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Public Service Motivation, Prosocial Motivation and Altruism: Towards Disentanglement and Conceptual Clarity

Carina Schott [a], Oliver Neumann[b], Muriel Baertschi[c], and Adrian Ritz [d]

[a]Utrecht School of Governance, Utrecht University, Utrecht The Netherlands; [b]Research Center for Digital Sustainability, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland; [c]School of Management and Law, Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften, Winterthur, Switzerland; [d]Center of Competence for Public Management, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

ABSTRACT
Research on public service motivation (PSM) has made great strides in terms of study output. Given the enormous scholarly attention on PSM, it is surprising that considerable conceptual ambiguities and overlaps with related concepts such as prosocial motivation, and altruism still remain. This study addresses this issue by systematically carving out the differences and similarities between these concepts. Taking this approach, this study clarifies the conceptual space of both PSM and the other concepts. Using data from semi-structured interviews with police officers, it is illustrated that PSM and prosocial motivation are different types of motivation leading to different types of prosocial behaviour.

KEYWORDS
Public service motivation; prosocial motivation; conceptual work; altruism

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, interest in and research on the concept of public service motivation (PSM) has increased immensely (Ritz, Brewer, & Neumann, 2016). As early as in 1982, Rainey called for research investigating the distinctiveness of PSM in relation to other concepts, such as altruism and prosocial behaviour. However, there still is a lack of clarity as to how PSM overlaps with and differs from related concepts, such as prosocial motivation and altruism (Bozeman & Su, 2015). These concepts are often used interchangeably and it remains unclear whether they are the same or different. The present study aims to provide an answer to Bozeman and Su's (2015) call for more efforts to strengthen the concept of PSM in conjunction with related concepts. More specifically, this study tries to *unravel* the differences and similarities between the concepts of PSM, and prosocial motivation and altruism, and to *clarify* their meaning and interrelatedness on the basis of three key criteria (the two reference categories 'beneficiaries' and 'temporal focus', and the criteria 'stages of human action').

Conceptual equivocality may be found in many areas of PSM literature. For instance, when trying to explain public servants' "behaviour such as self-sacrifice, realizing the public interest and altruism […] the concept of PSM has been developed as a counterweight to the self-interested motivation found in rational choice theories" (Vandenabeele, 2007, p. 546). From this perspective, PSM is seen as an antecedent of self-sacrifice and altruism. At the same time, PSM has been defined as "a general altruistic motivation" (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999, p. 23) or a "particular form of altruism" (Perry, Hondeghem, & Wise, 2010, p. 452). It is obvious that these perspectives are incompatible as they imply circular argument.

The conceptual equivocality is also due to PSM being frequently considered as a specific type, or even equivalent, of prosocial motivation (e.g., Jensen & Andersen, 2015; Wright, Christensen, & Pandey, 2013), which has been defined as "the desire to expend effort to benefit other people" (Grant, 2008, p. 48). However, instead of being actuated by the wish to explain behaviour such as altruism and self-sacrifice, as has been the case in PSM research, research on prosocial motivation has been stimulated by questions such as how employees can be motivated to "care about contributing to other people and the organization" (Grant, 2009, p. 94).

This study's ambition to provide better conceptual clarity is of paramount importance for at least two reasons. First, it is relevant for Public Administration as an academic discipline because the evolution of social sciences is closely related to the perpetual reconstruction of the concepts through which we seek to understand reality (Weber, 1949). Sartori, Riggs, and Teune (1975) even argues that conceptual clarity forms the basis for intersubjectivity: the cornerstone of science. Second, it

CONTACT Carina Schott c.schott@uu.nl Utrecht School of Governance, Utrecht University, Bijlhouwerstraat 6, Utrecht 3511 ZC, The Netherlands.
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helps to improve future research designs and will enable scholars to interpret previous empirical findings in a more accurate way. For instance, scholars have found a positive association between PSM and organizational citizenship behaviour (Kim, 2006). However, OCB is directed at the employing organization's interest and at co-workers (Williams & Anderson, 1991) and, therefore, contrasts with the core idea and extra-organizational focus of the concept of PSM (Vandenabeele, 2007). A legitimate question, therefore, is whether the same results would have been found if the authors had included the concept of prosocial motivation in their analysis.

In order to strengthen the concept of PSM in conjunction with related concepts, this article will proceed as follows. The next section discusses similarities and differences of PSM, prosocial motivation, and altruism and develops a schematic overview. After describing the empirical setting, the data and methods, illustrative findings obtained from 29 semi-structured interviews with police officers are presented. Finally, conclusions are drawn and the findings are discussed.

