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Public Service Motivation Research: Lessons for Practice

Theory to Practice

Abstract: *Public service motivation research has proliferated in parallel with concerns about how to improve the performance of public service personnel. However, scholarship does not always inform management and leadership. This article purposefully reviews public service motivation research since 2008 to determine the extent to which researchers have identified lessons for practice. The results of the investigation support several lessons—among them using public service motivation as a selection tool, facilitating public service motivation through cooperation in the workplace, conveying the significance of the job, and building leadership based on public service values. These results are important because they offer evidence that the field is coalescing around tactics that managers and leaders can use to address enduring concerns about employee motivation in the public sector. They also prompt us to articulate ideas that can guide a tighter integration of research and practice moving forward.*

Practitioner Points

- Employee public service motivation (PSM) is changeable by both intended and unintended organizational and management practices.
- Attracting and retaining employees with high PSM is a reliable way to enhance employee performance and agency mission accomplishment.
- Organizations that intentionally nurture PSM develop stronger ties between organizational and employee values and goals.
- Relationships between employees and service beneficiaries should be leveraged for motivational advantages.
- Leaders should communicate and model public service values.

Governments around the world continue to be attentive to an issue that is as old as the field of public administration: how to motivate employees who are doing the public's business. Recent headlines in the United States, for example, have prominently raised the failures of traditional incentives in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the challenges of motivating employees (Moynihan, DeLeire, and Enami 2015). In Great Britain, pressure to admit patients to emergency rooms within four hours of their arrival to improve the speed of health care delivery has led to ambulances delaying the arrival time of patients to meet performance targets (Shaw, Taylor, and Dix 2015). In Italy, performance schemes implemented in the 1990s have led to public health employee bonuses awarded either uniformly or based on seniority rather than performance (Micali 2009).

In the 1980s, in the aftermath of experiments such as the U.S. Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) of 1978, public administration scholars recognized the limitations of the application of traditional motivational schemes in the public sector (Pearce and Perry 1983; Perry, Petrakis, and Miller 1989). Traditional systems were largely adapted from the private sector. Designed around self-interest, extrinsic, usually pecuniary incentives, and a high degree of organizational control over prescribed behaviors, these practices generally fell far short of expectations to transform employee performance in government organizations. For example, more recent studies suggest that the negative effects of pay for performance are stronger in public sector than in private sector organizations (Frey, Homberg, and Osterloh 2013). In general, the importation of private sector management has not always yielded benefits for performance in the public sector (Weibel, Rost, and Osterloh 2010). The failings of the CSRA and other initiatives like it triggered new research about public service motivation (PSM) (Perry and Wise 1990) that has flourished for a quarter century.

The research on public service motivation has grown to unexpected levels. Ritz, Brewer, and Neumann (2016) put the volume of research in 2013 and 2014

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alone at 136 articles. The volume of the research about public service motivation is the stimulus for this article. The field has ample research showing that the concept has relevance. The time has come to think about how to translate the research into practice. Three distinctions separate the logics of public service motivation from traditional motivational schemes (Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2010). They are (1) others as the objects of individual interests rather than self; (2) the nature of incentives; and (3) an emphasis on values and individual autonomy, in contrast to extrinsic incentives and organizational control. Although traditional and public service systems are not mutually exclusive, their fundamental differences are likely to produce different organizational policies and tactics. Further evidence of the distinctiveness of public service motivation is its linkages to concepts such as altruism and prosocial motivation by scholars from other disciplines (Dur and Zoutenbier 2014; Grant 2008; Perry and Vandenabeele 2015). This article seeks to flesh out the implications of the differences associated with public service motivation.

This article extracts the management lessons learned from our review of the PSM literature since 2008. While systematic reviews of PSM research (Ritz, Brewer, and Neumann 2016) and meta-analyses (Homburg, McCarthy, and Tabvuma 2015; Warren and Chen 2013) have done a commendable job of summarizing PSM research for scholars, less effort has been devoted to organizing the implications of these empirical findings for managers. In 2008, the first effort (that we are aware of) to identify and provide a framework for practical lessons from the public service motivation research was published (Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem 2008). That chapter serves as a guide for our review.

We specifically address two questions: Has this growing body of scholarship translated research into practice? If so, what practical lessons have emerged? Our scope of inquiry is largely conscribed by an indirect assessment of management practices. At this point in the development of PSM research, management practices have received limited direct empirical investigation. Perry's recent call to directly test "strategies using public service motives" (2014, 42) holds some promise that direct analyses will be possible in the future, a project that could be facilitated by meta-analytic assessment. Until then, we view this contribution as a key step toward moving PSM as an emergent construct (Perry and Wise 1990) to an applied tool of management.

We specifically address two questions: Has this growing body of scholarship translated research into practice? If so, what practical lessons have emerged?

We begin by assessing what insights the research offers as to whether public service motivation is a state or a trait, an issue that is consequential for the efficacy of efforts to apply research findings. Then we identify lessons from research that could become part of a paradigm for public management and leadership as the twenty-first century evolves. The scholarship suggests five lessons for practice: (1) public service motivation should effectively be used as a selection tool, (2) supportive workplaces should nurture and maintain public service values that enhance employee performance, (3) workplaces can facilitate interactions with beneficiaries that convey the significance of the job, (4) newcomers should be given opportunities to learn public service values, and (5) leaders should communicate and model public service values. These lessons are important because they offer evidence that the field is coalescing around tactics that can be used to address the enduring challenge of employee motivation in the public sector. We conclude with suggestions for a tighter integration of research and practice moving forward.

Public Service Motivation: State or Trait?

