

Public service motivation and public values

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Public service motivation refers to the motivation people have to contribute to the public interest and improve the well-being of society at large. Perry and Wise (1990) have defined the concept as 'an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions'. Brewer and Selden (1998) expanded this meaning by redefining the concept as 'the motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful public service (i.e., public, community, and social service)', thus untangling it from the public sector labor force and focusing, instead, on the important motives and behaviors that occur when individuals perform public service, further the common good, and serve the public interest.

Public service motivation is – being and institutionally grounded concept – strongly related to public values. These are those values which belong to the core of the public sector. Jorgensen and Bozeman (2007) group them based on their place in the public values universe and the relation they have with other actors in this universe. Although some disagreement exists to what extent public values differ from those found in the private sphere (Van der Wal and Huberts 2008), most researchers agree on such a distinct set of values attached to public service in a broad sense (not necessary limited to government).

These motives, values and their related behaviors are thought to be prevalent among public sector employees, but others – such as nonprofit sector employees, government contractors, and private citizens – may perform meaningful public service as well. The spread of these public-regarding motives is potentially very important in an age when large numbers of nongovernmental employees are performing much of government's work through privatization, contracting, and co-production of services.

At the same time, only recently scholars have attempted to align the two bodies of literature. While motivations and values are in many ways related, PSM and public values so far have been separate fields of study. Advancement in both the meaning and measurement of both concepts as well as in connecting and aligning the two (i.e., do motivations precede the 'production' of values or are employees motivated to act in a certain way because of underlying values?) has potentially immense implications for the field of public management.

For this panel, we invite papers that will study research questions oriented at explaining antecedents and outcomes of public service motivation and public values, as well as their respective relationship. Also, the internal dynamics of the concepts and integrating various theoretical perspectives from political economy, motivational psychology, organizational behavior, political science and public administration are considered to be a fruitful strategy in explaining their relevance. This is not an exclusive list of topics; other papers bearing on the topic of public service motivation and public values will also be considered.

Further reading

Brewer (2003) JPART
Brewer, Facer & Selden (2000) PAR
Perry & Wise (1990) PAR
Perry & Hondeghem (2008) Book Oxford University Press
Vandenabeele (2008) IPMJ
Ritz (2009) IRAS
Beck Jorgensen & Bozeman (2007) A&S
Van der Wal (2008, 2011) Public Administration (2x)
Rainey et al. (2008, copenhagen paper)
Beck Jorgensen et al. (2010, Leiden paper)

dr. Wouter Vandenabeele

Utrecht School of Governance
Utrecht University
The Netherlands
w.v.vandenabeele@uu.nl

dr. Adrian Ritz
Center of Competence for Public Management
University of Bern
Switzerland
adrian.ritz@kpm.unibe.ch

dr. Zeger van der Wal
Department of Public Administration
VU University Amsterdam
The Netherlands
zvdwal@gmail.com

Prof. dr. Gene A. Brewer
Department of Public Administration & Policy
The University of Georgia
United States
cmsbrew@uga.edu