PSM, prosocial motivation, and altruism

Problems related to the conceptualization of a phenomenon substantially complicate the development of theory building in social sciences. Gerring (1999) suggests eight criteria for assessing theoretical concepts. By focusing on the two key criteria *coherence* and *differentiation* this study aims to increase the conceptual clarity of the concepts of PSM, prosocial motivation, and altruism. *Coherence* refers to the internal consistency of a concepts' instances and attributes whereas *differentiation* is focused on the degree to which a concept can be distinguished from other concepts. More specifically, to improve the coherence and differentiation of the three concepts under study, this study focuses on 1) the reference category 'beneficiaries' of PSM and prosocial motivation, 2) the reference category 'temporal focus' of PSM and prosocial motivation, and 3) the stages of human action (motivation versus behaviour) in general.

First criterion: the reference category 'beneficiaries'

PSM is one of the few theoretical concepts that originates from the field of Public Administration. However, the concept has also been adopted by economists (Delfgaauw & Dur, 2008; Georgellis, Iossa, & Tabvuma, 2010) and sociologists such as Etzioni (1988). Most PSM scholars agree that the purpose of public service-motivated individuals is to contribute to society at large through public service provision and serving the abstract idea of the public interest (Schott, van Kleef, & Steen, 2015). For example, Rainey and Steinbauer (1999, p. 20) pointed out that PSM is directed towards serving "the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation or humankind"; others consider it as the motivation to provide "meaningful… public, community, and social service" (Brewer & Selden, 1998, p. 417), to serve "the public interest" (Bright, 2008, p. 151) or "the interests of larger political entity" rather than "self-interest and organizational interest" (Vandenabeele, 2007, p. 547).

The concept of prosocial motivation originates from the field of social psychology. Beyond its use in psychology, the concept has also been adopted in various other disciplines such as the field of general management (Hu & Liden, 2015) and public management (Van der Voet, Steijn, & Kuipers, 2017). Grant and Berg (2011) argue that beneficiaries of prosocial motivation vary regarding whether they are individuals, groups, or larger collectives (e.g., nations or societies). However, in this study it is argued that 'individuals/groups in one's direct contact' or the 'employing organization' are the key *beneficiaries* of prosocial motivation, rather than 'society at large/lager collectives'. First, previous research found that prosocial motivation is enhanced "by connecting them [the employees] to the people who benefit from their work" (Grant, 2009). Grant (2009) emphasizes that at least three psychological mechanisms explain why connections with beneficiaries lead to more prosocial motivation: 1) received feedback by beneficiaries about the employees' impact, 2) feelings of appreciation by the beneficiaries, and 3) stronger emotional attachments to beneficiaries. This means that interpersonal contact with beneficiaries seems to be a prerequisite for prosocial motivation.[1] Society at large as a service recipient, however, does not provide direct feedback and express feelings of appreciation on a regular basis[2] leading to the question of whether it is plausible to assume that PSM goes along with strong emotional attachment to society.

Our conceptual distinction between PSM and prosocial motivation on the basis of different beneficiaries also fits well with previous literature on charity work and blood donation. Several studies have equated the sector of employment with levels of PSM and studied whether public, private, and non-profit employees differ regarding their engagement in activities such as volunteering and blood donation (e.g. Houston, 2006; Lee, 2012). Houston (2006) found government employees to be more likely to donate blood than for-profit employees. This is in line with this study's understanding of PSM being directed at unidentified beneficiaries as recipients of blood donations are unknown individuals rather than direct contacts

Second criterion: the "temporal focus" reference

In addition to differences in beneficiaries, it is argued that the reference category *temporal focus* is another

important difference between PSM and prosocial motivation. It is argued that prosocially motivated individuals are focused on the future – they are concerned with achieving a purposeful outcome through their work (Grant & Berry, 2011). Grant (2008) uses the example of a prosocially motivated teacher whose effort is driven by the desire to educate students, resulting in fulfilment in the form of students' improved knowledge. This study argues that, by contrast, a public-service motivated teacher's effort is driven by fulfilment in the form of a better educated society, or even better society through better educated people. Thus, the time frame that a public-service motivated teacher is concerned with is even longer than that of a prosocially motivated teacher. However, the differences in temporal focus might not be clear-cut. A prosocially motivated teacher might, for example, gain impetus not only from students' improved knowledge, but also from successful professional careers and happy family lives of former students. For this reason, in this study the temporal focus of PSM and prosocial motivation is seen as a continuum ranging from short-term to long-term, where PSM is situated on the longer-term side of the continuum.

Third criterion: changes of human action

Depending on the discipline and research tradition, the concept of altruism has been regarded as either a particular type of helping behaviour, a particular kind of motivation (Piliavin, 2009) or, probably even more frequently, the two have been conflated either unknowingly or deliberately. In social psychology, for instance, altruism is often defined as "acting on genuinely selfless motives to enhance another's welfare" (Maner & Gailliot, 2007, p. 348), which would suggest that altruism is a behaviour based on a specific set of underlying yet conceptually distinct motives. However, the terms altruism and altruistic motivation are also often used to refer to the motivational dimension in psychology research. Perhaps most interestingly, Batson and Shaw (1991, p. 108) see altruism as "a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare", a definition virtually identical to the definition of prosocial motivation by Grant (2008) from organizational psychology: "[prosocial motivation is] the desire to expend effort to benefit other people". The public policy scholar Le Grand (2003) criticizes this ambiguity in psychology terminology and considers the concept of altruism as a motivation to deliver public services (without providing a specific definition).