An issue that underlies any effort to tie PSM research to managerial practice and organizational policy is the extent to which public service motivation is a malleable or changeable individual attribute. The issue historically has been framed in psychology as whether the attribute in question is a trait, in other words, a stable individual difference, or a state, something experienced in the short run that fluctuates over time (Chaplin, John, and Goldberg 1998). If public service motivation is a highly stable, and therefore unchangeable, trait, then efforts to manage it are likely to be fruitless for organizations and leaders. On the other hand, if it is a state that fluctuates frequently and unpredictably, then it also may be difficult to manage. The point is that whether public service motivation is a state or a trait has consequences, among them the prospects for using it in the motivational process and the strategies by which it can be activated and managed. Thus, the trait–state question is important for the general issue of applying public service motivation research.

What light do the research results reviewed here shed on the state–trait question? A recent study of German public servants directly engages the state–trait issue. Vogel and Kroll (2016) used four waves of data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study, which covers a period of 16 years. Values associated with public service motivation were relatively stable over the 16 years. Even when changes occurred, individuals tended to return to their original level of public service motivation in later periods.

Vogel and Kroll's findings complement earlier nonlongitudinal research by Moynihan and Pandey (2007). The latter authors found that sociohistorical context, represented by variables such as an individual's level of education and membership in professional organizations, was an important determinant of public service motivation. Despite the role of long-linked sociohistorical factors, more immediate organizational factors, including red tape, organizational tenure, hierarchical authority, and reform efforts, also significantly influenced public service motivation. Thus, public service motivation may be a product of long-term socialization, but it may be moveable by more immediate influences in an individual's organizational environment.

Two more recent experimental studies shed additional light on the state-trait issue. Bellé concluded that "public service motivation is a dynamic state, or at least a trait showing significant within-person variability" (2013, 150). He inferred that the evidence from his study of Italian nurses demonstrated that public service motivation levels are a product not only of what people bring to their organization but also of organizational processes. In a survey experiment involving 528 law students, Pedersen (2015) found that low-intensity efforts to activate public service motivation, represented by variations in the content of survey items that targeted

the activation of identified and integrated extrinsic motivation, had a positive effect on individual behavioral intent.

To summarize, public service motivation does not appear to fluctuate widely from the levels individuals attain during their formative years. The attribute, however, seems neither to be fixed nor to fluctuate unpredictably. Instead, it appears that both intentional and unintentional practices within organizations influence motivation. It is especially noteworthy that longitudinal and experimental research conducted since 2008 offers clear support for managers and organizations that seek to use public service motivation as a lever in motivational strategies. Thus, public service motivation can be a path to attain goals important to organizations—and individuals. To what extent has research offered lessons for practice?

Literature Search, Inclusion, and Review Methods

As noted, research about public service motivation has grown rapidly during the last decade. Since 2008, when the first review of the research offered strategies for management and leadership (Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem 2008), a large body of research has emerged. The present study uses generalizations from 2008 as a baseline to assess and summarize the recommendations offered for practice by subsequent scholarship. The period covered by the review is January 1, 2008, to December 31, 2015. According to Ritz, Brewer, and Neumann's (2016) general research synthesis, only 29 studies, inclusive of articles empirical and nonempirical, were published between 1990 and 2005. Their annual count of articles indicates that a significant upswing began in 2008 and that the vast majority of articles have been published since then. Thus, the start date for our analysis coincides with the beginning of the primary period of new knowledge production and the year in which Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem (2008) appeared.

To identify articles to include in this review, we supplemented a bibliography of public service motivation articles maintained by the authors with a search of two electronic databases using the keywords "public service motivation" and "PSM." The electronic databases were Google Scholar and the Publish or Perish (Harzing 2007) software. In addition, we compared our list of articles with the list provided in Ritz, Brewer, and Neumann (2016). Our searches identified 160 potentially relevant articles, published either in print or online during the review period. Once we assembled a list of articles, we narrowed the pool of articles by selecting only peer-reviewed empirical articles for coding and formal review. We excluded the articles if they were (1) theory only, (2) measurement and methods only, (3) conference papers, or (4) non-English-language articles. In addition to the articles excluded based on these criteria, we were not able to access two additional published papers, which therefore were excluded from the final list of articles. The final number of articles we reviewed was 144.

To review and compare articles, we coded each article for year published, continent in which the study was conducted, sector of organizations studied, and research methodology. Open-ended information was also extracted about the study findings and practical implications, if any, that were included in the article. Table E in the online appendix provides a detailed summary and coding of each of the articles used for the review. The online appendix also provides other, supplementary information about the dates of publication, levels of analysis, methods, and geographic location of the studies. These attributes help us better assess broader patterns in the public service motivation research as they pertain to practical application—our ultimate attribute of interest.

Our search for practical or applied motivational strategies was guided by Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem (2008). In that article, five broad strategies of managing public service motivation are suggested, each centered on one of five units of analysis used in previous public motivation research (Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem 2008; Perry, Mesch, and Paarlberg 2006; Perry and Porter 1982). The five units of analysis are individual, job, work environment, organization, and society. From these strategies emerged 14 tactics. Our coding of an article for the present study linked its content directly to the 14 tactics. The review process helped identify emerging lessons that resulted from these original proposed tactics. The authors of about half of the articles explicitly discuss practical implications. While it is difficult to discern a notable trend, the moving average of the proportion of articles discussing practical implications seems to be increasing (see table 1).

The tactics suggested by the authors in our sample were coded to assess how researchers have applied public service motivation in practice, using Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem's (2008) framework as a guide. That framework is summarized in table 2 along with our findings. We include categorizations from the original 2008 framework in the far-right column of table 2. These reflect the level of focus based on Perry and Porter's (1982) original conceptual map, for example, individual, job, organization, but also the broad strategies that inform specific tactics. We observe that the strategy to integrate public service motivation into human resource management (HRM) processes has received the most attention; nearly 40 percent of the work we reviewed focused on tactics in this broader strategy. The second most common strategy was to create a supportive work environment for public service motivation, with over 30 percent of the total. The least attention has been given to organization-level strategies that integrate public service into organizational mission, strategy and leadership and societal-level strategies that seek to obtain external legitimacy for public service.

Informed, in part, by the frequency with which researchers have focused on particular tactics and strategies, we identify some specific lessons for practice in the next section.

