



Hybrid Governance and Public Value in South African PPPs: Balancing Trust, Accountability and Participation

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Abstract:

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are increasingly promoted as vehicles for addressing complex service delivery challenges, yet their ability to generate sustainable public value remains contested. This study examines how hybrid governance arrangements in South African PPPs shape public value creation, using Public Value Theory (PVT) and integrating it with a hybrid governance perspective. The study used a qualitative research design and secondary data analysis and applied a thematic approach guided by the Public Value-Hybrid Governance Interaction Model. The findings reveal that public value creation depends less on the formal adoption of hybrid governance structures than on the quality of their operationalisation across four interlinked dimensions: structural (role clarity and institutional alignment), processual (genuine co-production and stakeholder participation), relational (balance between trust and accountability), and outcome (equitable, legitimate, and sustainable results). This 'less' refers to a weaker correlation between the mere existence of hybrid structures and public value, compared to the stronger influence of their operational quality, particularly the extent to which they foster inclusive participation, clear accountability, and trust-building practices. Across these dimensions, persistent legitimacy deficits, institutional ambiguity, compliance-heavy oversight, and tokenistic participation weaken feedback loops essential for sustaining public value. Theoretically, the study extends PVT by positioning the trust-accountability equilibrium as a central determinant of value creation in hybrid contexts, rather than a peripheral moderator. Practically, it recommends governance designs that align institutional logics, embed inclusive participation, calibrate accountability mechanisms, and adopt multidimensional performance measures. By operationalising these principles, PPPs in South Africa can move beyond transactional efficiency towards transformative, equity-driven outcomes.

Keywords: Public-Private Partnerships; Public Value Theory; Hybrid Governance; Co-production; Value Creation

INTRODUCTION

There is a broad consensus that Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) are providing governments with innovation, improving the value received from government spending and accessing resources and capabilities from the private sector (Kivleniece & Quelin, 2012; Reynaers, 2013; Villani, Greco & Philips, 2017; Ramcharan-Kotze, 2018; Mandiriza, Fourie & Madumo, 2021; Menezes & Vieira, 2022; Virtanen & Jaloen, 2024). This has been a form of partnership between the government and the private sector in the last decade to accelerate service delivery, especially where the government is failing (Fombad, 2014). In simple terms, they have been put as "pragmatic solutions" to the limitations of government funding and service delivery capacity (Dlamini & Botes, 2022).

Important to PPPs is the effectiveness of driving value for multiple stakeholders. Moreover, PPPs are being sought out to be efficient in arguments where they are evaluated on their ability to create "value". Put it differently, PPPs are increasingly being evaluated as vehicles to create public value, a

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more expansive way to conceptualise that PPPs' value creation goes beyond the mere market-based analysis and metric to accommodate economic, social, institutional and democratic accountability as well as social equity (Moore 1995; Cabral et al. 2019).

However, from the literature, it is seen that the mechanisms that PPPs use to create, capture and distribute value remain highly contested if not less understood (Kivleniece & Quelin, 2012; Ramcharan-Kotze, 2018). According to public administration and management scholars (Lepak et al. 2007; Ramcharan-Kotze, 2018; Kivleniece & Quelin, 2012), Public value creation in these partnerships is not automatic; it is shaped by the governance arrangements that define how public and private actors collaborate, share decision-making authority, and align their interests. For Vakkuri and Johanson (2021), governments have long shifted from being the sole providers of public goods to being the managers and facilitators of multi-actor networks. This focus has then created a view of what we should understand on how value is co-created, negotiated and sometimes even fought against (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2017; Vakkuri, Johanson, & Rajala, 2021; Vakkuri, Johanson, Feng, & Giordano, 2021; Vakkuri & Johanson, 2021).

PPPs are hybrid; thus, within this environment, there is a diverse group of stakeholders with varying degrees of value outcomes. While the public sector is looking for better service delivery outcomes and goals to address sustainable development challenges, the private sector is looking for better optimal relationships shared between outputs and inputs where business opportunities exist. The civic society is looking for a better way to live, particularly in the South African context where there are issues of unemployment, weak infrastructure, poor management in municipalities and economic inefficiencies (Tshombe & Molokwane, 2016; Dlamini & Botes, 2022; Ramolobe & Khandisa, 2024).

Furthermore, the reason many countries resorted to PPPs, especially those in the developing world, is due to the deeply rooted challenges with political, fiscal, socio-economic as well as societal problems (Fombad, 2014). Given, the sub-Saharan countries have chosen to use PPPs as a strategy to challenge these deficiencies that led them to not fulfil their developmental goals (Chilunjoka, 2024). South Africa is the leading country regarding the adoption of PPPs at a growing market scale (Fombad, 2014). However, the success of the PPPs stands at the basis of value creation for all stakeholders. In this case, hybrid governance becomes an important focus on the interaction of the public, private and civil actors in designing and delivering the public services. Most importantly, how it is created and shared in PPP processes (Kivleniece & Quelin, 2012; Reynaers, 2013; Villani, Greco & Philips, 2017; Ramcharan-Kotze, 2018; Mandiriza, Fourie & Madumo, 2021; Menezes & Vieira, 2022; Virtanen & Jaloen, 2024; Maine, Uman & Samuelsson, 2024). However, as hybrid organisations operate under multiple and often competing institutional logics, they face complex accountability structures, legitimacy pressures, and performance expectations (Maine, Uman & Samuelsson, 2024). In this context, value creation is not just about delivering outcomes efficiently, but about managing tensions between market-driven goals and public-sector responsibilities, often within blurred lines of authority and ownership (Vakkuri et al., 2021; Johanson & Vakkuri, 2020).