This study believes that the conceptual ambiguity surrounding altruism is problematic as motivation and behaviour present two *different stages of human action* (Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2010). However, contrary to Le Grand (2003), it is argued that it is important to clearly define altruism in the latter sense – as a behaviour – since otherwise it would be conceptually identical to prosocial motivation. For this reason, this study follows a definition of altruism from the field of evolutionary biology by Nowak and Sigmund (2005, p. 1291) who understand altruism as "conferring a benefit b on the recipient at a cost c to the donor", which clearly defines the concept as a *behaviour*, not a *motivation*. An exchange of benefits does not immediately inform about the motivation or mix of motivations underpinning this exchange. By differentiating between motivations and behaviors scholars are given the chance to reduce this complexity, which contributes to conceptual clarity.

Taking this perspective, both PSM and prosocial motivation can potentially lead to altruism but are not the same as altruism. In particular, PSM seems to explain why individuals engage in helping behaviour that benefits society at large and for which one does not receive immediate task feedback. On the other hand, prosocial motivation helps explain behaviour that benefits specific individuals and groups in one's direct contact: beneficiaries who can provide direct feedback and express their appreciation. In order to highlight these differences, this study distinguishes between two types of altruism. It is argued that PSM, which is directed at society, is linked to *societal altruism* whereas prosocial motivation, which is related to individuals and groups in one's direct contact, is linked to *interpersonal altruism.*

When prosocial motivation is directed at the employing organization as the beneficiary, however, this study argues that it may to lead *organizational citizenship behaviour* (OCB), which has been defined as "work behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that, in the aggregate, promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988, p. 4). This differentiation fits well with Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, and Schroeder (2005) multilevel perspective on prosocial behaviour in which they distinguish between "the "meso" level – the study of helper-recipient dyads in the context of a specific situation" – and "the "macro" level – the study of prosocial actions that occur within the context of groups and large organizations" (p. 365).

Schematic overview of the concepts

On the basis of this theoretical discussion, it is argued that there are a number of similarities and differences between PSM, prosocial motivation, and altruism and that these similarities and differences can be delineated based on three key criteria: the reference category 'beneficiaries', the reference category 'temporal focus', and the stages of human action (motivation versus

behaviour). When applying the criterion *stages of human action*, it becomes obvious that PSM and prosocial motivation differ from altruism in the sense that the two former concepts refer to a motivation, while the latter refers to a behaviour. In this study it is argued that PSM and prosocial motivation lead to different types of prosocial behaviour (societal altruism, OCB, and interpersonal altruism) because they are directed at different *beneficiaries* and have a different *temporal foci*. As PSM is understood as a general motivation directed at unidentified individuals or society at large and has a rather long-term temporal focus, it is expected that public service-motivated individuals engage in societal altruism: doing something good for society at the expense of leisure time and/or despite the risk of disciplinary measures for breaking work-related rules, for instance. Prosocial motivation, in contrast, can be described as a role-dependent type of motivation directed at either individuals and/or groups in one's direct contact or the employing organization, with a temporal focus on the nearer future. Depending on the direction of the motivation, the behavioural consequences are either OCB or interpersonal altruism. Figure 1 summarizes the differences between PSM, prosocial motivation, OCB and altruism in diagram form.

Study design, case, and method

To ensure methodological rigor, six recommendations for reporting qualitative research in Public Administration recently put forward by Ospina, Esteve, and Lee (2017) are applied throughout this study. The epistemological approach of this study can best be described as postpositivist, meaning that researchers "take a detached, value-free stance toward the object of study, […] distancing themselves from the actors in the research setting (doing inquiry from the outside)" and acting "as external observers using instrumentation to isolate the phenomenon and manage complexity" (Ospina et al., 2017, p. 2). The reason for using this particular research approach is that it is well-suited "to develop an appreciation of underlying motivations that people have for doing what they do" (Henn, Weinstein, & Foard, 2005, p. 149).

The data used in this study is based on 29 in-depth interviews with police officers working at three small-to-medium-sized Swiss police corps. The case of police officers is very interesting in the context of this study since most police officers have a high level of discretion (Giauque, Ritz, Varone, & Anderfuhren-Biget, 2012). If individuals had no discretionary power, rules and regulations would serve as clear guidelines for behaviour and no or very limited variance in individuals' motivational consequences would be observed.

In order to gain insights from different perspectives, maximum variation sampling is used in this study (Creswell, Klassen, Plano, & Smith, 2011). The respondents were sampled by the employing organization on the basis of their function, gender and years of service and asked to participate in the study. An overview of the respondents' characteristics is provided in online Appendix A.