Lessons from the Research

What lessons can be synthesized from the empirical research conducted since 2008? Does the research since 2008 reinforce

Table 1 Practical Implications over Time

Year	No	Yes	% Yes	Total
2008	8	4	33%	12
2009	4	5	56%	9
2010	2	1	33%	3
2011	6	4	40%	10
2012	6	7	54%	13
2013	8	16	67%	24
2014	15	14	48%	29
2015	15	20	57%	35
Total				119

Table 2 Applications Based on Tactics: Perry, Paarlberg, and Hondeghem (2008) Framework

#	Tactic	Freq.	Level of Analysis	Strategy
1	Select based upon existing public service motivation.	34	Individual	Integrate public service motivation into HRM processes.
2	Socialize individuals into expectations of public service behavior.	15	Individual	Integrate public service motivation into HRM processes.
3	Utilize performance appraisals that include observations of behaviors that reflect public service motivations.	10	Individual	Integrate public service motivation into HRM processes.
4	Convey significance of job.	15	Job	Create and convey job meaning.
5	Establish clear goals in line with existing public service motivations.	8	Job	Create and convey job meaning.
6	Create work structures that enhance self-regulation.	5	Work environment	Create a supportive work environment for PSM.
7	Encourage supportive workplace interactions that facilitate public service motivation.	30	Work environment	Create a supportive work environment for PSM.
8	Create and maintain incentives that align organizational mission and employee public service motivation.	7	Work environment	Create a supportive work environment for PSM.
9	Design incentive systems that offer long-term reinforcement of intrinsic motivations and do not crowd out intrinsic motivations.	8	Work environment	Create a supportive work environment for PSM.
10	Articulate organization vision and action that reflects commitment to public service motivation.	9	Organization	Integrate public service into org. mission, strategy, and leadership.
11	Promote value-based leadership.	5	Organization	Integrate public service into org. mission, strategy, and leadership.
12	Partner with societal institutions to promote public service motivation.	4	Society	Obtain external legitimacy for public service.
13	Advocate for and provide opportunities for pre-service experiences.	0	Society	Obtain external legitimacy for public service.
14	Use a variety of media to bring public service to the attention of broader society.	3	Society	Obtain external legitimacy for public service.

inferences about practical implications of earlier research? Do new tactics or nuances of familiar tactics surface that are distinct from what was identified previously (Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem 2008)? Based on our systematic review of the literature, we discuss broad lessons. Our choices were guided by the frequency with which various tactics were raised in the published literature since 2008. Our top two lessons (largely echoed in tactics 1 and 7) appeared in approximately 25 percent of the articles. Our third and fourth lessons (echoed in tactics 2 and 4) appeared in just over 10 percent of articles.

Lesson 1: Give Priority to Selecting for High Public Service Motivation

The practical implication most frequently voiced in recent research is that selecting employees with high public service motivation is a reliable and predictable way to realize the benefits of public service motivation. This leads to our first lesson:

> **Lesson 1**: Attracting and selecting employees with high public service motivation is a highly reliable way to capture the benefits of public service motivation, enhancing both employee performance and agency mission accomplishment.

This lesson reinforces an important component of a broader strategy of integrating public service motivation into HRM processes. No fewer than 36 of the 144 studies published since 2008 explicitly refer to selecting for high public service motivation, but only 26 of these studies discuss practical applications in any detail.[1] Ritz, Brewer, and Neumann (2016) also found that this was the most frequently mentioned practical implication in their synthesis. In a recent blog post, Steve Kelman (2015) aptly summarized what we can infer from the substantial body of research: "Again, there is a managerial takeaway from this: If you want to harness the ability of public service motivation to improve the performance of your employees, you need to be looking for people with that motivation to join your organization in the first place."

Kelman's point also carries an implicit message that should not be overlooked. Although knowledge, skills, and abilities are explicit objects of recruitment processes, public service motivation is usually ignored as an important determinant of outcomes such as attraction, retention, performance, and ethical behavior. The accumulating research indicates that this is a serious omission in existing recruitment processes.

Selecting employees with high public service motivation is a reliable and predictable way to realize the benefits of public service motivation.

Research points to a number of reasons why attracting and selecting employees with high public service motivation may pay dividends for public organizations. Anderfuhren-Biget, Varone, and Giauque (2014) identified several reasons in their analysis of Swiss civil servants, among them value congruence, the reduction of principal–agent problems, and civil servant identification. These factors may be overlapping, but they are conceptually distinct. Value congruence enhances prospects for employees to be driven by higher-order extrinsic or intrinsic motivations. The reduction of principal–agent problems means that employees are likely to be able to operate with more autonomy from internal and external stakeholders, creating another condition for high motivation (Ryan and Deci 2000). Employee identification enhances ownership and the likely quality of effort applied.

Although recent empirical research speaks firmly for the goal of attracting and selecting individuals with high public service motivation, it is less concrete about steps public organizations can

take to realize the goal. We extracted at least three broad steps from the research.

Project organizational images to attract high public service motivation staff. Anderfuhren-Biget, Varone, and Giauque (2014) argued that prospective employees applying to work in a particular public policy arena are already familiar with the mission and therefore are likely to bring values congruent with the policy. This is a specific example of more encompassing processes surrounding organizational images and member identification. Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) posited that two different organizational images are consequential for the strength of a member's organizational identification—one based on what a member believes is distinctive and central about the organization and one grounded in a member's beliefs about what outsiders think about the organization.

The theory about organizational images and member identification gives public managers general guidance about what they can do to improve prospects for attracting staff with high public service motivation. All other factors being equal, organizations should project clear images about their missions, how the missions advance outcomes valued by society, and the distinctiveness of what the organization contributes. Public organizations have far less control of organizational images projected by outsiders, but they can act to paint a bigger picture about construed external images. Organizational leaders can place hostilities or criticisms in a larger context. A good example is the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The IRS can cultivate organizational images in professional circles that could attract prospective employees, but they may face a challenge in addressing construed external images that are hostile and critical. The IRS could, however, directly confront the images generated by detractors in their messaging to prospects and staff as a means for maximizing the strength of members' organizational identification.

