Strategic PIAO Communication for Public Value Creation in Local Government

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Abstract: Public administrations are increasingly expected to create Public Value through transparency, participation, organizational alignment and trust, not only through service delivery. This paper examines how investments in communicating the Piano Integrato di Attività e Organizzazione - Integrated Activity and Organization Plan (PIAO) may contribute to the organizational conditions enabling Public Value creation. Building on Knowledge Management, Organizational Learning, Public Value Governance, Public Service Motivation and strategic communication literature, the study conceptualizes the PIAO as a Knowledge Management infrastructure whose effectiveness depends on whether its strategic content is understood and translated into everyday practices. Adopting a qualitative conceptual approach supported by an exploratory case study of the Municipality of Pescara (Italy), the paper develops the Public Value Promotion Investment Indicator (PVP-II), a managerial tool for estimating the organizational effort devoted to promoting Public Value through internal communication, external communication, training, stakeholder engagement and employee involvement. Rather than measuring Public Value itself, the PVP-II estimates investments in knowledge-sharing processes that facilitate strategic alignment, organizational learning, employee engagement, institutional trust and stakeholder awareness. The paper contributes to Knowledge Management research by positioning communication as a strategic organizational investment connecting integrated planning, knowledge processes and Public Value creation.

Keywords: Knowledge management, Public value creation, Strategic organizational communication, PIAO

1. Introduction

In recent years, Italian public administrations have redesigned planning systems around Public Value. The Piano Integrato di Attività e Organizzazione (PIAO) integrates strategic planning, performance management, human resource policies, transparency, anti-corruption measures and organizational development within a single framework (Deidda Gagliardo & Saporito, 2021; Deidda Gagliardo et al., 2023; Cepiku et al., 2025). Its effectiveness, however, depends on whether it becomes a living managerial instrument rather than a formal planning document.

A practical paradox emerges: considerable resources are devoted to drafting, approving and publishing PIAOs, while less attention is paid to whether these documents are known, understood and used by employees, citizens and stakeholders. The managerial question is therefore whether a planning instrument can generate Public Value if the knowledge it contains is not effectively shared.

This question shifts attention from the document itself to the organizational processes surrounding it. From a Knowledge Management perspective, planning documents acquire value when they become shared organizational knowledge capable of influencing behaviours, decisions and relationships (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Massaro et al., 2015). Communication should therefore be regarded as a mechanism through which strategic knowledge is translated into organizational learning, engagement and institutional legitimacy (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Wenger, 1998; Men, 2014).

Public Value theory reinforces this perspective. Public Value emerges through interactions among institutions, employees, citizens and stakeholders rather than from administrative outputs alone (Moore, 1995; Meynhardt, 2009, 2015; Bryson et al., 2014). Since employees translate institutional strategies into outcomes for citizens, investment in strategic communication can become a value-enabling activity (Perry & Wise, 1990; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Men, 2014).

The paper therefore treats communication as an organizational investment. Resources allocated to disseminating the PIAO through internal communication, training, stakeholder engagement, public information and participatory activities may strengthen employees' awareness, organizational identification, trust and stakeholder participation (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Perry & Wise, 1990; Men, 2014; Meynhardt, 2009). Accordingly, the study asks:

> *How can investments in strategic communication associated with the PIAO contribute to the organizational conditions that support Public Value creation?*

Building on this question, the paper develops the following working proposition:

> *Strategic investments devoted to communicating and promoting the PIAO strengthen knowledge sharing, employee engagement, organizational alignment and stakeholder awareness, thereby increasing the organizational conditions that enable Public Value creation.*

To explore this proposition, the paper combines Knowledge Management, Organizational Learning, Public Value Governance, Public Service Motivation and strategic communication literature with an exploratory analysis of the Municipality of Pescara. It introduces the Public Value Promotion Investment Indicator (PVP-II) as a conceptual managerial proposal estimating the effort dedicated to promoting Public Value through communication, training, dissemination and stakeholder engagement associated with the PIAO.

