Institutional Logic, Social Identification, and Public Service Motivation:

Does Organization Matter?

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Paper presented at the 2011 Public Management Research Association Conference, Syracuse, New York. Results are subject to modification due to additional analysis and hence paper should not be cited without consulting the authors. Data analyzed in this paper were collected under the auspices of the National Administrative Studies Project (NASP-II), a project supported in part by the Forum for Policy Research & Public Service at Rutgers University and under a grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to the Center for State Health Policy also at Rutgers University. This support does not necessarily imply an endorsement of analyses and opinions in the paper. The second author’s participation in this research was supported by the World Class University (WCU) program through the Korea Science and Engineering Foundation funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (R32-20002)..
Institutional Logic, Social Identification, and Public Service Motivation: Does Organization Matter?

Abstract

Perry and Vandenabeele (2008) propose using institutional logic as an explanation for the origins of public service motivation (PSM). Institutional logic suggests a level of distinctiveness across formal organization, profession, and mission. This study examines the influence of formal organization and profession on PSM in comparison to common demographic predictors using hierarchical latent variable models. Additionally, PSM’s influence on job satisfaction and commitment is tested based on Dilulio’s (1994) and Mintzberg’s (1983) arguments derived from social identification theory (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) that employees are more supportive of organizations where values are more uniform and are similar to their personal values. NASP II includes just state-level health and human service organizations which allows a control for possible mission differences (n=274, response rate 53%). Findings indicate no support for organizational-level variation in PSM for organizations in the same general mission area but some support was found for social identification.
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Public service motivation (PSM) is widely studied as both an antecedent and dependent variable. As a dependent variable, most research uses standard individual demographic predictors often with weak theoretical justifications and conflicting results. Perry and Vandenabeele (2008) propose using institutional theory as an explanation for PSM. Institutional logic strongly suggests a greater level of distinctiveness across formal organization, profession, and mission.

In this study, we examine the influence of formal organization and profession on PSM in comparison to common demographic predictors using hierarchical latent variable models. NASP II includes state-level health and human service organizations only providing a control for possible mission differences (n=274, response rate 53%).

In addition to testing the influence of formal organization and profession, we investigate PSM’s influence on job satisfaction and commitment based on Dilulio’s (1994) and Mintzberg’s (1983) arguments derived from social identification theory (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) that employees are more supportive of organizations where values are more uniform and are similar to their personal values. Using NASP II, the average PSM levels are calculated for each organization and compared to each respondent. The variance in PSM level across respondents within an organization is used as a uniformity measure.

**Literature Review**

In a recent contribution about public service motivation theory, Perry and Vandenabeele
(2008) proposed a model that links motivation to its institutional roots. Their purpose was to embed motivation in distant rather than proximate stimuli that may underlie human behavior. They contrasted the rational choice model, which is predicated on conscious, calculative, utility-maximizing behavior, with an alternative model that begins with public institutions as the origin of public service identities.

The theory Perry and Vandenabeele propose follows a logic model originating in public institutions, that flows through public service identities, and ultimately to public service behaviors. They contend that institutions define rules related to permissible and prohibited behaviors and values associated with these behaviors. The institutional rules are transmitted through a variety of social processes, including categorization processes of social identification (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) and cultural processes both within the society and in organizations possessing strong cultures. The rules and values are embedded in an individual's self-concept or identity. In situations that invoke the public content of an individual's identity, behaviors are likely to be guided by logics of appropriateness that lead the individual to inquire about what behaviors are most appropriate given his or her identity. The behaviors upon which an individual settles are then governed by self-regulating processes associated with internal standards, autonomy, and individual predispositions.

Previous research on public service motivation provides foundations for the theory. Perry's (1997) early analysis of the antecedents of public service motivation emphasized several factors associated with institutional theory, among them family and religious socialization and professional identification. Indicators of each of the antecedent variables were significantly related to either overall public service motivation or one of its four dimensions (Perry, 1996).
In some cases, however, the associations were in directions contrary to predicted associations. In a subsequent non-empirical analysis, Perry (2000) further developed the argument for the influence of sociohistorical institutions on public service motivation.