For South Africa, this becomes an important threshold for relooking at governance models in providing the necessary governance outcomes. For example, municipalities continue to grapple with service delivery backlogs, governance failures and increased public dissatisfaction (Mamokhere & Kgobe, 2023; Ragolane & Khoza, 2024; Mamokhere, 2025). However, while PPPs are put forward as the rescuers to these challenges. Studies have found rather constraining revelations on their success. To this end, the promise of the envisaged efficiency by the New Public Management (NPM) associated with PPPs, their implementation has, however, faced a myriad of challenges (Mandiriza, Fourie & Madumo, 2021). Mandiriza et al. (2021) found that PPPs are complex, where they take a long time to conclude, the value for money is questioned, and they are also subjected to political interference. PPPs are often positioned as innovative responses to these challenges, but research shows that their success is contingent on how well they align with local socio-political dynamics, community needs, and broader public interests (Ragolane & Khoza, 2024). Thus, hybrid governance and co-production, citizen involvement in planning and decision-making have been advocated as vital to increasing transparency, accountability, and democratic legitimacy in service delivery (Osborne et al., 2016; Pestoff, 2014; Ragolane, Govender & Nomzaza, 2025).

Nevertheless, scholars reveal that accountability (Fombad, 2014) remains one of the most pressing challenges in hybrid PPP arrangements. The presence of multiple stakeholders, including invisible or passive principals, often complicates efforts to align objectives and responsibilities (Maine et al., 2024). Moreover, hybrid organisations must constantly negotiate between instrumental accountability (focused on outcomes and performance) and relational accountability (emphasising legitimacy and stakeholder inclusion), both of which are shaped by underlying institutional logics (Rana & Hoque, 2020). Considering these dynamics, this paper explores a central research question: How do hybrid governance arrangements in Public–Private Partnerships influence the creation of public value? To answer this inquiry, this study integrates Public Value Theory and the conceptual framework of hybrid governance. This study investigates not only the outcomes of PPPs but also the processes and structures through which value is constructed, negotiated, and legitimised. The paper will focus on recent literature and contextualising the discussion within the South African local government environment, the paper aims to provide both theoretical insights and practical implications for advancing public value in complex partnership arrangements.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing secondary data analysis to explore how hybrid governance arrangements in Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) influence the creation of public value within the South African local government context. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it enables in-depth exploration of complex governance dynamics, institutional interactions, and value creation processes that are not easily captured through quantitative measures (Flick, 2018; Mair et al., 2015). Secondary qualitative data analysis is widely recognised as a systematic and rigorous approach for generating new insights by reinterpreting existing datasets and documentary evidence (Heaton, 2021; Johnston, 2017). The research relies exclusively on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, government reports, evaluation studies, and relevant grey literature published between 2010 and 2025.

A similar approach was employed by Musekiwa, Masiya and Lubinga (2025), who used secondary data to examine hybrid governance arrangements in South African municipalities, demonstrating its value in studying complex institutional settings. The literature search was conducted between January and March 2025 across Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and official South African government repositories, ensuring comprehensive coverage of both scholarly and institutional materials. Search strings combined Boolean operators and key terms, such as: “Public–Private Partnerships” OR “PPP” AND “public value” OR “value creation” AND “hybrid governance” OR “collaborative governance” AND “South Africa”.

The study limited results to English-language publications from 2010 to 2025. Initial searches yielded 314 records. After removing 72 duplicates, 242 titles/abstracts were screened. Studies were included if they (a) addressed PPPs in South Africa or comparable developing contexts, (b) examined governance or value creation, and (c) were peer-reviewed or credible grey literature. Exclusions included purely financial/engineering analyses without governance implications. Full-text screening resulted in 56 sources for final analysis. A thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted, using a primarily horizontal synthesis to identify cross-cutting patterns across sources. This was chosen over vertical/case-based analysis to capture systemic, rather than project-specific, governance dynamics. An initial codebook was developed deductively from the Public Value–Hybrid Governance Interaction Model (structural, processual, relational, outcome dimensions) and inductively refined as new concepts emerged. Example codes include ‘institutional ambiguity’ (structural), ‘tokenistic participation’ (processual), and ‘compliance-heavy accountability’ (relational).

Data were coded and analysed manually using spreadsheets to maintain transparency and traceability. Themes were refined through constant comparison to ensure coherence and analytical depth, while attention was given to capturing both convergent and divergent perspectives within the literature. Themes were mapped against the Public Value–Hybrid Governance Interaction Model to trace how specific governance features (e.g., role clarity, participation quality) influenced public value outcomes in South African PPPs. The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation, enhancing the

credibility of findings, while maintaining a clear audit trail of the selection, coding, and synthesis processes ensured transparency and replicability. As the study is based on publicly available materials, no human participants were involved, and thus no formal ethical clearance was required; however, all sources are appropriately cited to uphold academic integrity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Public Value in The Context of PPPs

Public Value Theory (PVT) has reshaped how we conceptualise value in the public sector. Rather than merely focusing on efficiency and cost-effectiveness, PVT emphasises societal outcomes, democratic legitimacy, and the broader well-being of citizens (Moore, 1995). According to Breagh, Hammerschmid and Stockreiter (2025), efficiency, participation, and accountability are the most relevant public values in the context of PPPs. Within PPPs, public value is not solely a product of delivering services it is about who benefits, how decisions are made, and whether the partnership outcomes align with the public interest (Cabral et al., 2019). Moore (1995) provides a clear notion of public value where the public sector organisations are the managers and maintenance officers of the PPP relationship, through which value is realised. Ragolane *et al.* (2025) opine that rather than “merely delivering services, professionals are encouraged to adopt a facilitative stance, harnessing user experiences and fostering meaningful participation.” This value includes accountability, efficiency, justice and fairness (Breagh et al. 2025). Breagh et al. (2025) analyse public value in PPPs, to which they conclude that some values are found to have more impact to the projects while others are framed to have a stronger internal focus. According to Figure 1, they argue that for PPPs, it is essential to understand how public values are represented and protected. They find that “internal values focus on operational processes, decision-making structures employed within PPPs, with a clear emphasis on aspects linked to greater participation and engagement, and these act as enablers for greater value outcomes that can be proposed”.



Figure 1. Values coded from internal PPP projects and external value outcomes of PPP projects (Breagh et al. 2025)

While public values have been sought to be defined, especially in the public administration literature (Reynaers, 2013), there has been confusion in terms of the exact definition of public values. Reynaers (2013) opines that the confusion first starts from the term “public” which provides the suggestion for the difference in public sector public values and the private sector private values. From the literature, it appears that the public sector is associated with values such as accountability, solidarity and openness (Reynaers, 2013; Breagh et al., 2025) while the private sector is associated with efficiency and competition (Reynaers, 2013).