Waldner (2012) and Jorgensen and Rutgers (2014) suggest a tool for helping shape organizational images—the job advertisement. Waldner conducted a content analysis of 473 job requirements and benefits in job advertisements for lawyers. He found substantial sector differences in job advertisements, with public sector employers promoting specifically public characteristics. Few of the public characteristics, however, related to public service motivation. Jorgensen and Rutgers looked at job advertisements over a five-decade period in Denmark and Netherlands. They found consistent attention in advertisements to merit as a core value as well as attention to organizational branding. The results of the two studies are instructive about job advertisements as means for projecting organizational images and for values as signals to job candidates, both important elements relevant to attracting high public service motivation staff.

Take steps to screen in candidates with high public service motivation. In addition to promoting clear and positive organizational images that enhance public service motivation of candidates within selection pools, public managers can take focused action to select candidates with high public service motivation. Although scoring simple surveys (Perry 1996) is one avenue for identifying varying levels of public service motivation among job candidates, alternatives are available that increase validity and reliability. Scoring résumés may be a valid way to anchor public service motivation in prior behavior. In the context of interviews or assessment centers, critical incidents are another way to elicit behaviors associated with public service motivation. Both the scoring of résumés and critical incidents can also be geared to particular jobs and contexts, which may further enhance validity.

There are certainly limits to these varieties of activities. For example, if selection procedures have a demonstrable, adverse impact on a protected class of applicants, they should be called into question. However, in general, scoring résumés is one way to screen in candidates with high public service motivation by identifying particular experiences and behaviors. It is akin to another practice that is already widely used by universities in student admissions, which is consideration of extracurricular activities. Public organizations can improve their recruitment results by building in affirmation selection of staff based on behavioral profiles related to public service behaviors (Brewer 2003; Houston 2006). We recognize, however, that not all jobs warrant screening on PSM. Additional research should explore how job characteristics moderate the effect of public service motivation. Getha-Taylor and Haddock-Bigwarfe (2014) published one of the few studies that we have seen related to this vein of inquiry.

Take steps to screen out candidates with motivations that are likely to crowd out intrinsic or prosocial orientations. Public organizations must not only "select in" applicants with high public service motivation but also "select out" candidates driven by other motivations. Offering a realistic portrayal of what the organization stands for and a preview of what a specific job entails could help facilitate an applicant self-selection process where low public service motivation prospects are less apt to apply (Clerkin and Coggburn 2012). Realistic previews could also be constructed to promote preferred applicants to select into the workforce.

A variant of this strategy is to screen out candidates with significant self-interest motivations that stand in contrast to motivations associated with public service motivation, such as self-sacrifice and civic duty. Candidates with high needs for security or money might be screened out if these are their primary needs in the absence of strong public service motivation. An experiment reported by Fehrler and Kosfeld (2014) offered a lower wage to assess the willingness of participants to opt for mission-oriented jobs. About one-third of the subjects took the lower-wage option, proving it to be an effective screening device.

The concrete suggestions we offer here are not without challenges. They demand that organizations pay attention to public service motivation, develop valid and reliable systems for measuring and observing it, and integrate it into a range of other considerations, such as job-related knowledge, that are also consequential for identifying quality staff.

Lesson 2: Create a Supportive Work Environment

A second practical implication frequently identified in recent research involves the work environment that employees confront once they join an organization.

Lesson 2: Create a supportive work environment that models and reinforces public service motivation by implementing interventions that enhance public service motivation and avoiding practices that may crowd it out.

Thirty studies published since 2008 discuss practical implications involving the need for work environments that sustain and enhance high public service motivation; only 19 of these cover practical implications in some depth.[2] Moynihan and Pandey's (2007) finding that tenure was negatively associated with public service motivation helped bring attention to the importance of organizational socialization, which was highlighted in early research (Perry 1997) on public service motivation. The volume of research about work environment between 2008 and 2015 testifies both to interest surrounding improvement of public work experiences and importance of employee socialization, which has been a strong and recurring theme in the research since its inception.

Organizations that intentionally nurture public service motivation develop stronger ties between the organization and employee values and goals. Wright and Pandey (2008) investigated a model in which the relationship between employee public service motivation and job satisfaction was mediated by the extent to which employees perceived that their values were congruent with the organizations' values. Their model provides a theoretical foundation for a simple practical point: "Public organizations are not just passive beneficiaries of employee public service motivation levels inculcated and developed through earlier life experiences" (516). Wright and Pandey's model is consistent with the logic of much of what we have argued previously: "It [public service motivation] must be nurtured through communication and performance feedback that highlights how the organization's values and goals coincide with those of employee[s]" (515).

Several of the scholars who authored other studies identify with this lesson (e.g., Andersen and Kjeldsen 2013; Kaiser 2014; Vandenabeele 2014; Wright, Shahidul, and Christensen 2017) and refer explicitly to "nurturing" when describing the process they envision to leverage the public service motivations employees bring to their organizations. Studies by Kaiser (2014) and Vandenabeele (2014), based on samples of German and Belgian civil servants, respectively, tie growth of public service motivation to satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy and competence and the developmental processes associated with self-determination theory. Satisfaction of the basic individual psychological needs of autonomy and competence creates a gateway for individuals to internalize public service values that become part of their autonomous identity. Thus, public organizations should seek to provide an environment in which employee needs for autonomy and competence are satisfied while also ensuring that employees are aware of the public service values advanced by the organization and their work. Kaiser (2014) concluded that transferability of competences, autonomy, regular appraisal interviews, and productivity feedback are likely to have salutary influences on job satisfaction and, by inference, public service motivation. "Further results strongly recommend to putting up-to-date human resource management tools into action. Notably, a modern management toolbox of HR-management should include devices to allow for self-determination at the workplace, like the transferability of competence and autonomy" (14).