Subsequent empirical research by Moynihan and Pandey (2007) extended the institutional case to organizations. They investigated relationships between public service motivation and a variety of sociohistorical antecedents, including red tape, culture, organizational reform, length of tenure with the organization, and membership in a professional organization. They found positive relationships with professional membership and organizational reform, and negative associations with organizational tenure and red tape. Moynihan and Pandey’s (2007) general conclusion was that organizational institutions matter for the state of members’ public service motivation. Red tape (Scott and Pandey, 2005) and professionalism (Perry, 1997) were investigated in earlier research, but Moynihan and Pandey’s results were at variance with the earlier studies. Because Moynihan and Pandey used measures for both professionalism and public service motivation that differed from those used by Perry, the different results were attributed to this variance between the studies.

Several other studies have investigated different institutional sources for shaping public service motivation. Andersen (2009) and colleagues (Anderson, Pallesen and Pedersen, 2011) in Denmark investigated the influence of both professionalism and public-private ownership. In one study (Andersen, 2009), Andersen looked at the influence of public service motivation, professional norms and economic incentives on the performance of dentists, general practitioners and orthopaedic surgeons in the Danish public and private sectors. She concluded
that public service motivation did not influence performance because professionals in the two sectors self-reported equally high levels of public service motivation. The performance and behavior of health professionals was also similar for services governed by firm professional norms. Only in settings where professional norms were absent did performance and behavior depend on economic incentives. A second study in Denmark (Andersen, Pallesen and Pedersen, 2011) produced similar results for sector, i.e., there was no difference in the level of public service motivation between the public and private employees when the tasks performed are taken into account. The nature of public service motivation, however, differed between physiotherapists in the two sectors. Private sector physiotherapists were found to be more narrowly oriented toward the user. Physiotherapists in the public sector were more broadly directed toward public interest and compassion.

Another series of studies, initiated by Wright (2007; Wright and Pandey, forthcoming), look at relationships between organizational mission and public service motivation. In his initial study about organizational mission, Wright (2007) concluded that the importance of an organization’s mission increases employee work motivation by making the job more important. The positive influence of organizational mission was significant even after controlling for performance-related extrinsic rewards.

Research about public service motivation in the voluntary sector (Coursey, Brudney, Littlepage and Perry, 2011; Coursey and Pandey, forthcoming; Perry, Brudney, Coursey and Littlepage, 2008) provides further support for Perry and Vandenabeele’s (2008) model. Perry et al (2008) found significant relationships between family socialization, religious activity and
volunteer experiences. Their in-depth interviews of award-winning volunteers provide context for their statistical results. They found that the motivations of exemplary volunteers were tied to self-perceptions of a need for personal integrity and linked to personal understandings of the importance of community.

Vandenabeele (2011) studied more than 3500 civil servants from Flanders, Belgium, to assess the influence institutional attachments have on public service motivation. Among the variables he included in his cross-sectional analysis were the organizations for which the civil servants worked, family, political affiliation, education, gender, and age cohort. He concluded that a variety of institutions influence development of public service motivation: “Institutional arrangements, and with them their associated identities, inside and outside the public sector appear to influence the development of public service motivation” (p. 102).

Research on organizational commitment also provides findings suggestive of the potential influence of institutions on predispositions and attachments. O’Reilly and Chatman (1986) studied university employees and business students to assess psychological attachments associated with compliance, identification, and internalization. They found that identification and internalization were positively related to prosocial behaviors and negatively related to turnover. The identification and internalization concepts in the O’Reilly and Chatman (1986) study parallel the same individual-level concepts Perry and Vandenabeele (2008) refer to in their institutions, identify, public service behaviors logic model.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) build from O’Reilly and Chatman’s results by suggesting that identification may have roots not in the organization, but in social groups. Ashforth and Mael
present evidence that identification has dual roots, in both organizational values and social identity. This again provides support for the case that institutions are among the drivers of public service motivation. The social identity argument is among those offered by Perry and Wise (1990) in their original analysis of the motivational bases of public service.