Reynaers (2025) further argues that the second source of ambiguity in how the term *public values* is applied to both empirical and normative values. For example, stating that the public sector *should* uphold transparency does not mean it *actually does*. Whether public values can genuinely be attributed to the public sector is still uncertain. When used in a normative sense, the concept invites debate over what public values *ought* to be and who has the authority to decide which values merit that label. A third source of ambiguity concerns the ownership of values. While public values are often seen as central to public organisations and civil servants, research shows that private companies can also adopt and protect them. If private actors can safeguard public values, then these values may be as much private as they are public (Reynaers, 2013).

Furthermore, PPPs must balance private-sector efficiency against public accountability (Fombad, 2014). Studies have shown that PPPs often succeed when they align with what Moore (1995) terms the “strategic triangle” consisting of public value, legitimacy and support and operational capacity. However, these elements can become distorted in hybrid settings, where accountability structures are blurred and stakeholder interests diverge (Vakkuri et al., 2021). Cabral et al. (2019) caution that many PPPs risk being reduced to mechanisms for “value appropriation” by private actors, rather than platforms for value co-creation. The concern is not merely theoretical when private interests dominate, outcomes may reflect efficiency for the few rather than equity for the many. This critique has been echoed in the South African context, where public disillusionment with government services has prompted calls for more inclusive, transparent models of value creation (Ragolane & Khoza, 2024).

Hybrid Governance and the Complexity of PPPs

Hybrid governance in PPPs is not simply a matter of blending actors from the public and private sectors it is a negotiated and often contested arrangement where institutional logics, performance norms, and accountability structures must coexist despite divergent objectives. While the rhetoric around PPPs frequently centres on efficiency and innovation, the underlying governance complexity arises from the interplay between organisational cultures, competing stakeholder priorities, and the political economy in which partnerships are embedded (Vakkuri et al., 2021; Aristovnik et al., 2022). From an institutional perspective, hybrid governance represents a “layering” process where older governance logics such as Weberian legality or New Public Management efficiency are not replaced but sedimented alongside newer participatory and networked approaches (Aristovnik et al., 2022). This produces ambiguous boundaries between public authority and private autonomy, which in turn complicates decision-making and accountability. PPPs operating in such contexts often need to reconcile market-driven imperatives for profitability with public-sector commitments to equity, democratic legitimacy, and long-term social outcomes (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2020).

The South African case illustrates these tensions acutely. Local governments face chronic service delivery shortfalls, corruption, and public distrust (Ragolane & Khoza, 2024), yet PPPs are promoted as vehicles for revitalising infrastructure and extending services. However, empirical work shows that such hybrid arrangements are vulnerable to political interference, contractual ambiguity, and capacity gaps, which undermine their potential to create public value (Mandiriza et al., 2021). Where governance frameworks fail to integrate citizen participation meaningfully reducing co-production to a procedural formality, the legitimacy deficit deepens, fuelling resistance and service delivery protests (Biljohn & Lues, 2020).

Comparative studies reinforce that hybridity is not a neutral or universally beneficial configuration. In some contexts, hybrid governance enables resource pooling, mutual learning, and resilience, especially in environments where neither public nor private actors can deliver services independently (Aripin & Rulinawaty, 2022; Barry, 2020). Yet, in others, it entrenches power asymmetries, allowing dominant actors to capture decision-making and extract value (Motadi & Sikhware, 2024). The risk is particularly pronounced when traditional or informal governance structures intersect with formal PPP arrangements, as these may carry embedded patriarchal or exclusionary norms (Van Dijk & Mangai, 2024).

Analytically, the complexity of PPP hybrid governance can be unpacked along three interlinked dimensions:

1. Institutional Logics and Cultural Clashes-Public bodies often prioritise compliance, equity, and political oversight, whereas private partners emphasise efficiency, innovation, and return on investment. These logics shape organisational cultures “machine” bureaucracies in the public sphere versus entrepreneurial or adhocratic cultures in private and civil society organisations which may be incompatible without deliberate integration strategies (Barry, 2020).
2. Accountability and Legitimacy-Hybrid arrangements must navigate between instrumental accountability (performance metrics, cost-effectiveness) and relational accountability (stakeholder trust, inclusiveness) (Rana & Hoque, 2020). The challenge is heightened by “invisible” stakeholders such as marginalised community groups whose interests are not easily represented in formal governance structures (Maine et al., 2024).
3. Power and Participation-Effective hybrid governance in PPPs requires more than stakeholder consultation; it demands shared decision-making authority and capacity-building to address asymmetries in knowledge, resources, and bargaining power. Without these, co-production risks becoming symbolic, reinforcing rather than reducing inequality (Ragolane & Khoza, 2024; Wang & Ran, 2021).

Thus, while hybrid governance offers a flexible framework for managing PPPs in complex socio-political environments, its success depends on deliberate institutional design. This includes clarifying roles, embedding multi-level accountability, and ensuring that participatory processes are substantive rather than tokenistic. Absent these safeguards, hybridity risks becoming a rhetorical device masking structural inequities and value capture by dominant actors.

Co-Production and Stakeholder Participation

The governance complexity outlined earlier has direct implications for how co-production and stakeholder participation unfold in PPPs. In hybrid governance contexts, the interplay of divergent institutional logics means that collaborative arrangements are inherently fragile, subject to competing priorities, shifting accountability lines, and uneven power dynamics (Vakkuri et al., 2021; Nel, 2018). This fragility can either constrain or enable co-production, depending on whether participatory structures are embedded as integral components of governance or treated as discretionary activities.

In theory, the adaptive and multi-actor nature of hybrid governance should create fertile ground for co-production. Diverse actor’s public, private, civic, and sometimes informal community networks, bring complementary resources, perspectives, and legitimacy claims (Barry, 2020). Yet, in practice, hybridity often amplifies the very asymmetries that undermine meaningful participation. Private partners may have disproportionate influence over project design due to their technical expertise and financial leverage, while public agencies may prioritise political expediency or contractual compliance over deliberative engagement (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2020; Ragolane & Khoza, 2024).