The interviews used in this study were semi-structured. The guiding questions can be found in online Appendix B. Each interview was conducted by two members of the research team and lasted for 45 minutes on average. The interviews started in very broad terms by asking the interviewees what their daily tasks are. In order to learn more about their work motivation, the open qualitative approach used in previous studies on PSM is followed (e.g., Schott

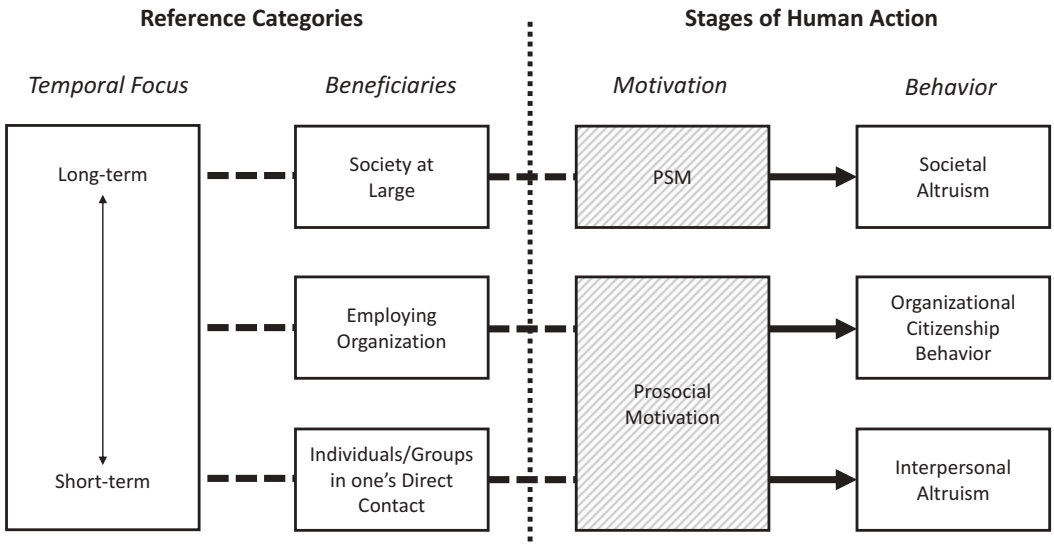

Figure 1. Schematic overview: similarities and differences between PSM, prosocial motivation, OCB, and altruism.

et al., 2015; Van Loon, Leisink, & Vandenabeele, 2013) and the question is asked "what does your 'perfect working day' look like: a day that gives you energy and motivates you" and "what motivates you in your work". The advantage of this approach is that it creates rich opportunities for the discovery of new concepts and/or nuances of existing ones (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), and should decrease the risk of social desirability bias, which can be an issue in PSM research (Kim & Kim, 2016).

To learn more about the relative strength of prosocial motivation and PSM in a specific working context, a hypothetical case – the arrest of a burglar in a neighbourhood – is presented to the interviewees. The interviewees are asked to describe any thoughts that came to their mind in such a situation. Depending on the interviewee's answer, one of the three following follow-up questions is asked: 1) If the interviewee referred to *either* "helping the victim" *or* "contributing to society by, for example, improving safety or justice", it is asked whether the other motive also played a role. 2) If the interviewee referred to *both* motives, this study wanted to know which motive mattered most to him of her. 3) If the interviewee referred to *neither* of these motives, it is asked whether "helping the victim" or "contributing to society" is also something he or she thinks about in such a situation. The case was chosen because it presents a familiar context for all officers, and therefore does not require any role-play.[3] In the second part of the interviews, this study was interested in different types of prosocial behaviour (OCB, societal altruism and interpersonal altruism). In particular, this study asked respondents to describe recent work situations in which they had discretion and to elaborate on how they acted in those situations. By asking them to describe their behaviour in these real live-situations, it is expected to receive high-quality information reflecting actual behaviour.

The analysis focused on the question of whether potential differences in reported behaviour in discretionary situations can be traced back to differences in motivation, beneficiaries, and temporal foci. More specifically, first all motivation-related elements mentioned by the interviewees and all behaviour-related elements are coded. The coding scheme for PSM, prosocial motivation, societal and interpersonal altruism, and OCB was created on the basis of the theoretical description of the respective construct. As such, the deductive a priori template of codes approach established by Crabtree and Miller (1999) is followed. In a second step, discretionary situations are identified and it is analysed how individuals reacted in these situations, at whom their behaviour was directed, and what their temporal focus was. This means that in-person variation of motivation is investigated and how it relates to behaviour and the reference categories beneficiaries and temporal focus. The coding scheme can be found in online Appendix C.

Results

Motivation among police officers

The presentation of the findings begins with a description of what the interviewees currently motivates in their work. Almost all police officers stated that task variety and the excitement (e.g., "chasing a car", "not knowing what the day will bring") are motivating aspects of their work. Next to this, many officers mentioned that complex operations that had gone smoothly, issues that could be dealt with on the spot without consulting bureaucratic rules and procedures and protracted aftereffects, and the appreciation by citizens and colleagues were also important drivers of their day-to-day motivation.