Data

The data for this study were collected in Phase II of the National Administrative Studies Project (NASP-II). The theoretical population of interest for this study was comprised of managers engaged in information management activities, working in state level primary health and human service agencies. Primary health and human service agencies were identified according to the definition used by American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) and include agencies housing programs related to Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and child welfare. Information management was broadly defined to include a range of key managerial roles such as the top program administrator, managers of information system applications, managers in charge of evaluation and research, and managers dealing with public information and communication. The sampling frame was developed with the aid of the most widely used directory of human service agency managers, namely the APHSA directory. Application of study criteria resulted in a sampling frame made of 570 managers from the fifty states and Washington, D.C. Given the diminutive sampling frame, a decision was made to administer the survey to the entire sampling frame (i.e., conduct a census).

One arguable advantage is the sample homogeneity. Here, all the organizations have similar general missions and the sample includes only members from one professional association. Hence, at least within this sample with the typical questions about generalizability
to other missions and professional associations, the data allow an isolated test of formal organization.

Every effort, within reason, was made to encourage managers in the sampling frame to complete the survey. However, with each contact respondents were advised about the voluntary nature of the study and informed that while the researchers greatly appreciated participation in the study, managers could choose not to participate. Consistent with best practice in survey research, no follow up efforts were directed at managers indicating they did not wish to participate (Dillman, 1999).

As with most survey research projects, minimizing non-response, both to the survey and to specific questionnaire items, was a primary administrative goal. Dillman's (2000) comprehensive tailored design method (TDM) approach to maximizing the response rate was used, including such elements as (1) multiple personalized contacts, each contact accompanied with a carefully crafted message to encourage the respondent to complete the survey questionnaire; (2) an alert letter, fax message, phone call at key points in the survey administration; and (3) use of special delivery (combination of 2 day delivery by Airborne Express and Priority Mail service of US Postal Service), among others.

The data collection phase of the study began in fall of 2002 and concluded in winter of 2003. First, respondents were sent a pre-notice letter informing them about the study and requesting their cooperation in completing a pending questionnaire. Approximately a week after the initial alert letter, the survey questionnaire was mailed to the respondents. The accompanying cover letter outlined the study objectives, indicated the voluntary nature of the
study, requested participation, and provided project director contact details for further informational needs and clarifications. About ten days later, a combination thank you/reminder postcard was sent to all respondents, thanking those who had responded and encouraging those who had not to respond as soon as they possibly could. Nearly a month after the mailing of this postcard, a new cover letter and replacement survey were sent to non-respondents. The cover letter emphasized that it was important for everyone to respond. To assure the respondents were aware of the second mailing, concurrently a copy of the cover letter from the second mailing was faxed to the non-respondents indicating a replacement survey was being mailed. Finally, two months later, non-respondents were sent another, new cover letter and a second replacement survey with a completion request. This final mailing, delivered by a combination of two-day delivery by an express carrier and United States Postal Service Priority Mail, noted that this was the last opportunity to participate.

Based on information accumulated during this period, the sampling frame was reduced from 570 to 518 due to departing managers, retirement, and death. It should be noted that APHSA’s directory is the best available source of information on the sampling frame. However, the directory information at publication is a year-old and the survey was administered several months after publication. By the time survey administration concluded in winter of 2003, a total of 274 responses (53%) were received. Of these, 270 are used due to four cases with missing values on one or more indicator.
Variables / Indicators

There are two sets of analyses and variables due to testing two theories (viz., institutional theory and social identification). Variables/indicators are described in separate sets.

Institutional Theory Analysis – Variables

Public service motivation (PSM) is used as the dependent variable with respondent age, education level, and gender as individual-level predictors and agency as a clustering variable.