Purging practices that crowd out PSM complements nurturing PSM. Scholars' primary concern about crowding out of PSM has been performance pay. The reasons for concern are manifold. Pay for performance could crowd out higher-order extrinsic and intrinsic motivations (Frey 1997; Perry, Engbers, and Jun 2009). Extrinsic motivations may also be less powerful and persistent (Grant 2008; Perry, Mesch, and Paarlberg 2006; Perry, Engbers, and Jun 2009).

Research published since 2008, though limited, bears out the concerns. Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, and Frédéric Varone (2013), based on research in Swiss cantons, found that pay for performance negatively influences public service motivation. They concluded that "[t]he current trend in public HRM management, which mainly consists of proposing pay for performance, is not capable of reaching the desired ends, which are, namely, to increase the motivation of civil servants and of organizational performance" (141). French and Emerson (2015), based on analysis of a small sample of local government employees in a Mississippi city, arrived at essentially similar conclusions. They found that overall the employees tended to place greater emphasis on intrinsic versus extrinsic rewards and that employees with higher public service motivation believed that intrinsic rewards were of greater importance than extrinsic rewards.

Pay for performance is not alone, however, among practices that could diminish public service motivation. Liu, Yang, and Yu (2015) point to potential connections between work stressors and public service motivation. They surveyed 412 police officers in a metropolitan city in east China and found that public service motivation moderated the relationship between work stressors and individual well-being. Public employees with higher levels of public service motivation are better able to deal with stressors in ways that offset their negative effects. Despite Liu, Yang, and Yu's favorable findings, Bakker (2015) offered theoretical grounds for taking action to mitigate workplace stressors even when public service motivation is high. Bakker argued,

Public employees with higher levels of public service motivation are better able to deal with stressors in ways that offset their negative effects.

> Public servants may become more and more exhausted because of high daily job demands, and hence they may start to make mistakes and have concentration problems, which will further burden daily job demands. . . . The resulting and repeating daily exhaustion will have a negative influence on long-term PSM, as psychological withdrawal is one of the possible options when levels of strain accumulate over time. (729)

Bakker's argument is that, over the long run, daily strain could undermine public service motivation by undermining its positive influence on job performance and employee engagement. Although

Bakker's theoretical argument does not settle the issue, and additional empirical research is desirable, Bakker offers a plausible rationale for the influence of workplace stressors on public service motivation.

The solution for long-term threats of daily exhaustion, especially for high public service motivation employees, is for managers to be attentive to daily levels of job demands and resources (Bakker 2015). Bakker offered detailed heuristics for attentive managers:

> Managers should ask themselves which specific job resources they offer their employees on a daily basis. . . . Do employees receive feedback about their daily work activities? It may be a good idea to walk around regularly and ask employees how they are doing and whether they need support, task variety, feedback, or other job resources. Also, it may be a good option to provide employees with sufficient job control, so that they have the daily autonomy to craft their own jobs. Simultaneously, managers should have an eye for the daily job demands—is the work to be done interesting and challenging enough? Are there daily hassles that need to be taken care of? Although high public service motivation can help public servants take care of their own daily job demands, chronic job demands are likely to lead to stress and undermine public service motivation. (730)

Lesson 3: Leverage Relationships between Employees and Service Beneficiaries

A third practical implication identified in recent empirical research involves the work that employees are engaged in, particularly how it impacts beneficiaries.

> **Lesson 3**: Identify beneficiaries of specific jobs, programs, and organizational missions, creating opportunities for direct contacts between employees and beneficiaries, and provide clear channels for beneficiary feedback.

This lesson largely echoes the strategy of creating and conveying job meaning. Twenty-three studies published since 2008 refer to facets of the work itself, in contrast to the work environment, as an important lever for stimulating public service motivation, but only 11 of the articles offer details.[3] The research points to a design advantage that is built into the institutional origins of public work (Boyte and Kari 1996; Perry and Vandenabeele 2008, 2015). Boyte and Kari described public work as underpinning American democracy: "Public work, work that makes things of value and importance in cooperation with others, is the taproot of American democracy. Linking everyday work to democracy gives work larger meaning and makes citizenship serious" (1996, 2).

Although the institutional origins of the meaningfulness of public work may not be universal, Boyte and Kari's point is that work on behalf of common interests has special significance. This significance extends all the way to the characteristics of jobs. The task significance (Hackman and Oldham 1980) embedded in public jobs, that is, being able to identify a task's contribution to society or a broader good beyond the self, is more likely to be present and demonstrable in public work.

Design work that allows for direct contact between employees and beneficiaries. Grant (2007) proposed a model of what he called "relational job design" to explain the virtuous cycle associated with motivation to make a prosocial difference. The foundation of the model rests on interpersonal relationships between employees and beneficiaries that enable employees to experience their work as important and meaningful. Grant (2008) illustrated the power of connecting employees with their prosocial impact in a quasi-experiment involving telephone fund-raisers at a public university. Members of the experimental group met a recipient of scholarship monies from the telefund for which they worked and had the opportunity to hear his or her testimonial. After a month, telephone fund-raisers in the experimental group, who had direct contact with the beneficiary, had received significantly higher numbers of pledges and donations than the control group whose number of pledges and money donated did not change.

Grant's findings from the quasi-experiment with U.S. public university telephone fund-raisers were replicated by Bellé (2013) in an experiment with nurses in a public hospital in Italy. Bellé looked at interrelationships among job performance, public service motivation, and two experimental conditions: exposure to contact with beneficiaries and self-persuasion interventions. The two treatments positively influenced nurses' persistence, output, productivity, and vigilance. Nurses with higher baseline public service motivation strengthened the effects from the two interventions. In addition, both experimental conditions caused increases in public service motivation that partially mediated their positive effects on job performance. Thus, Bellé's experimental results strongly support the case for designing work that allows for direct contact between employees and beneficiaries.