When focusing on motives linked to PSM and prosocial motivation, it is found that the sample could be subdivided into four groups: individuals referring to 1) neither PSM nor prosocial motivation, 2) aspects of PSM, 3) aspects of prosocial motivation, and 4) aspects that could be linked to both types of motivation conjunctively. A summary of the respondents' motivational categorization is provided in the online Appendix A. Individuals in the "PSM group" explained that what motivates them is the opportunity to contribute to justice and security, as reflected in the following interview statements.

> *As a criminal investigator, I think I can contribute more [compared to working at traffic police]. Talking about justice: you really can make a difference in finding the truth. For me, there must be more to it than chasing traffic offenders and doing speed checks. (R11)*

> *When I look at accident statistics and I see that the numbers are decreasing, I always say: "we are part of it". Fewer people were killed in car accidents because we did our job. […] Of course, it's not all because of me, but I'm part of it. And, of course, that's motivating. (R26)*

In contrast, individuals in the "prosocial motivation group" explained that their motivation is to help and support others, and that they gain energy from direct interactions with citizens. For instance, one individual in this group said the following:

> *When I am talking about helping people, then I think of a specific person. For example, an elderly man or woman who was lost and I was able to help bring him or her back home. Or when I could help solve a problem somebody was struggling with at that moment. I draw great energy from this. (R5)*

When analysing the respondents' answers to the request to describe their thoughts on a successful arrest after a break-in (hypothetical dilemma), the prevalence of either PSM or

prosocial motivation was affirmed for many individuals. However, a tendency for prosocial motivations to be mentioned more frequently can be seen, even among people who were initially categorized as being public-service motivated. For example, one individuals who was categorized as being prosocially motivated explained:

> *For me, it's clearly about the aggrieved person. […]. The other thing is more abstract. It's something you can imagine, but it's hard to grasp. […] The thing is: we know what happens to burglars. Most of the time, they are free to go a day or two later. But that's not what bothers me. We do our job on the streets and I'm not in control of the further process. What really motivates me is that I was able to do something positive for the individual. (R3)*

> *It can be very frustrating. Sometimes I have to arrest the same person three to four times. […] My key objectives, of course, are justice and helping the victim or getting an offender off the street. Or at least that was my attitude 13 years ago. Today, I know that if one person is arrested, another one is born. That's the way it is. […] I no longer think of the entire canton or the general public. This has changed. You tell yourself to focus on the family.*
> *Interviewer: Do those kinds of things affect your motivation?*
> *It's more that you change the focus of your motivation. Now my motivation is related to the here and now. I do not longer think globally but focus on individual deeds. (R7)*

The interview statements suggest that the reason for the predominant focus on prosocial motives in such a hypothetical but everyday situation seems to be the result of an effective coping strategy. Many interviewees stated that they do not see a relationship between their work and the impact it has on society. They do their work in the field and draw energy from helping individual victims, but they do not have the impression that they are in control of achieving more than that due to the legal system in Switzerland. In fact, many interviewees expressed negative feelings about the functioning of the judiciary, stating that they were particularly frustrated by the lenient punishment of repeat offenders and the limited power they have.

Beneficiaries and temporal focus of police officers' behaviour in discretionary situations

As a second step of the analysis, it is investigated whether PSM and prosocial motivation are indeed reflected in an individual's behaviours, as predicted by the study's conceptual model. To that end, this study focused on situations in which police officers have a certain degree of discretion and describe 1) how they acted in these situations, 2) why they behaved in such manner (at whom their motivation was directed), and 3) what their temporal focus was.

The results illustrate that prosocial motivation is indeed reflected in certain types of prosocial behaviour, which can be directed at different beneficiaries and usually has a short-term temporal focus, as depicted in the study's theoretical model. The question of whom the prosocial motivation is directed at seems to depend strongly on the context. This study was able to identify four different clusters of discretionary situations in which a certain group of beneficiaries and temporal focus was dominant: 1) low-risk situations 2) high-risk situations, 3) fruitless situations, and 4) situations with far-reaching consequences. Interestingly, only one respondent expressed motivational arguments for behaviour in a discretionary situation that could be linked to PSM. The results are presented in detail below. In Table 1, the results are summarized systematically.

Low-risk situations

Almost all officers stated that there are many situations in which they have a certain amount of leeway. However, it has to be noted that these situations are limited to administrative offences, such as parking offences, not carrying a driver's license, financial offences with a value below 300 Swiss Francs, littering, and night-time disturbances. The other common feature of these situations is that they involve short- and one-time contact with the offender and the act of rule breaking does not put either the offender or anyone else at serious risk.

When asked "*What* did you do in such a situation and *why* did you behave in this specific way?", several officers explained that they turned a blind eye in such situations and/or only gave out a first warning in an effort to improve the image of police. This means that the beneficiary of their motivation was the *employing organization*. Recalling the definition of OCB (Organ,

Table 1. Beneficiaries and temporal focus of PSM and prosocial motivation in discretionary situations.