PSM

PSM is measured using ten indicators across three dimensions defined by Perry (1996) as shown in Exhibit 1: attraction to public-policy making (PSM-PUBPOL), compassion (PSM-COMP), commitment to the public interest (PSM-COMT). These indicators have been subject to validity testing by Coursey and Pandey (2007). Four dependent variables are represented as simple summations for this analysis (overall PSM and summations by dimension). The authors recognize per Coursey and Pandey’s (2007) arguments this is far from ideal. Hence, further analysis will evaluate the stability of the findings by generating variables per their suggested approach based on confirmatory factor analysis.

Education

Education (EDUC) is represented by a question concerning the level of education across “some college,” “bachelor’s degree,” “MPA (or related),” or “other graduate degree.” The last two were combined into a single response. Analyses were also run using a dummy variable for MPA instead and found education as described above was a better predictor (not included in
this conference paper).

Age and Gender

Age was obtained via an item asking respondents for their year of birth and age was then calculated by subtracting from the survey year (2002). Gender was a simple item asking respondents to indicate whether they were female or male. Female was coded “1” and male represented by “0.”

Social Identification Analysis – Variables

Job satisfaction and commitment (separate variables) are dependent variables. Predictors include three measures of the level of social identification as well as age, gender, and PSM as represented as in the institutional analysis.

Social Identification

Three measures for social identification with the organization are used to reflect theory. PSM’s influence on job satisfaction and commitment is tested based on Dilulio’s (1994) and Mintzberg’s (1983) arguments derived from social identification theory (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) that employees are more supportive of organizations where values are more uniform and are similar to their personal values. The average PSM levels are calculated for each organization and compared to each respondent and the difference used as a predictor (PSM-DIFF). The variance in PSM level across respondents within an organization is used as a uniformity measure (PSM-VAR). A moderated term is added (which the theory predicts via presuming the combination of difference and uniformity act jointly) (PSM-MOD). Given the need to compare averages and variances, only respondents where at least three employees of their agency responded to the survey were included.
Job Satisfaction

Three indicators were summed measuring job satisfaction: “In general, I like working here,” “In general, I don’t like my job (reversed),” and “All in all, I am satisfied with my job.”

Job Commitment

Six indicators were summed for job commitment: “This organization deserves my loyalty,” “I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it,” “I owe a great deal to my organization,” “It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to,” “Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now,” and “I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.”

Analysis

Institutional Theory

Exhibit 2 provides the HLM models for PSM and its three represented subdimensions. While the demographic predictors tend to be significant and in the expected direction, there is virtually no evidence in the sample of any clustering by agency as all the variances for the grouping variable (agency) are 0.

Social Identification

Eight regression models for job commitment and job satisfaction were calculated by varying how PSM was represented in the model. For example, four models for job satisfaction were evaluated by varying whether PSM was represented as a total summation or by just one of its three measured subdimensions. Social identification would predict a significant
moderation involving the 1) difference between a respondent and the agency average; and 2) the variance in the agency. The relevant PSM-DIFF and PSM-VAR were centered and standardized for each of the eight models while the moderator was not per convention for avoiding multicollinearity problems. Only agencies with three or more responses were included given a variance was needed. Exhibit 3 provides the job commitment and Exhibit 4 the job satisfaction findings.

There is no support for social identification amongst the job commitment models as the moderator term and its component variable are not significant. However, the moderator is significant in every job satisfaction model though the overall model strengths are weak. We suspect that the inconsistent results across the two job variables may be due to the wording of some of the commitment indicators. Two, and arguably three, of the indicators ask the respondent to consider commitment with respect to outside opportunities or life effects. While that is often considered a component of measuring commitment, it may be a relatively poor conceptualization in the sample population given limited job opportunities.