This tension is evident in South African PPP experiences, where the hybridity of governance arrangements exemplified by initiatives such as the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) has created both opportunities and risks for participation. On one hand, REIPPPP has institutionalised socio-economic development obligations, prompting private developers to engage with local communities (Nel, 2017). On the other hand, without robust mechanisms for shared decision-making, these engagements risk being narrowly instrumental, focusing on compliance with development quotas rather than fostering long-term community empowerment (Biljohn & Lues, 2020). Thus, the success of co-production in hybrid PPPs depends on how governance design manages three critical linkages (Cabral et al., 2019):

1. Integration of participatory mechanisms into formal governance so they survive leadership changes and contractual renegotiations.
2. Balancing instrumental and relational accountability, ensuring that participation serves both efficiency goals and legitimacy-building functions.
3. Capacity equalisation, whereby weaker stakeholders especially marginalised community groups receive resources, knowledge, and institutional support to participate on equal footing.

In so doing, situating co-production within the complexity of hybrid governance, it becomes clear that participation is not merely a normative ideal but a governance necessity for sustaining legitimacy and creating durable public value. In PPPs, especially in politically contested or resource-constrained contexts, the quality of stakeholder participation can be a decisive factor in determining whether hybridity results in collaborative problem-solving or entrenched inequities.

Trust, Accountability and Performance in Hybrid Settings

In hybrid governance arrangements, trust, accountability, and performance are deeply interdependent, yet often in tension. Trust is essential for enabling flexibility and innovation, but hybrid settings where multiple institutional logics, ownership structures, and funding arrangements intersect are inherently prone to accountability ambiguities that can erode that trust (Vakkuri et al., 2021). These ambiguities arise because no single actor has full control over resources, decision-making, or outcomes; rather, responsibilities are shared, negotiated, and sometimes contested across public, private, and civic spheres.

Trust as a Governance Enabler

High levels of trust in hybrid partnerships can reduce the transaction costs associated with formal oversight, thereby granting actors greater operational autonomy and space for adaptive decision-making (Krause & Swiatczak, 2020). In such contexts, outcome-oriented control where partners are evaluated on agreed results rather than detailed inputs can be more effective. However, in low-trust environments, accountability mechanisms tend to default to input-heavy controls and compliance monitoring, which can stifle innovation and weaken the collaborative ethos (Pollitt, 2001). Trust, therefore, is not an abstract ideal; it is a strategic resource that shapes the choice and cost-effectiveness of control systems.

Accountability in Multi-Logic Environments

Hybrid organisations must navigate *instrumental accountability* (focused on performance metrics, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness) alongside *relational accountability* (anchored in legitimacy, fairness, and stakeholder trust) (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2017). These dimensions often pull in different directions, market-driven actors may prioritise measurable outputs, while public bodies and civil society actors may focus on process legitimacy and equity. Managing this dual accountability requires compromise mechanisms that reconcile competing logics without collapsing into lowest-common-denominator solutions (Campanale et al., 2020). Importantly, accountability is not only upward (to funders or regulators) but also lateral and downward, encompassing peers, partners, and end-users (Costa & Andreus, 2020).

Performance Measurement: The “A Little Bit of Everything” Challenge

Measuring performance in hybrid settings is notoriously complex because such organisations must deliver on multiple, sometimes conflicting, value propositions: efficiency, equity, innovation, and ethical governance (De Waele et al., 2021). As Vakkuri et al. (2021) note, performance systems in hybrid organisations tend to blend diverse indicators from public administration, market-based management, and social value measurement. This “a little bit of everything” approach can be both a strength capturing multidimensional impacts and a weakness, creating overload and diluting strategic focus. The challenge is to design measurement frameworks that integrate multiple value dimensions while remaining coherent and usable for decision-making. Empirical studies suggest that trust and accountability are not substitutes but complements in hybrid governance. Trust enables partners to work with looser, more adaptive performance frameworks, while well-designed accountability mechanisms reinforce trust by ensuring transparency and fairness (Krause & Swiatczak, 2020). However, mismatches such as imposing rigid control in high-trust environments or relying solely on informal trust in low-trust contexts undermine both performance and legitimacy.

What does it mean for PPPs and the South African Context?

In South African PPPs, especially in infrastructure and energy sectors, trust deficits rooted in corruption scandals, political patronage, and uneven capacity make accountability mechanisms

heavily compliance-focused (Nel, 2017). While this may mitigate certain risks, it often constrains innovation and responsiveness. To improve performance in such settings, governance design must: (a) Embed *mutual accountability* arrangements that balance contractual enforcement with collaborative problem-solving; (b) Calibrate control systems to the actual trust environment, avoiding both over-regulation and under-scrutiny; and (c) Develop performance frameworks that reflect not only output efficiency but also legitimacy, equity, and long-term public value. Ultimately, sustaining high performance in hybrid settings requires a dynamic equilibrium, where trust reduces the need for costly oversight, accountability safeguards public interest, and performance measurement captures the full complexity of value creation in multi-actor collaborations.

Public Value Creation in Hybrid Ppps

Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) are justified not merely by their ability to deliver infrastructure or services more efficiently, but by their potential to generate *public value* the enhancement of societal well-being in ways that are legitimate, sustainable, and collectively endorsed (Moore, 1995; Benington, 2011). In hybrid governance contexts, however, creating public value is a contested process, shaped by the interplay of multiple institutional logics, stakeholder interests, and performance regimes (Bryson et al., 2016). Public value is inherently pluralistic: what constitutes “value” differs between stakeholders, and definitions may shift over time (Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). For public agencies, value may mean equity, transparency, and democratic accountability; for private partners, it may be framed in terms of efficiency, innovation, or risk-return balance. Civil society actors often emphasise inclusivity, empowerment, and long-term social outcomes. Hybrid PPPs must navigate these competing frames, often without a singular authority to arbitrate them, making value creation both a political and a managerial challenge (Vakkuri et al., 2021).