The contribution is threefold. First, it reinterprets the PIAO as a Knowledge Management infrastructure whose effectiveness depends on strategic knowledge circulation. Second, it positions communication as an organizational investment creating conditions for Public Value generation. Third, it proposes the PVP-II as a first conceptual architecture for making communication and engagement investments visible within integrated Public Value management.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Public Value Requires Shared Organizational Knowledge

The growing emphasis on Public Value has changed how public administrations conceive planning, organizational development and institutional performance. Rather than evaluating public organizations only in terms of efficiency or service delivery, contemporary public management increasingly recognizes their capacity to generate broader social outcomes, strengthen democratic legitimacy and improve citizens' well-being (Moore, 1995; Meynhardt, 2009, 2015; Bryson et al., 2014). Public Value therefore emerges through the interaction between organizational capabilities, institutional relationships and stakeholders' perceptions of public action.

This evolution has significant managerial implications. Creating Public Value requires public organizations not only to define strategic priorities but also to ensure that these priorities are understood, shared and translated into coherent organizational behaviour. Integrated planning systems, and particularly the PIAO, aim to strengthen this alignment by connecting strategic objectives, organizational resources, human capital, governance mechanisms and performance management within a unified framework (Deidda Gagliardo & Saporito, 2021; Deidda Gagliardo et al., 2023; Cepiku et al., 2025). Strategic alignment, however, cannot be achieved through planning documents alone. It depends on whether the knowledge embedded in those documents becomes part of everyday organizational practice.

This perspective is particularly relevant in contemporary public organizations, where strategic planning depends on collaboration among managers, employees, political leaders and citizens. Knowledge Management in the public sector extends beyond information management and includes the capability to create, share, apply and preserve knowledge in support of public decision-making (Cong & Pandya, 2003; Wiig, 2002). Leadership, organizational culture and knowledge-sharing practices strongly influence this capability (Pee & Kankanhalli, 2016). KM should therefore be understood as a managerial capability that aligns people, knowledge and institutional objectives around Public Value creation.

Consequently, integrated planning cannot be evaluated only by examining the quality of planning documents or the coherence of strategic objectives. The crucial issue is how strategic knowledge is disseminated, explained and internalized. Only when planning becomes shared organizational knowledge can it influence employees' behaviour, strengthen organizational alignment and create the conditions for Public Value generation (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Wenger, 1998; Men, 2014).

2.2 Strategic Communication as a Knowledge Management Process

Knowledge Management literature shows that knowledge generates value only when it is communicated, interpreted, shared and applied (Nonaka, 1994; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Massaro et al., 2015). Communication is therefore a mechanism through which strategic knowledge becomes coordinated action, learning and collective understanding.

This interpretation is particularly relevant for integrated planning systems such as the PIAO. Although the document defines strategic priorities, organizational objectives, performance indicators and Public Value goals, its managerial effectiveness depends on whether these contents become understandable and meaningful for those responsible for implementation (Deidda Gagliardo & Saporito, 2021; Deidda Gagliardo et al., 2023; Cepiku et al., 2025). Publishing the PIAO does not ensure that its strategic vision becomes embedded within the organization. Planning becomes operational only when communication transforms formal objectives into shared organizational knowledge.

Communication supports the interpretation of strategic priorities, reduces informational asymmetries, facilitates organizational learning and aligns individual behaviours with institutional objectives (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Men, 2014). In public organizations, this process is especially important because employees represent the primary interface between institutional strategies and citizens. Public servants translate strategic priorities into administrative decisions, services and everyday interactions with stakeholders. Their awareness of organizational objectives is therefore a strategic asset, influencing internal coordination and the perceived quality, coherence and legitimacy of public action (Perry & Wise, 1990; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Men, 2014). Strategic communication also extends beyond organizational boundaries, contributing to transparency, accountability, stakeholder awareness and legitimacy in collaborative governance environments (Bryson et al., 2014; Meynhardt, 2009).

Communication should therefore be interpreted as a core Knowledge Management process: investing in communication means investing in the capacity to transform planning into shared understanding, coordinated behaviour and collective commitment.