Discretionary Situation	Low-risk situations		High-risk situation	Fruitless situation	Situation with far-reaching consequences
Behavior	OCB (turning a blind eye)	Societal altruism (strict enforcement)	Interpersonal altruism (turning a blind eye)	OCB (turning a blind eye)	Interpersonal altruism (turning a blind eye)
Beneficiary	Police as an organization	Society at large	Offender	Police as an organization	Offender
Temporal focus	Medium -term	Medium-to-long-term	Short-to-medium-term	Short-term	Medium-term

1988), turning a blind eye to benefit the image of the police can be considered OCB as this is not part of the formal job description. The temporal focus of this motivation appears to be *medium-term*. The officer's effort is driven by the desire to improve the image of the police by showing a gesture of goodwill, which cannot be achieved by one single action, but is realized by the sum of many citizen-friendly deeds.

> *Somebody tells you "I only just arrived". You check the [heat of the] engine. […] You tell the person to drive away and then it's okay. It also helps to improve our image. They are not all criminals. (R1)*

Only one single person could be identified whose behaviour in a low-risk situation seemed to be grounded in PSM-related motives. Interestingly, the person also expressed a strong desire to serve society when being asked what he enjoys most in his current work. This officer explained that in the case of littering, he does not have mercy nor patience because society is affected, making society as a whole the beneficiary of the motivation. Thus, it is argued that the officer displayed *societal altruism*. Despite the additional workload, he applied the rules very strictly in a situation where more lenient ways of acting (e.g., ignoring it, issuing a verbal warning) were also options. The temporal focus of this motivation appears to be *medium-to-long-term*. The officer's effort is driven by the desire to stop the individual from littering in the near future and improve the city's cleanliness for everybody. While the temporal focus of the former goal is medium-term, the one of the latter is long-term. It cannot be realized by one single action on the spot but is realized by the aggregate of consistent efforts.

> *The crux of the matter is this: If people do not buckle up, they are only hurting themselves. In the case of littering, however, if somebody throws a cigarette on the ground, people from the municipal utilities have to clean up. […] Everybody is affected. […] This really makes me mad. […]. Talking makes no sense here. I just charge the 50 Francs. (R24)*

High-risk situations

Officers also stated that they exercise their discretionary power in situations where individuals are putting themselves at risk, such as not wearing a seatbelt, or consuming drugs. This study categorizes these as high-risk situations. Police officers explained that they do not always follow the rules rigidly in these situations, as explaining can be more effective than strict rule enforcement. However, this concerns only first offenders and people who appear cooperative and insightful. It is argued that this type of prosocial behaviour is *interpersonal altruism*. Officers confer a benefit by bending the rules in the interest of an individual in their direct contact, despite the risk of disciplinary measures and quota arrangements. The temporal focus of this motivation is *short-to-medium-term*. The prosocially motivated officer's effort is driven by the desire to help affected individuals in the near future and beyond that by stopping them from using drugs and ensuring that they will drive safely.

> *When I have the feeling that he really gets why wearing a seatbelt is so important – when there is a learning moment – then I can say "It's okay. Just don't do it again." It's more important to prompt somebody to buckle up than cashing in. […] For me, it makes more sense if he has learned to wear a seatbelt, if he understands why it is so important to wear one. (R11)*

Fruitless situation

A third category of discretionary situations which is identified were situations where enforcement actions are expected to come to nothing as it is. For example, when refugees are stopped who do not possess valid residency papers. Imposing a fine is not seen as efficient because refugees "*don't have any money in the first place*" and "*we do not have enough people to begin with*" *(R6)*. In line with this, a police officer said the following about a case in which he was called by an uninvolved person to take care of a domestic quarrel that had got out of control.

> *You have to know, the prison is not nearby. You have to document the warrant officially. This means you and your team are completely absorbed. Four persons cannot do anything else for 3 hours because of nothing. They sleep off their intoxication and they are free to go home the next day. […] If nobody presses charges, you can leave it at that. But we could also have acted differently. (R3).*

This study argues that turning a blind eye in these situations can also be seen as OCB, as it is voluntary and benefits the organization. This behaviour is driven by the desire to safeguard scarce human resources, meaning that the motivation is directed towards the *employing organization*. The temporal focus of this motivation seems to be rather *short-term*. By not ordering colleagues to engage in fruitless tasks, manpower is freed up for other tasks.

Situation with far-reaching consequences

Officers also described discretionary situations where they bent the rules to benefit the offender. What was noticeable about these situations was that, in contrast to the situations described above, the consequences of rule enforcement would have been severe for the affected person. As a reason for their rule-bending behaviour, officers mentioned high levels of compassion for and

identification with the affected individuals. For example, respondent R2 explained that she did not arrest an immigrant for cycling on a main road without any working lights and legal documents to prove his identity because she knew the magnitude of the likely consequences of an arrest. Similarly, respondent R1 expressed that he once had released a father of small children in a traffic stop although the results of his breathalyser had exceeded the maximum permitted value.