Moore’s (1995) *strategic triangle* linking public value outcomes, legitimacy and support, and operational capacity provides a useful lens for analysing PPP value creation. In hybrid settings (a) public value outcomes are multidimensional, encompassing tangible outputs (infrastructure delivered) and intangible impacts (community trust, social cohesion); (b) legitimacy and support must be built across diverse constituencies, which requires inclusive governance and credible accountability; and (c) operational capacity depends on integrating the resources, expertise, and networks of multiple actors, while managing the frictions between their differing institutional logics. The fragility of any one of these elements can undermine the others; for instance, capacity without legitimacy risks public backlash, while legitimacy without delivery erodes credibility. Research on hybrid organisations identifies three recurrent mechanisms through which value is created in PPPs (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020):

1. Mixing values-blending public interest goals with private-sector efficiency, often through innovative service or financing models.
2. Compromising on values-negotiating trade-offs between conflicting objectives, such as cost minimisation versus service quality.
3. Legitimising values-framing and communicating achievements in ways that secure continued stakeholder support, often mediated through media narratives or performance reporting. While these mechanisms can produce synergies, they also carry risks overemphasis on compromise can dilute transformative ambitions, and legitimacy efforts can become performative rather than substantive.

Challenges in Measuring Public Value

Measurement remains one of the most persistent difficulties in public value governance. Traditional performance frameworks in PPPs emphasise quantitative, output-based indicators (cost, time, units delivered), which tend to privilege instrumental value. Yet many aspects of public value such as trust, empowerment, equity, and resilience are qualitative and relational (Bryson et al., 2016). Hybrid PPPs require multidimensional evaluation systems capable of capturing both tangible and intangible impacts, while avoiding indicator overload that obscures strategic priorities.

In South Africa, public value creation in PPPs is mediated by deep socio-economic inequalities, contested political legitimacy, and historical distrust of both government and private elites (Ragolane & Khoza, 2024). Here, the promise of PPPs lies in their ability to leverage private investment for public priorities such as infrastructure backlogs and service delivery while embedding equity, empowerment, and participation into project design. Yet without strong mechanisms to align private incentives with public priorities, PPPs risk reinforcing existing disparities rather than ameliorating them.

Conceptual Framework for Public Value Creation in Public-Private Partnerships

This study adopts a Public Value Governance perspective to examine how hybrid governance arrangements in Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) shape service delivery outcomes in the South African context. Building on Moore's (1995) strategic triangle, which links public value outcomes, legitimacy and support, and operational capacity, the framework integrates insights from four interrelated domains of the literature: hybrid governance complexity, co-production and stakeholder participation, trust, accountability, and performance and public value creation.

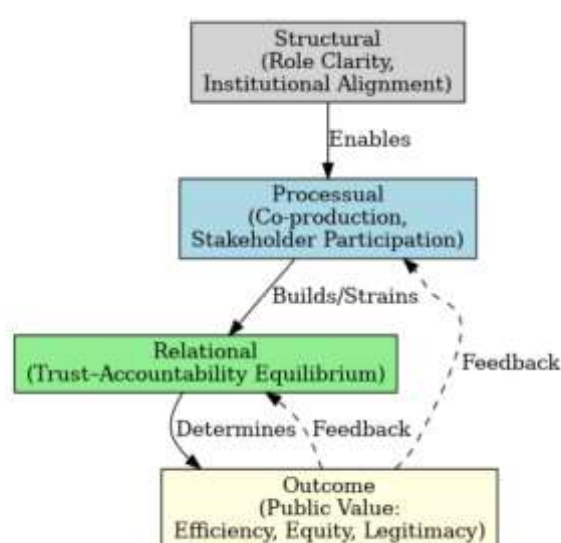


Figure 2. Public value-hybrid governance interaction model (showing structural, processual, and relational mechanisms driving outcomes, feeding into theoretical propositions and diagnostic checklist)

Conceptual Model: Linking Hybrid Governance, Co-Production, and Public Value Outcomes

As shown in Figure 2 the conceptual model positions hybrid governance attributes as the *structural foundation* shaping co-production processes, which are mediated by the trust-accountability equilibrium. These dynamics collectively determine the quality and sustainability of public value outcomes. Importantly, the model incorporates feedback loops, recognising that the perceived value of outcomes influences future trust levels, willingness to participate, and even the configuration of governance structures. This feedback renders the system adaptive and path dependent.

Structural Dimension: Hybrid Governance Attributes

Hybrid governance refers to institutional arrangements that blend public, private, and in some cases, civic sector logics, producing systems characterised by mixed ownership, goal incongruence, varied funding sources, and heterogeneous control mechanisms (Vakkuri et al., 2021). While such hybridity offers flexibility and innovation potential, it also introduces institutional ambiguity, which (if unmanaged) can result in role confusion, accountability gaps, and misaligned incentives. In South Africa's public-private partnership (PPP) landscape, these challenges are amplified by political contestation, uneven administrative capacity, and entrenched socio-economic inequalities. Consequently, the nature and configuration of hybrid governance attributes set the structural

conditions under which PPPs function, influencing both the opportunities and constraints for public value creation.

Processual Dimension: Co-Production and Stakeholder Participation

The operational expression of hybrid governance emerges through co-production processes that integrate stakeholder perspectives into decision-making. Meaningful co-production beyond tokenistic consultation can enhance legitimacy, align services with community needs, and mobilise diverse resources (Cabral et al., 2019). However, in the absence of mechanisms to mitigate power asymmetries, participation risks becoming performative, entrenching inequities rather than reducing them. Thus, stakeholder participation operates as a mediating process between governance structures and public value outcomes, with its effectiveness contingent on the inclusivity, depth, and influence of engagement mechanisms.