2.3 From Communication Activities to Communication Investments

Communication is often treated as a supporting function, yet public management and KM literature suggest that it is a strategic capability shaping the conditions under which Public Value is generated (Bryson et al., 2014; Meynhardt, 2009, 2015; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Massaro et al., 2015).

Despite this recognition, communication is still rarely treated as an organizational investment within public administrations. Resources devoted to communication are usually considered operational expenditures rather than strategic assets. Consequently, while considerable attention is devoted to measuring outputs, outcomes and performance indicators, less attention is paid to the investments required to ensure that strategic priorities are understood, shared and enacted.

This observation is particularly significant in the context of the PIAO. Preparing an integrated planning document requires strategic analysis, performance planning, human resource policies, governance design and Public Value objectives. Yet this effort may remain partly unrealized if the strategic contents of the PIAO are not disseminated among employees, managers, citizens and institutional stakeholders. Drafting the PIAO is therefore only the first stage of a broader organizational process whose effectiveness depends on communication.

KM literature shows that organizational knowledge generates value only when it becomes actionable knowledge influencing behaviour and decision-making (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Wiig, 2002). Investments in internal communication, training, participatory processes and stakeholder engagement should therefore be interpreted as mechanisms converting strategic knowledge into organizational capabilities.

The same reasoning applies to human capital. Employees translate institutional strategies into operational practices; their understanding of priorities and contribution to collective goals influences organizational action (Perry & Wise, 1990; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Men, 2014). Communication investments also reinforce transparency, stakeholder awareness, trust and participation (Bryson et al., 2014; Meynhardt, 2015).

These considerations suggest that communication investments are enabling investments. They do not directly create Public Value; rather, they strengthen the organizational conditions through which Public Value can emerge. This shifts managerial attention from communication outputs to the contribution of communication to alignment, knowledge sharing, employee engagement and stakeholder involvement.

An important gap therefore remains. Although many studies recognize the strategic importance of communication, there is still no conceptual framework capable of estimating the organizational effort devoted to promoting Public Value through strategic communication activities associated with integrated planning systems such as the PIAO. Addressing this gap provides the rationale for the conceptual proposal developed below.

3. Conceptual Framework: Strategic PIAO Communication as a Knowledge Management Infrastructure

The central argument of this paper is that the Public Value potential embedded within the PIAO cannot be realized through drafting and formal approval alone. Integrated planning defines strategic priorities, organizational objectives, governance mechanisms and expected societal impacts, but these elements generate organizational value only if they are understood, shared and translated into everyday behaviour. Public Value is therefore not produced by the existence of the PIAO itself, but by the organizational processes that transform its strategic content into collective action (Moore, 1995; Meynhardt, 2009, 2015; Bryson et al., 2014; Deidda Gagliardo & Saporito, 2021).

This observation shifts attention from planning to implementation and, more specifically, from producing strategic documents to managing organizational knowledge. Knowledge Management literature argues that organizations create value when knowledge is generated, interpreted, shared and applied by organizational actors (Nonaka, 1994; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Massaro et al., 2015). An integrated planning system such as the PIAO can therefore be interpreted as a repository of strategic organizational knowledge whose effectiveness depends on dissemination, internalization and operational use.

If the PIAO represents the strategic knowledge architecture of the organization, a further question arises: how can public administrations ensure that this knowledge reaches employees, managers, citizens and stakeholders? Communication is one of the primary mechanisms through which knowledge becomes coordinated action, organizational learning and shared understanding (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Wenger, 1998; Men, 2014). In integrated planning, it is therefore a deliberate managerial activity requiring resources, attention, capabilities and governance arrangements.

For this reason, communication is conceptualized as a strategic organizational investment rather than a post-planning activity. Internal dissemination, training, explanatory materials, digital communication, participatory events and stakeholder engagement transform planning into shared organizational knowledge.

The expected return on these investments should not be interpreted as immediate Public Value creation. Instead, communication investments strengthen intermediate organizational conditions that make Public Value more likely to emerge. Knowledge sharing increases employees' understanding of institutional priorities and facilitates organizational learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Wenger, 1998). A clearer organizational mission may reinforce motivation, commitment and Public Service Motivation (Perry & Wise, 1990; Deci & Ryan, 2000). External communication may also improve transparency, legitimacy, stakeholder trust and awareness (Men, 2014; Bryson et al., 2014).