It is argued that this type of prosocial behaviour is *interpersonal altruism*. The police officers confer a benefit – bending the rules – on an individual in their direct contact, despite the risk of disciplinary measures or discussions with their supervisor. The temporal focus of this motivation is *medium-term*. The prosocially motivated officer's effort is driven by the desire to help protect the affected person from the consequences of strict rule enforcement.

Discussion and conclusions

Clarification and refinement of concepts is a fundamental task of scientific research (Adcock & Collier, 2001). The aim of this study was to improve the conceptual clarity regarding the concepts of PSM, prosocial motivation, and altruism. By presenting a schematic overview of how these concepts relate to and differ from one another, this study improves both their coherence and differentiation as recommended by Gerring (1999). Regarding *coherence*, it is clarified that PSM is a type of motivation, thereby excluding definitions depending on behavioural factors (e.g., Houston, 2006). Coherence is also strengthened by limiting the beneficiaries of PSM to society at large and its temporal focus to medium- to-long-term. By strengthening the coherence criterion of the concept of PSM, the *differentiation* criterion is strengthened as well. Following the guidelines developed in this article, the concept of PSM now does distinguish adequately from the concepts of altruism and prosocial motivation through a clearer demarcation of it in space and in time (Gerring, 1999), sharpening its boundaries. The qualitative analysis revealed three findings that have implications for future research thereby contributing to the literature on PSM and related concepts.

First, the findings illustrate that the schematic overview (Figure 1) is a useful tool to distinguish PSM from prosocial motivation in theoretical terms. Many interviewees stated that they like their work and that they joined the police to be able to help individuals with whom they have direct contact *or* because it enables them to contribute to values such as security and justice. The latter finding is similar to that of a previous study among police officers in the Netherlands by Van Loon et al. (2013) in which officers were found to be "allergic to injustice". Interestingly, when scrutinizing whether these distinct motivations also result in distinct prosocial behaviours in discretionary situations, this study found prosocial motivation to be reflected much more strongly in behaviour than PSM suggesting that there indeed is a limit of PSM (Cooper & Reinagel, 2017). While prosocial motivation could be linked to either interpersonal altruism or OCB, only one individual justified his prosocial behaviour (societal altruism) with a reference to society at large. Because this individual was a young officer who only recently started work at the police, a potential explanation for this finding might be that the so-called "reality shock" – a frequently cited theoretical explanation for a negative change in PSM (e.g., Brænder and Andersen 2013; Kjeldsen & Jacobsen 2012; Schott, Steen, & Van Kleef, 2018) – had not yet occurred.

Our finding that the behavioural power of PSM seems to be limited – at least in the situations studied in this article – has important implications for future research on PSM. It suggests that we need to think more carefully about the question of which type of public service provision can be expected to result from PSM and what does serving the public interest actually mean. On the basis of the conceptual model, this study encourages scholars to think of possible behavioural outcomes of PSM that are directed at anonymous beneficiaries and that have long-term consequences. An interesting line of research may be to study the relationship between PSM and volunteering (Houston, 2006) in more detail. While prosocial motivation can be expected to increase charity work where direct feedback and appreciation by service recipients can be received (e.g., helping elderly people to do groceries, teaching refugees the local language), PSM can be expected to increase more indirect charity activities such as fund raising and logistical background work.

Second, the qualitative research design makes it possible to go beyond analysing direct effects and to explore explanations for the effects of different types of motivation on behaviour. Jensen and Andersen (2015), for example, found that user orientation is significantly and positively associated with GPs' antibiotic prescriptions, while PSM had an insignificant effect on prescribing behaviour. This study's findings indicate that the reason for the limited role of PSM may be due to the fact that, frequently, employees do not see the relationship between their work and the impact it has on society. Officers, in this study often do not think that they are in control of achieving any more than fixing problems on the spot, since they have to hand over many of their cases to the judiciary. This study argues that, because of this feeling of powerlessness, PSM may remain a general work motivation with limited behavioural consequences.

This explanation fits well with previous research on the relationship between PSM and perceived performance and

can be explained by the psychological mechanism of self-efficacy. Central to this mechanism is the idea that the extent of one's belief in one's own ability to reach a goal (i.e. contributing to justice and security) influences choices and actions (Bandura, 1977). If individuals do not receive feedback explicating that their efforts matter, they will lose confidence in their ability to realize PSM-related motives in specific situations. For future research on the relationship between PSM and behaviour, this finding suggests that it is important to focus on individuals who can actually have an impact on society in their work. For example, it may be interesting to study judges, or to focus on individuals working at the top of organizational hierarchies.