Relational Dimension: Trust-Accountability Equilibrium

Within hybrid governance settings, trust facilitates adaptive, outcome-oriented collaboration by reducing transaction costs, while accountability safeguards the public interest and ensures transparency (Krause & Swiatczak, 2020). These elements are mutually reinforcing trust without accountability risks opportunism, whereas accountability without trust may lead to rigid compliance frameworks that stifle innovation. Achieving a balance between instrumental accountability (measured performance) and relational accountability (perceptions of fairness and legitimacy) is crucial for sustaining effective, long-term collaboration. This equilibrium moderates the relationship between participatory processes and performance, thereby influencing both the sustainability and legitimacy of PPP outcomes.

Outcome Dimension: Public Value Creation

Public values serve as the normative anchor of this framework, encompassing outcomes that are socially desirable, democratically legitimate, and operationally viable (Bryson et al., 2017). In PPP contexts, value creation is mediated through mechanisms of mixing, compromising, and legitimising values (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020), yet remains inherently contested and multidimensional. In South Africa, historical distrust, service delivery deficits, and risks of elite capture complicate the realisation of public value. Consequently, value creation in hybrid PPPs is not an automatic by-product of collaboration but the emergent result of interactions among governance structures, participatory processes, and the trust-accountability equilibrium.

RESULTS

The thematic analysis of secondary sources reveals that the creation of public value in South African PPPs is shaped less by the formal adoption of hybrid governance structures than by the quality of their operationalisation. Consistent with Moore's (1995) strategic triangle, the findings indicate that legitimacy, operational capacity, and value outcomes are interdependent, yet frequently unbalanced in practice. In many local government PPPs, legitimacy deficits rooted in historical distrust, political interference, and opaque decision-making undermine both operational capacity and perceived public value. This aligns with Vakkuri et al. (2021) observation that hybrid arrangements are particularly vulnerable to weakened accountability when institutional logics are misaligned.

The findings substantiate the Public Value–Hybrid Governance Interaction Model (Figure 2). Structural weaknesses (unclear roles, politicised procurement) disrupt processual co-production, which destabilises the relational trust–accountability equilibrium. This imbalance feeds back into fragile outcomes, eroding legitimacy and sustainability. The feedback loops predicted by the model, where weak outcomes diminish trust and participation, are strongly evident in the reviewed literature as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Brief literature evidence

Source	Key Takeaway	Code	Theme (Dimension)
Mandiriza et al. (2021)	Procurement processes are politicised	Role ambiguity	Structural
Fombad (2014)	Diffuse accountability in PPPs	Accountability gaps	Structural
Government of South Africa (2022 PPP Policy Review)	Inconsistent policy enforcement undermines PPPs	Weak enforcement	Structural
Maine et al. (2024)	Multiple accountability logics complicate governance	Hybrid accountability	Structural
Nel (2018)	Community meetings lacked decision-making power	Tokenistic engagement	Processual
Biljohn & Lues (2020)	Participation compliance-driven	Procedural participation	Processual
Osborne et al. (2016)	Co-production requires redistribution of authority	Substantive participation	Processual
Pestoff (2013)	Collective action sustains co-production	Collective empowerment	Processual
Krause & Swiatczak (2020)	Over-reliance on formal controls eroded trust	Compliance bias	Relational
Ragolane & Khoza (2024)	Distrust created adversarial dynamics	Adversarial governance	Relational
Rana & Hoque (2020)	Competing accountability logics hinder legitimacy	Conflicting logics	Relational
Johanson & Vakkuri (2020)	Balanced trust and accountability improve outcomes	Trust accountability balance	Relational
Cabral et al. (2019)	Outputs delivered, but equity unaddressed	Instrumental outcomes	Outcome
Ragolane et al. (2025)	Legitimacy deficits persist despite delivery	Legitimacy deficit	Outcome
Breaugh et al. (2025)	Internal values enable external value outcomes	Internal values	Outcome
Vakkuri & Johanson (2020)	Value creation depends on aligning logics	Mixed value creation	Outcome

Structural Dimension: Institutional Ambiguity and Role Clarity

Within the structural dimension of the framework, hybridity often manifests as institutional ambiguity rather than functional complementarity. While PPP legislation and policy guidelines create formal spaces for public, private, and civic actors, the literature indicates that unclear role delineation, weak contractual enforcement, and politicised procurement processes limit the intended synergies (Mandiriza et al., 2021). This structural fragility creates fertile ground for elite capture and value appropriation, echoing Cabral et al.'s (2019) caution that hybrid governance without deliberate safeguards can privilege private gains over collective benefit. Additional studies reinforce this concern: the Government of South Africa's 2022 PPP Policy Review highlights inconsistent enforcement of partnership agreements, undermining accountability mechanisms at the local level, while Maine et al. (2024) show that overlapping accountability logics in hybrid settings can create confusion over who is ultimately responsible for delivery failures. Such structural weaknesses not only obstruct effective collaboration but also erode the institutional foundations necessary for sustained public value creation.

Processual Dimension: Tokenistic Participation

The processual dimension of co-production and stakeholder participation emerges as the most contested aspect of public value creation. Although participatory mechanisms are embedded in many PPP frameworks, evidence suggests these are frequently procedural rather than substantive. For instance, the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) demonstrates that community engagement obligations can stimulate socio-economic benefits (Nel, 2018), but without shared decision-making power, these benefits risk being narrow, compliance-driven outputs rather than transformative public value. This supports Osborne et al.'s (2016) argument that genuine co-production requires not only inclusion but also redistribution of authority and capacity. Similarly, Pestoff (2013) finds that enduring co-production depends on collective empowerment rather than one-off consultations, and Ragolane & Khoza (2024) observe that South African municipalities frequently adopt “tick-box” participation approaches that fail to address power imbalances between private investors and affected communities. Without mechanisms to equalise capacity and embed participation in governance structures, PPP processes risk reinforcing, rather than reducing, inequality.

