems interact in the decisions made by public administrators. The research problem being addressed is whether public administrators are free from accountability for their decisions and what are the different influences that can affect their decisions.

It is clear from the abstract of the article that this is no simple issue. In fact the article is fairly confusing for the first couple paragraphs. The author starts by saying that explicit ethics codes of reference systems make it easier to hold individuals accountable for their actions, however a conflict emerges when an individual's moral values are different from such accountability policies. What can make accountability more complicated are the motivations of the administrator and also the individual's inability to perceive future consequences of their decisions.

Another influence, outside of individual morals and ethical guidelines, is the existence of social context. These different domains generally "lay down their own standards of good and bad behavior" (p. 336). This social surrounding can help an individual determine a good decision from a bad one, but at the same time complicates the idea of accountability. The organization that a public administrator is a part of may also complicate accountability and may provide another outlet for blame if the public sees a decision as immoral. The author also acknowledges the tendency to blame the highest level of a hierarchy or elected official for

questionable decision making on a lower level. Udo Pesch sees this as “undesirable” and writes that by carrying out the policies the public administrator is at least somewhat responsible. To support this claim the author uses the example of viewing the public administrator as a citizen, and as such they have “an active role in the safeguarding [community] values and interests”. (p.339)

To such a complicated issue the author sums the research up well by saying that there are times when a public administrator has to violate their own moral codes because there are no universal moral rules that “allow a civil servant to live up to integrity standards.”(p.341) A public administrator can hide behind laws and organizational procedures, but ultimately this is no reason to disregard accountability and there are ways that these individuals can act morally. Pesch writes, “It would be more sensible to design accountability arrangements that acknowledge that civil servants are actively responsible for their actions, and that try to provide them the opportunity to consciously address the potential difference between authorized rules and communal principles and values.” (p.341) And, while this is excellently laid out as a theory, the author ultimately admits that there is no single best design for an accountability agreement on a tangible level.

This is good concept for how the problem of multiple value systems and accountability should be handled. However, there doesn't appear to be any concrete guidelines for carrying this out. In other words this sounds great on paper but it doesn't translate as easily to everyday life. There isn't research in the traditional sense for this article, but the author does include many examples of work written by those who have written on this subject in the past. Pesch

cites people like Locke, Montesquieu, and Machiavelli. These are good, well-known examples and authors and I think it adds a great deal credibility to the piece as a whole.

Overall this article isn't very straightforward in the beginning and it's not until the second page that you realize where the article is headed. In order to have more people be engaged and read the whole article it needs a new, more concise introduction. Once the reader gets to the really good examples that are relevant to the everyday life of a public administrator, a good portion of the article has already past. Overall it is a good, well-written article with an important message for public administrators and organizations. The piece, when taken as a whole, is relevant and very convincing in theory but starts slow and never lays out a concrete way of approaching this complex problem.