Efforts to design work to cultivate employees' prosocial identity have limits. The social, organizational, and occupational contexts in which jobs are situated moderate employees' reactions to the structural characteristics of jobs (Grant 2007, 402). Unfavorable social information about a beneficiary could decrease employees' affective commitments. This might be the case, for example, among large groups of clients of the IRS who have avoided filing taxes for long periods and are presumptively treated as "tax cheats." Thus, structural characteristics of jobs affect social information about beneficiaries that moderates the effect of contact on affective commitment to beneficiaries. Social information is therefore an important variable that affects choices about whether job design can be an effective strategy for increasing public service motivation. Overall, however, we believe work design is a highly promising strategy for enhancing public service motivation.

When the importance of the public work is salient for employees but direct contacts are constrained, use self-persuasion or other types of self-administered interventions to connect employees to beneficiaries. A self-persuasion intervention was a second treatment in Bellé's (2013) experiments with Italian nurses. Bellé created the self-persuasion intervention based on research in social psychology studying the motivational efficacy of putting people in situations in which they are compelled to persuade themselves. Research on self-persuasion has involved idea reflection and advocacy methods. Bellé's self-persuasion intervention reflected a

combination of these methods. Nurses exposed to self-persuasion were asked "to write a few lines—to be included in a presentation that . . . would [be delivered] to all hospital departments and to all of the other hospitals belonging to the same local health authority—describing how they thought the project would help health care practitioners in the target area improve the lives of their patients" (2013, 146). In addition, each participant was asked "to promote the project within their departments and to do their best to recruit at least three volunteers willing to perform the same work in the future" (146–47).

The self-persuasion intervention was found to stimulate increased performance among employees reporting high public service motivation in advance of the experiment. In addition, the significant increases in public service motivation associated with the experimental conditions only partially meditated the positive effect on performance associated with self-persuasion and contact with program beneficiaries.

Lesson 4: Provide Opportunities for Newcomers to Learn Public Service Values

Although the first lesson emphasizes the value of attracting and recruiting staff with high public service motivation, we recognize that public organizations will need to engage staff who may be newcomers to public service values. The finding that public service motivation is, to some extent, dynamic (Bellé 2013; Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Pedersen 2015; Vogel and Kroll 2016) offers public managers an opportunity to socialize newcomers who are new to public service and its values. This leads to a fourth lesson:

> Direct supervisors, mentors, and work colleagues are critical influences on the socialization of employees and their potential to develop public service motivation.

> **Lesson 4**: Provide formal and informal opportunities for newcomers to learn about organizational values and expectations for employee behavior that reflect public service values.

This lesson reflects another key aspect of the strategy to integrate public service motivation into HRM processes. Eight of 15 articles published since 2008 explicitly discuss practical reasons why newcomers should learn about public service values.[4] Vandenabeele (2011), inferring broadly about practical implications from a study of more than 3,500 state civil servants in Flanders, concluded that the complex nature of socialization permitted public service motivation to be managed at different career stages and different human resource management processes. Thus, the research implies that there are many opportunities to intervene, but there is also a need for continuous attention to socialization.

Implement onboarding and orientation initiatives. An individual's early experiences with an organization represent a critical time for conveying an organization's identity (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994). A collection of onboarding and orientation initiatives can generally enhance new employee socialization and advance integration between member values and an organization's public service values (Paarlberg and Lavigna 2010). Shim, Park, and Eom (2015) suggested, for example, that imbuing public sector values through formal and informal training is an important way to create employee–organization convergence that produces a stronger public service ethos.

Grant (2008) offered an interesting small-scale initiative that he associated with employee–beneficiary connections but fits at least as well with the practice of orienting staff to expectations for employee behavior that reflects public service values. He described a cooperative initiative with students to develop a program that would provide positive feedback to local police officers. The students identified several grateful citizens and asked participants to write stories about how the officers' efforts had positively influenced the community. The stories were then shared with the officers. Grant related the effect of the stories on a detective: "This experience made me realize how rare positive feedback is in this profession. We never hear from citizens who appreciate what we do. It seems that this would be good for officer morale and mental health" (2008, 59). Providing feedback of this type, based on the actions of employees in a particular public service, could be a meaningful influence on both new entrants and veteran employees.

Aside from this particular illustration of how organizations can influence employee values and the identity of the public service in which they work, Waterhouse, French, and Puchala's (2014) mixed-methods study confirms both the complexity of influential relationships and their importance. Direct supervisors, mentors, and work colleagues are critical influences on the socialization of employees and their potential to develop public service motivation. Although recent austerity (Esteve et al. 2017) and workforce reductions may have increased the difficulty of pursuing important socialization initiatives in some contexts, research indicates that innovative social exchanges and value alignment remain an option for building public service motivation among new staff. Not all interventions need be complex or costly (Esteve et al. 2017; Waterhouse, French, and Puchala 2014).

Encourage mentoring. Another method to socialize members is mentoring (Lee and Choi 2016), which is a familiar technique used widely by many organizations for integrating and guiding members. In a cross-sectional study of state civil servants in Flanders, Vandenabeele (2011) found that having a supervisor or coworker with strong public service values was associated with higher levels of public service motivation. Finding that Korean students sought public service careers because of the potential job security, Lee and Choi advised that mentoring may "imbue organizational members with the organization's underlying values" (2016, 158). In addition to communicating values to workers, formal and informal mentoring may impart "craft knowledge" and create a prosocial environment that may be particularly valued by new generations of employees (Bozeman and Feeney 2009a; Winter and Jackson 2014). In a qualitative case study of younger employees in values-based organizations, Winter and Jackson (2014) reported that respondents describe mentoring using such terms as "supportive," "approachable environment," and "providing a road map." For younger workers, mentoring may balance their need for autonomy and self-direction with career support, providing increased opportunity for career advancement. In this light, Bozeman and Feeney (2009a) proposed a

three-tier model of public management mentoring that emphasizes the value of mentoring for improving the capacity of employees to manage the procedural complexity of government services, providing opportunities for underrepresented groups in government services, and enhancing public service motivation. In a study of mentoring in public managers, Bozeman and Feeney (2009b) found that protégés were most satisfied with the mentoring relationship when it involved making connections both within and outside the organization.

