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## **Public Service Motivation**

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**Abstract:** Public Service Motivation concept was developed in North America and focuses on specific motivations of public servants, such as employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, reward preferences, organizational and individual performance. Other types of motivation, as financial consideration, are relevant but have less important influences with regard to this kind of work outcomes. This strengthens the assertion for a diversified motivational strategy, which affects various types of motivation, while not losing sight of the public value that one organization shows and therefore valuing public service motivation as a specific contribution to work outcomes. The concept has been increasingly applied in European public administration. This paper presents Status Quo of international Public Service Motivation research and locates in them empirical evidences from countries that are already working with this concept, like Austria. It also analyses implications for central questions of public management. The main focus of this article is general appropriateness and possible applications for Romanian public management research.

**Keywords:** motivation; public service; public management

### **1 Introduction**

The concept of Public Service Motivation is focused on specific motivation of civil servants and analyses implications for central issues of public management such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and individual performance, incentive systems. Originally developed for the Anglo-Saxon context, this concept is increasingly applied in European public administration.

Standing changing conditions, employee dissatisfaction, negative feedback from stakeholders and citizens make it difficult for civil servants to identify themselves with the traditional model of public servants. However, a persistence of specific values and orientations manifests, such as preference for common good, in service for citizens, high professionalism, objectivity and political independence of self-image of public service. A specific kind of motivation is associated to public servants. Nonetheless, this approach got up in the debate on New Public Management and public service reforms in the 90s with respect to rational and public choice Theory and its assumptions regarding utilitarian approach and instrumental rationality. The new public sector logic results show up that maximizing budgets, power, public reputation and level of remuneration are the main reasons of acting as civil servants together with the alignment of employment conditions and incentive structures to those of the private sector, these all represent a very promising way to modernize the public sector. The institutional-economical approaches are criticized to have reached their limits, when it comes to the results of many research on basics of motivated behaviour, such as to explain the specific Ethos of civil servants. Neoinstitutional approaches argue each their own logic with the specific institutional structure, in which members are socialized and guide their behavior to the "logic of appropriateness" from which they set up their social identities.

A similar result is found by James Perry in North America, who developed a different concept composed of four dimensions, "Public Service Motivation" who increased in popularity in recent years. Factors that influence the Public Service Motivation are currently being discussed intensive at international level, in particular the PSM relevance for involvement and commitment, individual and organizational performance as well as other aspects of the Human Resources Management like job satisfaction or reward system.

Functioning cultural values concepts such as that of Public Service Motivation cannot be simply export in other social-historical contexts. Not at least because of the strong conceptual roots in the American culture and the particularities of the American public sector regarding the concept applicability in the European context (even within Europe there are considerable differences).

## **2 The Concept of Public Service Motivation**

Under Public Service Motivation is understood "the individual predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions" (Perry/Wise, 1990, p. 368). Perry and Wise differentiate in their approach between rational, norm-based and affective elements of this specific motivation. Public Service Motivation is used throughout the public sector regardless of polics (policy level doesn't play any role). This original definition of Perry and Wise was further developed, so Brewer and Selden see the Public Service Motivation as "the motivational force that induces individuals to perform public service" (Brewer/ Selden, 1998, p. 417). They also proved a basic applicability and validity of the concept outside the public sector. For Europe is important the Vandenabeele work. Regarding to Vandenabeele, the Public Service Motivation is "beliefs, values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest or organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that induce, through public interaction, motivation for targetted action" (Vandenabeele, 2007, p. 547).

## **3 The 4 Dimensions of the Public Service Motivation**

The concept of Public Service Motivation is generally conceptualized as a multidimensional construct. Builded on Knoke and Wright-Isak distiction between three different motivational categories - rational, norm-based and affective - Perry differentiated four dimensions:

- a. The first dimension is the appeal of politics and policy advice - this is in the category of rational, on own interest utility maximization and examines the extent to which civil servants are characterized by a particularly strong interest in politics action and up to what extent are they motivated by the possibilites of Policy co-determination or by the proximity to political process.
- b. The second dimension is the norm-based one; here is considered the extent to which acting for common good and social responsibility affects the professional activity in the public administration. The main factors here are the desire to serve the public interest or the loyalty to the state.
- c. As the first two dimensions stand for self-interest and state norms and the society as a whole have priority, the third dimension is the social compassion, also norms-based one. This dimension considers the individual perceived obligation to improve the lives of others.
- d. The fourth dimension - altruism/unselfishness - is attributed to the affective motives and focuses on the willingness to work selflessly and independent from external standards and expectations from other people.