Relational Dimension: Trust Accountability Equilibrium

In the relational dimension, the equilibrium between trust and accountability is often skewed towards compliance-heavy oversight, reflecting the low-trust environment in South African municipal governance (Nel, 2018). While this can mitigate certain forms of opportunism, it simultaneously constrains innovation and adaptive problem-solving. The literature suggests that in hybrid settings, such imbalances erode relational accountability, stakeholder trust, fairness, and legitimacy, which in turn weaken public support and long-term value sustainability (Krause & Swiatczak, 2020). Rana & Hoque (2020) further argue that conflicting accountability logics balancing upward accountability to funders with downward accountability to communities create tensions that, if unresolved, undermine legitimacy. Johanson & Vakkuri (2020) demonstrate that hybrid arrangements achieving a balanced trust–accountability relationship are more resilient, adaptive, and capable of delivering enduring public value. Among the four dimensions, the relational trust–accountability equilibrium emerged as the most influential driver of value creation, as it conditioned the effectiveness of both structural and processual mechanisms.

Outcome Dimension: Public Value Creation

Finally, the outcome dimension shows that public value is produced in fragmented and uneven ways. Where hybrid governance functions effectively through balanced accountability, inclusive participation, and clear role definition, PPPs can generate multidimensional value that extends beyond service efficiency to equity, empowerment, and legitimacy. However, in most cases reviewed, the mixing, compromising, and legitimising mechanisms identified by Vakkuri & Johanson (2020) remain skewed towards compromise, leading to diluted outcomes that satisfy contractual targets but fall short of addressing systemic inequities. This suggests that without deliberate governance design to protect long-term public interests, hybrid PPPs risk reproducing. The findings reinforce that the effectiveness of hybrid PPPs in creating public value depends not on the existence of hybrid structures per se, but on the degree to which they are intentionally designed to align institutional logics, redistribute authority, and balance trust with accountability. This aligns with the conceptual model's premise that structural, processual, and relational dimensions must be mutually reinforcing for sustainable public value to emerge. The South African experience demonstrates that unless these elements are simultaneously strengthened, public value creation will remain contingent, contested, and vulnerable to capture.

These four thematic dimensions - structural, processual, relational, and outcome feed directly into the propositions outlined in Section 6 and inform the diagnostic checklist in the Conclusion, reinforcing the applied value of our conceptual framework (Figure 2) furthermore, whereas Moore's (1995) strategic triangle conceptualises public value as the alignment of legitimacy and support, operational capacity, and value outcomes, the framework advances this by introducing (i) a dynamic, feedback-driven system rather than a static alignment, (ii) the trust–accountability equilibrium as a central, structural determinant of sustained value creation, and (iii) an integrated hybrid governance lens

capturing the interplay of structural, processual, and relational dimensions. This reframing addresses gaps in Moore's model, particularly its limited treatment of complex, multi-actor environments where legitimacy is actively constructed through participatory and accountability practices rather than assumed from institutional authority.

Theoretical Implications/Propositions

Based on these findings, the following theoretical propositions are proposed for future research:

1. Proposition 1 (Structural): Clear role delineation and enforceable accountability provisions are prerequisites for hybrid PPPs to achieve sustained public value.
2. Proposition 2 (Processual): Substantive stakeholder participation beyond compliance-driven consultation enhances legitimacy and aligns service outcomes with public needs.
3. Proposition 3 (Relational): A balanced trust accountability equilibrium moderates the relationship between hybrid governance structures and public value outcomes, enabling adaptive innovation.
4. Proposition 4 (Integrative): Hybrid PPPs that simultaneously optimise structural clarity, processual inclusion, and relational balance are more likely to produce multidimensional, equitable public value than those focusing on efficiency alone.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide new insights into how hybrid governance arrangements influence public value creation in South African PPPs. Dissimilar to previous research, which has tended to focus on the structural presence of hybrid arrangements such as legal frameworks, partnership contracts, or financing mechanisms (Mandiriza et al., 2021; Vakkuri et al., 2021), this study shows that the mere existence of hybrid structures does not guarantee the creation of public value. Instead, public value emerges from the quality of operationalisation, where structural, processual, and relational elements interact dynamically. This perspective represents a shift away from static, compliance-driven models towards a more adaptive, systems-oriented understanding of how PPPs function in politically complex and resource-constrained environments.

A central theoretical contribution of this study lies in reconceptualising the role of trust and accountability in hybrid governance. Previous studies have largely treated these elements as separate, or even opposing, forces. For example, Rana and Hoque (2020) emphasise accountability mechanisms as safeguards against opportunism, while Krause and Swiatczak (2020) highlight the importance of trust as a foundation for collaboration. However, this research challenges that binary by demonstrating that trust and accountability are mutually reinforcing and that their balance is the single most critical determinant of whether hybrid PPPs produce sustainable public value. In low-trust environments like many South African municipalities, punitive and compliance-heavy accountability frameworks tend to dominate. While these mechanisms reduce certain risks, they also stifle innovation, discourage co-production, and foster adversarial relationships among stakeholders. Conversely, when trust-building is deliberately integrated into governance practices through transparent decision-making, shared authority, and relational accountability, collaboration becomes more adaptive and resilient. This finding extends Moore's (1995) strategic triangle by positioning the trust–accountability equilibrium as a fourth pillar, alongside legitimacy, operational capacity, and public value outcomes. It suggests that PPP governance reforms should not only clarify structures and processes but also actively manage the relational dynamics between actors.

This study also provides a new lens for understanding stakeholder participation in PPPs. Much of the existing literature evaluates participation procedurally, focusing on whether consultation mechanisms exist rather than how they function in practice (Osborne et al., 2016; Biljohn & Lues, 2020). By introducing the concept of participatory depth, which is co-production, this research distinguishes between symbolic participation, which is compliance-driven and reinforces power imbalances, and transformative participation, which redistributes decision-making authority and equalises stakeholder capacity. The findings show that many South African PPPs remain trapped in symbolic participation, creating what can be termed a “participation paradox”: communities are formally included but remain

powerless, which ultimately erodes legitimacy and trust. This perspective adds nuance to debates on co-production by showing that participation is not inherently beneficial; rather, its value depends on its depth and its ability to challenge entrenched hierarchies within governance systems.