Lesson 5: Develop Leaders Who Communicate and Model Public Service Values

As noted with respect to the previous lesson, many paths are available to socialize employees in ways that draw out their public service motivation. One group in particular, an organization's leaders, has special obligations to position an organization to attract, nurture, and socialize employees to optimize public service motivation. This leads to a fifth lesson.

> **Lesson 5**: Develop leaders who communicate and model public service values via organizational mission and vision.

This lesson mirrors the strategy from Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem (2008) to integrate public service into organizational mission, strategy, and leadership. Sixteen articles published since 2008 discuss the practical implications associated with organizational leadership in some depth.[5]

Recent research offers details about the mechanisms through which leadership influences public service motivation. One mechanism or "lever" through which leaders affect public service motivation is mission valence, that is, employee perceptions of the "attractiveness or salience of an organization's purpose or social contribution" (Wright, Moynihan, and Pandey 2012, 206). Transformational leadership indirectly affects mission valence by clarifying goals and fostering public service motivation.

Another mechanism through which transformational leadership works involves sharing the organization's vision (Andersen et al. 2016). In a small-scale qualitative study, Andersen et al. (2016) concluded that employees should not only understand the organization's vision but also experience that the vision is shared and maintained across the organization and that their jobs contribute to society.

Krogsgaard, Thomsen, and Andersen (2014) identified a potential limiting factor to the upside for transformational leadership—the degree of value conflict and consensus. They found that the positive relationship between direct managers' levels of transformational leadership and employees' public service motivation was stronger when value conflict was lower. This is also true for top management. The authors concluded that transformational leadership is more influential when employees and managers agree on key public values.

Based on the mechanisms discussed here, two general paths are worth pursuing as ways to enhance public service motivation through leadership.

Articulate mission and vision. The general body of empirical research points to at least two concrete elements that potentially influence public service motivation: organizational mission and vision. Although these elements may exist independent of leaders, it is also obvious that leaders are instrumental in articulating, steering, and activating missions and visions. Thus, a lesson that can be strongly inferred from the general evidence is that leaders are instruments for connecting mission and vision with their employees' public service motivation.

Research that has focused specifically on leaders tends to support the inference. Park and Rainey's (2008) cross-sectional analysis of 6,900 respondents to the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board's Merit Principles Survey showed that the combination of transformation-oriented leadership and public-service-oriented motivation had the strongest positive relationship with job satisfaction, perceived performance and work quality, and lower turnover intentions. The results suggest that

leaders who are encouraging, supportive, and informative, and who emphasize high standards, are associated with both higher public service motivation and higher organizational outcomes.

The analysis indicates that the channels through which transformational leadership affects outcomes are a combination of employee empowerment, goal clarification, and enhanced public service motivation. The channels seem most likely influenced by leader communications but also by leader example or modeling.

Leaders who are encouraging, supportive, and informative, and who emphasize high standards, are associated with both higher public service motivation and higher organizational outcomes.

Promote value-based leadership. In a representative survey of local government officials in Korea, Im, Campbell, and Jeong (2016) reached a conclusion consistent with Park and Rainey (2008): the relationship between public service motivation and commitment is significantly moderated by transformational leadership. They identified two explanations for the relationship. One is that transformational leadership emphasizes socialization to organizational values. Im, Campbell, and Jeong argued that this permits individuals to understand how their work is related to the organization's mission, which, in conjunction with their public service predispositions, produces high employee organizational commitment. Their second interpretation is that transformational leadership appeals to individual self-concepts that transcend self-interest, which makes it a leadership strategy well suited for employees with high public service motivation.

A third survey-based, cross-sectional study from a third country, Belgium, offers support for the U.S. and Korean findings. Vandenabeele (2014) studied a particular aspect of transformational leadership, specifically promoting public values, on public service motivation development using 3,506 Flemish civil servants. He found a positive relationship between promoting public service values and public service motivation development.

The survey-based, cross-sectional findings (Park and Rainey 2008; Im, Campbell, and Jeong 2016; Vandenabeele 2014) are supported by Bellé's (2014) experiment with Italian nurses, confirming the importance of transformational leadership. Bellé found that

public service motivation had a significant moderating role in the performance effects of transformational leadership, both independently and in combination with structural job features.

Conclusion

The analysis of a large volume of recent research about public service motivation leads us to conclude that scholars have established a strong evidentiary foundation to guide public organizations in the construction of policies, systems, and management training for employee motivation. The five lessons presented here provide a foundation for bringing public service motivation more fully into the motivational paradigms used in public organizations. While specific paths to implementation may remain somewhat unclear, the lessons provide first steps in clarifying implementation moving forward.

We note some limitations of the existing body of public service motivation evidence. First, our recommendations focus on PSM's positive consequences. We acknowledge that PSM may, for example, have negative consequences, including employee burnout (Bakker 2015). However, we do not believe there is a large enough body of literature in this area to offer recommendations for practice.

Second, while the body of research offering recommendations for practice grows, we also note that at this juncture, management practices have received limited *direct* empirical testing. Most research to date, when it addresses practical implications at all, discusses them as an *indirect* by-product of the research rather than as a direct focus for analysis. We expect to see more research focused directly on management practices as researchers begin to look at applications and less at incidence and measurement, which represents much of the early research on public service motivation. This projected evolution of the research from public service motivation's start as an emergent construct (Perry and Wise 1990) to an applied tool for motivating people in public organizations follows Perry's recent assessment of the evolution of the research, ending with "more effort to apply research to test efficacy of strategies using public service motives" (2014, 42).