Existing studies discuss integrated planning, effective PIAOs and the benefits of Knowledge Management (Deidda Gagliardo et al., 2023; Massaro et al., 2015; Pee & Kankanhalli, 2016), but rarely estimate the effort required to transform strategic planning into shared organizational knowledge. These investments remain largely invisible within planning and performance systems.

To address this gap, the Public Value Promotion Investment Indicator (PVP-II) is proposed as a conceptual managerial tool. It does not measure Public Value itself or replace existing indicators; rather, it estimates the intensity of organizational investment devoted to promoting PIAO contents through communication, training, dissemination and stakeholder engagement.

Conceptually:

$$\textbf{PVP-II} = \mathbf{f(IC, EC, T, SE, EI)}$$

where IC is internal communication, EC external communication, T training and organizational development, SE stakeholder engagement, and EI employee involvement. The formula is intentionally conceptual: each dimension should be calibrated according to organizational context, strategic priorities and future empirical validation. The proposed variables are scalable and may be adapted to organizational size, financial investment per PIAO action, number of employees involved and stakeholder heterogeneity.

The PVP-II has a dual function. Ex ante, it estimates the investment devoted to communicating PIAO objectives at the time of publication. Ex post, it supports reflection on whether these investments contributed to employee engagement, organizational learning, performance improvement and the broader conditions enabling Public Value creation.

Figure 1 summarizes the model, showing how strategic investments in PIAO communication activate Knowledge Management processes, generate organizational and relational outcomes, and strengthen conditions for Public Value creation.

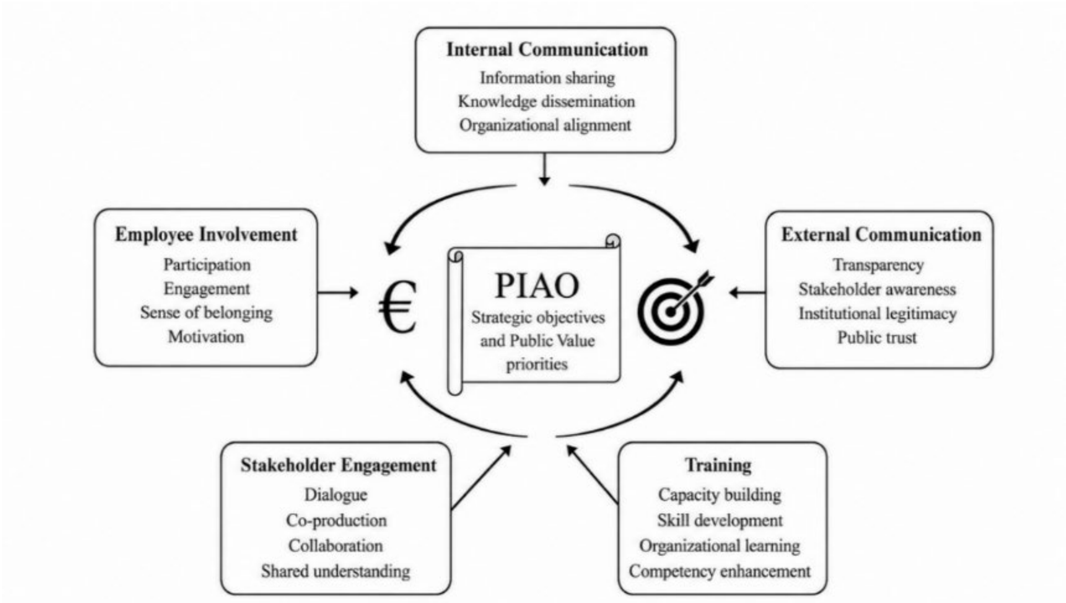

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: strategic PIAO communication as a Knowledge Management infrastructure for Public Value creation (authors' elaboration)

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual design supported by an exploratory case study. It does not seek to demonstrate a causal relationship between communication activities and Public Value creation, nor to validate a new performance indicator statistically. Rather, it develops a theoretically grounded managerial framework explaining why investments in communicating integrated planning represent an overlooked organizational dimension and how they may become measurable. The paper therefore adopts a theory-building perspective in which conceptual development precedes empirical operationalization (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Moore, 1995; Meynhardt, 2009).