Conclusions

This study tests both institutional logic via formal organization and social identification theory in relation to PSM. Findings for institutional logic indicated no support for formal organization clustering in the sampled population. Social identification was generally supported for job satisfaction but not commitment. The differences in the job variable results may be attributable to the wording of some of the commitment items requiring consideration of outside factors such as life effects and other opportunities.
Future Directions

This analysis is considered preliminary. The authors plan on running the institutional logic tests using multilevel structural equations with the notable advantages of better latent (variable) represented and consideration of measurement error. PSM variables will also be represented via produced factors from a confirmatory factor analysis per Coursey and Pandey’s (2007) suggestion.

A test of the level effects (slopes) for the moderator in the job satisfaction models is also being conducted. Job commitment will be retested eliminating the questioned indicators to see if the results vary. Additionally, data from NASP IV will be used to test comparisons across mission and job types such as finance/budgeting, public works, and personnel as well as a comparison of organizational versus professional associations. NASP II only includes one mission area. While this provides a control for mission differences, NASP IV allows other types of groupings besides formal organization; formal organization, however, is not testable. Hence, NASP IV has good potential for complementing the current analysis.
## Exhibit 1
Public Service Motivation Items by Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attraction to Public Policy Making</th>
<th>Perry (1996) Designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics is a dirty word (reversed)</td>
<td>PSM 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The give and take of public policy-making does not appeal to me (reversed)</td>
<td>PSM 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t care much for politicians (reversed)</td>
<td>PSM 31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment to Public Interest / Civic Duty</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I unselfishly contribute to my community</td>
<td>PSM 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful public service is very important to me</td>
<td>PSM 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community even if it harmed my interests</td>
<td>PSM 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider public service my civic duty</td>
<td>PSM 39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compassion</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress</td>
<td>PSM 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another</td>
<td>PSM 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves (reversed)</td>
<td>PSM 24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Exhibit 2
HLM Models for PSM and Subdimensions Testing Clustering by Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>PSM</th>
<th>PSM-PUBPOLICY</th>
<th>PSM-COMPASSION</th>
<th>PSM-COMMITMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.063*</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.063***</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.596****</td>
<td>0.805***</td>
<td>0.356*</td>
<td>0.535**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1.200**</td>
<td>0.635*</td>
<td>1.037****</td>
<td>-0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency Var</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 260  263  261  261

Total clusters (agencies) for all models = 57

1 **** p<.000; *** p<.01; ** p<.05; * p<.10
Exhibit 3
Regression Models Testing Social Identification for Job Commitment Models by PSM and its Subdimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>PSM</th>
<th>PSM-PUBPOLICY</th>
<th>PSM-COMPASSION</th>
<th>PSM-COMMITMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.685²</td>
<td>0.744</td>
<td>0.731</td>
<td>0.738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-1.249*</td>
<td>-0.971</td>
<td>-0.858</td>
<td>-1.241*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSM</td>
<td>0.159</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.212</td>
<td>0.551***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSM-DIFF</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>0.180</td>
<td>-0.414</td>
<td>-0.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSM-VAR</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td>-0.737</td>
<td>-0.287</td>
<td>0.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSM-MOD</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² **** p<.000; *** p<.01; ** p<.05; * p<.10
### Exhibit 4
Regression Models Testing Social Identification for Job Satisfaction Models by PSM and its Subdimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>PSM</th>
<th>PSM-PUBPOLICY&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>PSM-COMPASSION</th>
<th>PSM-COMMITMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.089&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.042**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.359</td>
<td>-0.334</td>
<td>-0.268</td>
<td>-0.262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSM</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.088*</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>0.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSM-DIFF</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>-0.080</td>
<td>-0.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSM-VAR</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>-0.406**</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>-0.447*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSM-MOD</td>
<td>-0.005**</td>
<td>0.047***</td>
<td>-0.006***</td>
<td>-0.039*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>0.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup> Age, Education, and PSM p-levels range between 0.103-0.109 for the public policy dimension

<sup>2</sup> **** p<.000; *** p<.01; ** p<.05; * p<.10
References