A further contribution of this research is the introduction of feedback loops into the analysis of hybrid governance. Previous studies have tended to conceptualise PPPs as linear arrangements, where inputs lead to outputs and outputs lead to outcomes (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020). However, this study demonstrates that outcomes themselves influence future governance processes in self-reinforcing cycles. Negative outcomes such as inequitable service delivery or elite capture reduce public trust and participation, which in turn destabilise structural and relational dimensions of governance. This creates a vicious cycle of decline, explaining why many South African PPPs experience repeated failures despite policy reforms. Conversely, when PPPs deliver visible, equitable outcomes, they generate virtuous cycles, where increased trust fosters deeper participation and alignment of institutional logics. This dynamic perspective allows for a more predictive and diagnostic understanding of PPP performance, offering policymakers a tool to identify leverage points for breaking negative cycles and sustaining positive ones.

The study also advances the conceptualisation of public value itself. Existing PPP literature often equates public value with service delivery efficiency or financial performance (Cabral et al., 2019). While these remain important, they represent only one dimension of value. This research identifies three interconnected forms of public value. The first is instrumental value, which relates to efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and service quality. The second is relational value, which encompasses trust, transparency, and legitimacy. The third and most ambitious is transformative value, which addresses systemic inequities and creates long-term social change. Most South African PPPs succeed in delivering instrumental value but fail to generate transformative value because they do not fundamentally redistribute authority or address historical legacies of exclusion. Of importance is that in expanding the definition of public value, this study provides a more holistic framework for evaluating PPPs and highlights the need to design governance systems that deliberately target relational and transformative outcomes, not just efficiency gains.

In practical terms, these findings challenge the New Public Management (NPM) assumptions that continue to dominate PPP policy discourse in South Africa. NPM approaches prioritise efficiency and market mechanisms, often sidelining issues of legitimacy, equity, and participatory governance. This study argues that a more balanced model is required, one that integrates efficiency with democratic values and emphasises adaptive governance. For policymakers, this means prioritising structural clarity by clearly defining roles and responsibilities to prevent elite capture, fostering transformative participation through capacity-building and shared decision-making, and calibrating accountability mechanisms to align with the prevailing trust environment. Furthermore, performance evaluation systems should be restructured to include multidimensional metrics that capture not only output efficiency but also legitimacy, equity, and long-term societal impacts. These recommendations move PPPs beyond transactional service delivery toward transformative partnerships capable of addressing deep-rooted governance and development challenges.

Finally, this research positions itself in the broader literature by contributing three innovations. First, it reframes the relationship between trust and accountability, showing that they are not competing forces but co-dependent drivers of value creation. Second, it introduces feedback loops to explain why some PPPs persistently fail or succeed, offering a dynamic systems perspective absent from most current models. Third, it expands the conceptual boundaries of public value by distinguishing between instrumental, relational, and transformative forms. Together, these contributions provide a more comprehensive understanding of how hybrid governance can be leveraged to create sustainable public value in complex, multi-actor environments. Unlike prior studies that are largely descriptive or case-specific, this research offers a conceptual framework that is both explanatory and prescriptive, guiding both academic inquiry and practical reform.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that South African PPPs must move beyond a narrow focus on efficiency. Governance designs should:

1. Clarify roles and responsibilities to prevent elite capture and value appropriation.

2. Embed substantive participation mechanisms that grant communities real influence over decision-making.
3. Calibrate accountability mechanisms to balance necessary oversight with collaborative problem-solving.
4. Adopt multidimensional performance measures that capture legitimacy, equity, and long-term societal impact.

Therefore, operationalising these principles, PPPs can shift from transactional arrangements focused solely on service delivery to transformative partnerships that address systemic inequalities and generate sustainable, equitable public value. Providing these new perspectives, this study advances theory and practice simultaneously. It challenges policymakers to view PPPs not as static contractual arrangements but as living governance systems that require continuous recalibration to balance efficiency, equity, and legitimacy. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for future research and reform efforts aimed at unlocking the transformative potential of PPPs in South Africa and similar contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the ability of PPPs in South Africa to generate sustainable public value depends less on the presence of hybrid governance structures and more on how effectively these structures are designed and operationalised in complex, politically charged, and resource-constrained environments. Effective implementation relies on fostering inclusive participation, clear accountability, and trust-building. While hybridity can bring benefits such as resource pooling, innovation, and shared expertise, these are often undermined by institutional ambiguity, unbalanced accountability and tokenistic participation. The Public Value Hybrid Governance Interaction Model highlights that structural, processual and relational dimensions must work together to create public value.

However, in practice, legitimacy deficits, rigid oversight, and weak participatory mechanisms disrupt the feedback loops needed to sustain trust and adaptive governance. Without addressing these issues, PPPs risk becoming transactional arrangements that meet contractual outputs but fail to address deeper governance and equity challenges. Theoretically, this study extends Public Value Theory by showing that in hybrid PPP contexts, value creation depends not only on aligning legitimacy, operational capacity, and value outcomes (Moore, 1995) but also on the dynamic balance between trust and accountability. Legitimacy is not just a result of performance but is actively shaped by how accountability mechanisms are combined with trust-building, particularly in low-trust environments. Institutional logics, power imbalances, and participatory processes are therefore active drivers of value creation rather than background factors. This positions the trust–accountability relationship as a central determinant of sustained public value in complex, politically charged contexts.

To strengthen PPPs, governance design must first achieve structural clarity, with well-defined roles, enforceable accountability, and safeguards against elite capture. Second, participation must go beyond symbolic consultation, giving communities real decision-making power and supporting marginalised groups through capacity-building. Third, accountability mechanisms should be calibrated to the level of trust, balancing oversight with collaboration to avoid stifling innovation. Finally, performance frameworks must measure not only efficiency but also legitimacy, equity, sustainability, and long-term societal impact. Consequently, by implementing these strategies, PPPs can move beyond efficiency-driven models toward equitable and transformative public value creation. Ultimately, this study underscores that public value in hybrid PPPs is an intentional, contested, and adaptive process. Its sustainability depends on aligning diverse actors' incentives, embedding inclusive governance, and maintaining a balance between efficiency and legitimacy. By operationalising these principles, South Africa can move closer to unlocking the transformative potential of PPPs in addressing persistent service delivery gaps and advancing equitable development.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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