This methodological choice is consistent with Knowledge Management research, where conceptual studies have anticipated empirical developments by proposing interpretative models, constructs and managerial tools before operationalization (Nonaka, 1994; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Massaro et al., 2015). Similarly, Public Value research has developed conceptual frameworks intended to guide managerial practice before empirical measurement (Moore, 1995; Meynhardt, 2009; Bryson et al., 2014). The paper should therefore be understood as a theory-building contribution centred on the PVP-II.

To support the framework, the study employs an exploratory case study of the Municipality of Pescara. The case does not function as empirical validation; rather, it provides a real organizational setting in which the assumptions of the framework can be examined. The case selection follows a purposive logic based on theoretical relevance. Pescara has adopted the PIAO as the central governance instrument integrating strategic planning, performance management, organizational development, human resource policies, transparency and Public Value objectives. The municipality has also expressed interest in strengthening PIAO dissemination among employees and stakeholders, making the case suitable for exploring communication as an organizational investment.

The empirical analysis primarily relies on documentary evidence. The principal source is the Municipality of Pescara's PIAO 2026-2028, examined with particular attention to Public Value, strategic planning, organizational development, performance management, human capital, stakeholder participation, transparency, internal communication, training and governance mechanisms. Document analysis was complemented by consideration of institutional communication initiatives, organizational practices and managerial reflections concerning PIAO dissemination. Rather than assessing effectiveness, the analysis identified the organizational resources potentially invested in transforming strategic planning into shared knowledge. This distinguishes the study from approaches that evaluate only document quality or organizational outcomes.

The documentary analysis followed a structured qualitative procedure. First, the PIAO 2026–2028 and the related institutional documentation were systematically examined to identify recurring themes concerning Public Value, strategic planning, communication, human capital, governance and stakeholder engagement. Second, these themes were grouped into broader analytical categories and interpreted through the theoretical lenses of Knowledge Management, Organizational Learning and Public Value. Finally, an iterative comparison between the documentary evidence and the literature allowed the refinement of the conceptual framework and the identification of the dimensions composing the proposed PVP-II. Therefore, the Municipality of Pescara was not used to validate the framework empirically, but to inform and theoretically ground its conceptual development.

Following an abductive logic, theoretical concepts from Knowledge Management, Organizational Learning, Public Value, motivation and strategic communication literature were compared with documentary evidence from the case. This iterative comparison refined the conceptual framework and identified the principal dimensions of the PVP-II, allowing the model to remain connected to the operational characteristics of the PIAO. The indicator follows a conceptual rather than statistical logic: it estimates the intensity of investment devoted to promoting strategic objectives through internal communication, external communication, training and organizational development, stakeholder engagement and employee involvement.

Consequently, the contribution is not the validation of a new performance measure, but a theoretically grounded pathway for future operationalization of the relationship between communication investments and the conditions supporting Public Value creation.

5. The Municipality of Pescara: Towards the Public Value Promotion Investment Indicator (PVP-II)

The Municipality of Pescara offers a meaningful setting because its PIAO 2026-2028 identifies Public Value as the overarching objective of municipal action and links strategic planning, organizational development, human resource management, transparency, digital transformation, participation and performance management within a unified strategy aimed at improving local economic, social, environmental and institutional well-being.

From a strategic management perspective, the document represents more than a statutory planning requirement. It codifies the municipality's institutional vision, strategic priorities, expected impacts and organizational commitments. In Knowledge Management terms, the PIAO is the principal repository of strategic organizational knowledge, concentrating information that should guide managerial behaviour and collective action (Nonaka, 1994; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Alavi & Leidner, 2001). Yet this does not automatically mean that its contents become shared or influence employees, managers, citizens and stakeholders. Its effectiveness depends on the organization's capacity to transform strategic planning into shared knowledge and collective awareness.