In the original concept of Perry, these four dimensions are measured with a factor analysis based on 24 items, which however in later studies were barely fully used. Moreover, the relevance of each dimension is challenged also in particular of the items in different public sector "cultures". Therefore many researchers developed their own items or additional dimensions, based on advanced concept definitions or the cultural resonance of the concept in each specific context, while in many other studies on the concept was limited on the measurement of only three dimensions or on fewer items, due to high correlations between each dimension. Thus significant differences make it difficult both in terminology and in the conceptualization and selection of individual dimensions and different items for measuring this dimensions the interpretability of the results and in spite of numerous individual country studies (in UK, USA, Austria, Belgium) the integration of these comparative studies. Moreover, in the comparative research another aspect is discussed, namely the extent to which the four dimensions can be aggregated into a comprehensive PSM score. Although Perry in his studies from 1996 and 1997 pointed out that each of the four dimensions appreciate special aspects of the public service motivation and should be single investigated, the summing up of the individual scores or the determination of an arithmetic means is on major approach, especially in contexts in which each of the four dimensions indicate in different directions or they have different antecedents or effects.

Despite this heterogeneity the studies are mostly based on the assumption that public servants but also the employees from the non-governmental sector indicate far more expression of these four motivational factors' in comparison with to private sector employees, although many authors indicate that a service motivation and an interest for common good is of course relevant in the private sector (in accounting fraud scandals, financial crisis and the rise of the concepts like Corporate Citizenship, Corporate Social Responsibility). Brewer and Seldon argued that a strong focus of public motivation research in the public sector" obscure the universal nature of PSM and led some scholars to believe it promotes a false dichotomy between the harmful sectors"(Brewer/Seldon, 1998, p. 417). Even if clear differences exist between public and private sector, it is open whether people with a higher PSM usually turn more to the public sector or whether each PSM is the result of professional socialization. So assert the Houston studies (2000) that the civil servants are motivated intrinsically than private sector employees, responsive to extrinsic factors such as income and shorter working hours. The author also emphasizes that both groups of employees describe meaningful work as the main motivator and concludes that the both groups differentiate less by their motivational predisposition but they adapt more to the realities in their respective work contexts. Also the level of the hierarchy, ie the difference between management and non-executives has a stronger influence on the motivational disposition as has the sector (public or private). It is outstanding to what extent the PSM deals with the specific feature of the public sector or to what extent the entire public sector can be treated uniformly.

#### **4 Conclusions**

The motivation of employees is a critical variable for the success of an organization and the concern at civil servants motivation is of important interest in the Public Management Research. Although it is well known that it is the premise of a special kind of motivation for public servants of high interest, there were up in the 80s hardly any specific theories and empirical research which dealt explicitly with this question. In the past 10 years this fact has changed fundamentally. Based on by Perry developed concept of public service motivation a significant progress was achieved especially in regard to public servants.

The PSM concept focused on the specific reasons and motivations that are characteristic to public servants and provides just in regard to the strongly utilitarian and instrumental rationality of the New

Public Management, an interesting alternative model to better understand the behavior of public servants. The key point of the PSM research is the positive impact of PSM on the public administrations' success important factors like incentive preferences, job satisfaction, individual and organizational performance, integrity, ethical behavior. In terms of administrative practice raise the question of appropriate institutional structure such as recruitment and selection and also socialization of employees or motivating workplace conditions and incentive systems. The means of the available PSM research approaches now a critical dimension that allows more general relationships between the concept and the variables and build up an important step toward a more evidence-based Public Management Research. A key priority of the current and especially future PSM research is accordingly to Perry and Hondeghem the study of PSM in different contexts.

The general theories of motivation are ample, but the PSM is in his country of origin a primarily empirically based approach. Even many interesting results are already available in a high dynamics of international research on the subject of PSM, it still seems to be a long step up to reliable PSM international comparative research.

## **5. Appendix: The four dimensions and the 24 items for measuring the PSM (according to Perry 1996)**

### **A. Attraction to Policy Making**

- Politics is a dirty word. (Reversed<sup>1</sup>);
- I don't care much for politicians. (Reversed);
- The give and take of public policymaking doesn't appeal to me. (Reversed).

### **B. Commitment to the Public Interest**

- I unselfishly contribute to my community;
- An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors;
- Meaningful public service is very important to me;
- I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the community, even if it harmed my interests;
- It is hard for me to give intensely interested in what is going on in my community. (Reversed)

### **C. Compassion**

- I am highly moved by the plight of the underprivileged;
- To me, patriotism includes seeing to the welfare of others;
- I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves. (Reversed);
- I seldom think about the welfare of people whom I don't know personally. (Reversed);
- Most social programs are too vital to do without;
- It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress;
- I am often reminded by daily events how dependent we are on one another;
- There are few public programs that I wholeheartedly support. (Reversed).

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<sup>1</sup> Reserved: Questions were deliberately formulated inverse methodological reasons. For interpretation, they have to be seen the other way around, ie Rejection corresponds to high PSM

#### D. Altruism/ Self-Sacrifice

- Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements;
- I think people should give back to society more than they get from it;
- I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else;
- Doing well financially is definitely more important to me than doing good deeds; (Reversed)
- Much of what I do is for a cause bigger than myself;
- Serving other citizens would give me a good feeling even if no one paid for it;
- I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society;
- I believe in putting duty before self.

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