Finally, we intentionally limited our analysis to studies of a specific construct: public service motivation. We have not included empirical studies of broader altruistic and prosocial motivations. As noted in the introduction, there is some evidence for convergence across the distinct streams of research about PSM, altruism, and prosocial motivation (Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2010). Future efforts to connect theory and practice could exploit areas of convergence.

These limitations suggest opportunities for scholars and practitioners to advance useable knowledge to effectively apply public service motivation. We see at least three directions for future work. First, as implied at several points in this article, scholars need to continue upgrading the research designs used to study public service motivation (Wright and Grant 2010). Our analysis of the context and methods of these articles suggests a few guideposts for research in the context of translating research into practice. We are encouraged by the diversity in geographic representation. Continuing the trend of internationalization will be key to better understanding to what extent public service motivation is a culturally sensitive concept (Kim et al. 2013). Although some of the sources from which our lessons were drawn used experimental (Bellé 2013, 2014), quasi-experimental (Grant 2008), and longitudinal (Vogel and Kroll 2016) research designs that instill confidence in the validity of their findings, more could certainly be done to diversify methodology. We see ample room for scholars to focus on aggregate (e.g., organizational-level) data so that practical implications can speak beyond those supported only at the individual level. While public service motivation is extensively explored in government organizations, the growing reliance on shared models of governance encourages scholars to test the applicability of commitment to public service in nonprofit or other public service commercial settings

A second step is for practitioners and scholars to join forces in creating knowledge useful for practice. Scholars and practitioners could cooperate on field experiments to assess key facets of the public service motivation paradigm. Practitioners in need of evidence related to recruitment, leadership, reward structures, or a host of other important information could provide the arena and problem statements. Scholars could bring their expertise, time, and other resources to serve the needs of practitioners. Such partnerships need to become more common, and the coproduction of practical research needs to happen more frequently. It can pay dividends for scholars, practitioners, and the wider professional community (Buick et al. 2016). These scholar–practitioner partnerships may encourage scholars to be more attentive to applications—in other words, the difference the research can make for the workplace and the profession (Perry 2012, 2013; Radin 2013), which reinforces our argument above for more direct research about applications.

Third, our study suggests additional areas for research. Rigorous meta-analyses could distill additional lessons from the growing body of empirical evidence that connects PSM to various dimensions of performance. We also find that there are lessons that may be missing. For example, we still know little about how society affects public service motivation, despite regular attention to this theme since the inception of public service motivation research. Perry's (1997) early empirical study of antecedents highlighted the potential of religious, family, and professional socialization, and subsequent articles (Perry 2000; Perry and Vandenabeele 2008) articulated theoretical rationales. Vandenabeele (2011) found that family, education, and political affiliation affect public service motivation, suggesting the need for greater attention to how societal institutions shape an individual's motivations and the implications for organizational leadership. Anderfuhren-Biget (2012) found that the profile of respondents varied significantly by each dimension of public service motivation and that different sociopolitical variables were especially important for all dimensions except self-sacrifice. Ritz and Brewer (2013), based on a comparison of Swiss French and Swiss German public employees, concluded that culture has a consistent impact on public service motivation.

Finally, public leaders and managers must become conversant with the research and how it can make a difference in their organizations. Rather than continue on courses of action that emphasize industrial models of motivation (Perry and Porter 1982), scholars have begun

to establish a knowledge base for alternative schemes and visions of motivation for public service.

Notes

1. Anderfuhren-Biget, Varone, and Giauque (2014); Andersen, Heinesen, and Pedersen (2014); Andersen and Kjeldsen (2013); Bottomley et al. (2016); Bright (2009); Caillier (2014, 2016); Christensen and Wright (2011); Clerkin and Coggburn (2012); Coursey et al. (2011); Drevs and Müller (2015); Fehrler and Kosfeld (2014); Georgellis, Iossa, and Tabvuma (2011); Jeon and Robertson (2013); Kim (2012); Koumenta (2015); Liu and Perry (2016); Liu, Yang, and Yu (2015); Park and Kim (2015); Pedersen (2013); Ritz and Waldner (2011); Steijn (2008); Van Loon, Vandenabeele, and Leisink (2015); Vogel and Kroll (2016); Waldner (2012); Wright and Christensen (2010).
2. Andersen and Kjeldsen (2013); Bellé (2013); Chen and Hsieh (2014); Cho and Song (2015); Christensen et al. (2015); Clerkin, Paynter, and Taylor (2009); French and Emerson (2015); Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, and Varone (2013); Kaiser (2014); Liu and Perry (2016); Liu, Yang, and Yu (2015); Shim, Park, and Eom (2015); Taylor (2008); Vandenabeele (2014); Waldner (2012); Wright and Pandey (2008, 2011); Wright, Shahidul, and Christensen (2017); Yeo (2016).
3. Bellé (2013); Christensen and Wright (2011); Grant (2008); Kaiser (2014); Kim (2015); Stritch and Christensen (2014); Taylor (2014); Vogel and Kroll (2016); Waterhouse, French, and Puchala (2014); Wright and Pandey (2008); Wright, Shahidul, and Christensen (2017).
4. Clerkin and Coggburn (2012); Grant (2008); Lee and Choi (2013); Vandenabeele (2011); Van Loon, Vandenabeele, and Leisink (2015); Waldner (2012); Waterhouse, French, and Puchala (2014); Wright and Pandey (2008).
5. Anderfuhren-Biget, Varone, and Giauque (2014); Andersen and Serritzlew (2012); Bellé (2014); Carpenter, Doverspike, and Miguel (2012); Gould-Williams, Mostafa, and Bottomley (2015); Im, Campbell, and Jeong (2016); Jeon and Robertson (2013); Krogsgaard, Thomsen, and Andersen (2014); Lee and Kim (2014); Liu and Perry (2016); Park and Rainey (2008); Vandenabeele (2008, 2014); Waterhouse, French, and Puchala (2014); Wright, Moynihan, and Pandey (2012); Wright and Pandey (2008).

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Supporting Information

A supplementary appendix may be found in the online version of this article at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/puar.12796/full.