From this perspective, communication becomes a managerial issue rather than a purely informational one. Internal dissemination activities - leadership communication, staff meetings, onboarding, training, workshops and digital communication - help employees understand the strategic meaning of the PIAO and their contribution to its objectives (Men, 2014; Perry & Wise, 1990; Deci & Ryan, 2000). External communication directed towards citizens, associations, businesses, schools and institutional partners may increase transparency, accountability and awareness of municipal priorities. These activities require financial resources, managerial time, competences and organizational commitment, yet such investments remain largely invisible within planning and performance systems.

Knowledge Management explains why these investments matter. Strategic knowledge generates value only when it is shared, interpreted and incorporated into routines (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Massaro et al., 2015). Organizational Learning theory similarly suggests that employees develop coherent behaviours when institutional objectives are collectively understood (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Wenger, 1998). Motivation theories reinforce this view by showing that individuals become more engaged when they understand the purpose of their work and perceive their contribution to collective goals (Perry & Wise, 1990; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Building on these considerations, Pescara can be interpreted as an exploratory laboratory for the conceptual development of the PVP-II. The indicator does not quantify Public Value or replace existing performance measures. Rather, it estimates the organizational investment dedicated to promoting the strategic contents of the PIAO among employees and external stakeholders, shifting attention from outcomes alone to the effort required to make those outcomes achievable. In its conceptual formulation, the PVP-II assumes that investments in strategic communication create enabling conditions - knowledge dissemination, organizational learning, employee engagement, institutional trust, stakeholder awareness and organizational alignment - that increase the probability that PIAO objectives are translated into behaviour and, ultimately, Public Value outcomes.

The case illustrates an overlooked managerial dimension: transforming strategic planning into shared organizational knowledge requires resources, competences and sustained communication. Recognizing and progressively measuring this effort is the primary contribution of the PVP-II and the foundation for Figure 2.

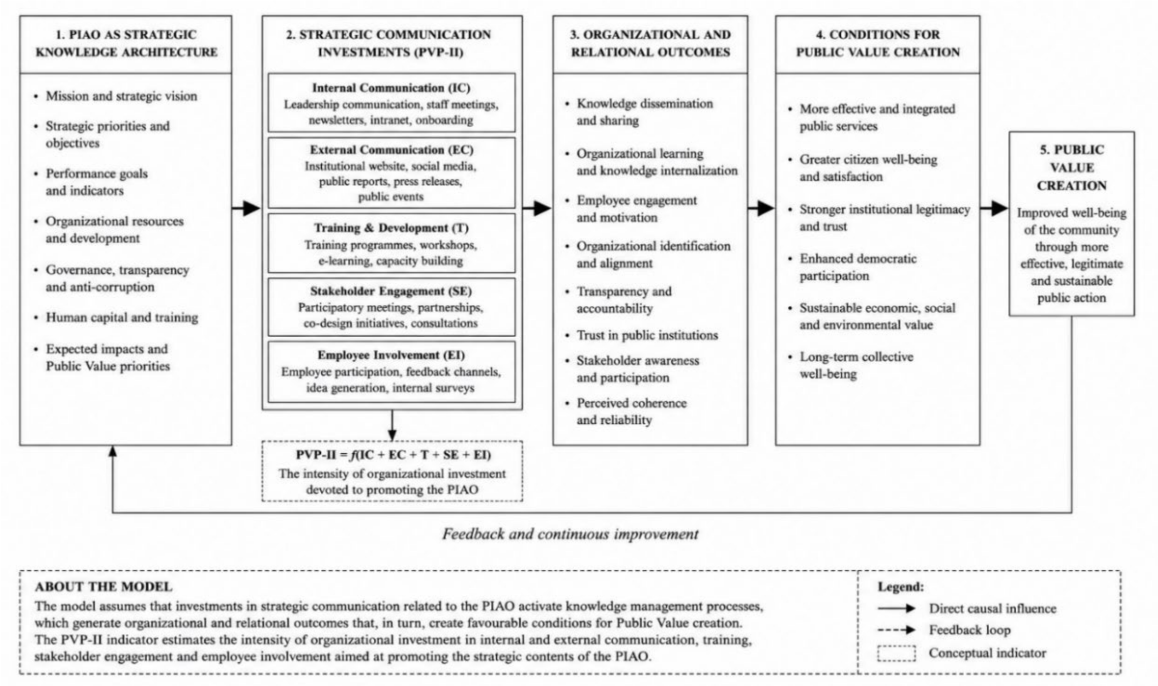

Figure 2: The PVP-II Conceptual Model (authors' elaboration)

6. Managerial Implications: The Public Value Promotion Investment Indicator (PVP-II)

The conceptual framework and the exploratory analysis of Pescara suggest that one managerial dimension of integrated public planning remains overlooked: the effort required to ensure that strategic priorities become understood, shared and translated into coordinated organizational behaviour. The central proposition advanced in this paper is that strategic communication should be interpreted as an organizational investment rather than as downstream dissemination. Internal communication campaigns, leadership engagement, employee training, stakeholder consultation, participatory initiatives, digital communication and public dissemination require financial resources, managerial commitment and organizational capabilities. They are therefore not ancillary to planning; they create the conditions through which planning can influence behaviour and performance.

Building upon this premise, the PVP-II is introduced as a conceptual managerial construct. The indicator does not measure Public Value itself or replace performance measurement systems. Its purpose is to estimate the organizational effort devoted to promoting, communicating and disseminating the strategic contents embedded within the PIAO, thereby supporting the knowledge-sharing processes that precede Public Value creation. It is organized around five investment domains: internal communication, external communication, training and organizational development, stakeholder engagement and employee involvement. Together, these dimensions describe the extent to which an organization invests resources in transforming strategic planning into shared organizational knowledge.

The scalability of the model may be refined by relating PVP-II components to contextual parameters, including territorial extension, resident population, employee-to-population ratios, investment per PIAO action, the number of trained or informed employees and the stakeholders involved in specific communication actions. This formulation is a conceptual aggregation of the principal investments supporting Public Value promotion, not a definitive measurement equation. Future research may refine the model through weighting coefficients, normalization factors or organizational parameters according to the size, complexity and strategic priorities of different public administrations.

From a managerial perspective, the indicator encourages public managers to ask whether sufficient resources are being invested to ensure that strategic priorities are understood by employees, managers, citizens and stakeholders. The Municipality of Pescara is an appropriate context because its PIAO already links organizational health, participation, governance quality, human capital and Public Value. The PVP-II extends this logic by making communication investment visible.

Figure 2 positions strategic communication investments at the centre of the relationship between integrated planning and Public Value creation, interpreting communication as the mechanism through which strategic knowledge is disseminated and organizational learning is fostered.

7. Concluding Remarks

This paper addressed a practical yet theoretically underexplored question: how can public administrations ensure that the strategic knowledge embedded within integrated planning systems contributes to Public Value creation?

Responding to this question required moving beyond the interpretation of the PIAO as a planning and compliance instrument and reinterpreting it as a Knowledge Management infrastructure whose effectiveness depends on transforming planning into shared organizational knowledge. Drawing on Knowledge Management, Organizational Learning, Public Value, motivation and strategic communication literature, and using Pescara as an exploratory context, the paper argues that investments devoted to communicating the PIAO constitute an overlooked managerial dimension.

Rather than producing Public Value directly, these investments strengthen knowledge sharing, organizational alignment, employee engagement, institutional trust and stakeholder awareness, thereby reinforcing the conditions through which Public Value may emerge. The principal contribution is the conceptual development of the PVP-II. Unlike traditional performance indicators, it does not quantify Public Value itself; instead, it makes visible the resources devoted to making strategic planning understandable, actionable and collectively shared. The proposed framework should be interpreted as a conceptual starting point rather than a definitive measurement model.

Future research may operationalize the PVP-II dimensions, explore weighting schemes, investigate relationships with employee engagement and organizational learning, and test applicability across public administrations.

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