Third, this study reveals that the beneficiaries of prosocial motivation and the behaviour resulting from it seem to depend on the context. In this study four categories of discretionary situations are identified that vary in terms of the magnitude of risk to which the offender him- or herself and others are exposed, the expected impact of the police intervention, and the magnitude of the negative consequences of the intervention for the offender. This finding corroborates with O'Toole and Meier's call (2014) for closer attention to context in public management research. Behavioural responses of prosocial motivation and the recipient of this type of motivation seem to be conditioned by contextual circumstances.

The most interesting discretionary situations identified in this research, however, were low-risk situations; i.e. situations in which neither society nor the affected individual was in danger. These situations are interesting as they provide a 'neutral' ground for both PSM- and prosocial motivation-related behaviours. Thus, it comes as no surprise that behaviour directed at the employing organization (OCB) and behaviour benefitting society at large (societal altruism) was found in precisely these kinds of situations. On this basis, this study encourages scholars interested in behavioural implications of different types of motivation to ensure that increasing the well-being of an individual would not result in a large amount of harm to society and *vice versa*.

Limitations

Although it was not the aim of this study to generalize the findings on the basis of a representative sample, one needs to be aware that the sample of this was highly specific: police officers working in small-to-medium-sized police corps in Switzerland. Several respondents explained that they would never work anywhere else because of the strong bond they have with the region. Others made clear that working in this rather rural area is very different from working in large cities such as Zurich and Basel, where uniformed police officers enjoy less respect and the relationship with citizens is more anonymous. This strong sense of identification and personal contact with citizens may have influenced findings of this study, especially the frequent references to prosocial motivation.

Practical implications

In light of the qualitative findings of this study, This study recommends that public managers in general and the police in particular should consider the relevance of making employees aware of their potential contribution to society at large through their work in the long-term (e.g. communicating changing numbers of traffic incidents and burglaries), as this may help stimulate the behavioural consequences of PSM among police officers. Moreover, HR managers are encouraged to make employees aware of the fact that their PSM-related efforts are nevertheless very important, although they are not always visible due to the large number of factors that influence the scope to make a positive difference in health and safety.

Notes

1. In the case of the employing organization as a beneficiary, interpersonal contact can take place by contact with representatives of the organization.
2. Exceptions are annually offered service rewards, such as becoming a "Member of the British Empire" in the UK or the "Bundesverdienstkreuz" in Germany, which are offered to a very small number of public servants.
3. Note that officers with management functions still work on the street for a couple of days every month, and that all officers had experience in the primary process.

ORCID

Carina Schott http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3297-8607
Adrian Ritz http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2788-5219

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Appendix A. Respondents' characteristics and dominant type of motivation.

Respondent	Gender	Tenure	Function	PSM	PM
R1	male	≥15 < 20	Management	X	X
R2	male	≥10 < 15	Management	X	X
R3	male	≥5 < 10	Primary process	X	
R4	male	≥25 < 30	Primary process		
R5	male	≥25 < 30	Criminal detective	X	
R6	male	≥5 < 10	Primary process	X	
R7	female	≥15 < 20	Criminal detective		X
R8	male	≥20 < 25	Criminal detective		X
R9	female	≥0 < 5	Primary process		X
R10	male	≥15 < 20	Criminal detective		
R11	male	≥35 < 40	Criminal detective	X	
R12	male	≥5 < 10	Primary process		
R13	male	≥5 < 10	Primary process	X	
R14	male	≥5 < 10	Primary process		X
R15	male	≥30 < 35	Primary process		
R6	female	≥10 < 15	Primary process		
R17	female	≥10 < 15	Primary process		
R18	male	≥5 < 10	Primary process		X
R19	male	≥0 < 5	Primary process		X
R20	female	≥0 < 5	Primary process		
R21	male	≥15 < 20	Primary process		X
R22	male	≥5 < 10	Criminal detective		
R23	male	≥15 < 20	Primary process		
R24	male	≥0 < 5	Primary process	X	
R25	male	≥15 < 20	Management		
R26	male	≥20 < 25	Management	X	
R27	male	≥20 < 25	Primary process		X
R28	female	≥5 < 10	Primary process		X
R29	male	≥40 < 45	Primary process		X

Appendix B. Interview topics

Introduction

Work Motivation

- Please describe what a perfect work day looks like to you: a you gain energy from
- What motivates you in your work?
- What do you like/dislike about your work?

Hypothetical situation of a successful arrest of a burglar

- What comes to your mind in such a situation?
- Follow-up question: Do you also think of justice in such a situation? About the victim?

Discretionary situations

- Please describe work situations in which you have discretion
- Follow-up question: How did you act in this situation?
- Follow-up question: Why did you act the way you did?

Closing off

Appendix C. Coding scheme

Public service motivation

- Wanting to contribute to solving wrongs (APS)

- Wanting to contributing to the public interest and/or public values (CPV)
- Sympathy for the underprivileged and needy (COM)
- Making sacrifices (SSF)

Prosocial motivation

- Wanting to help other people in one's direct contact
- Wanting to the employing organization

Societal altruism

- Conferring a benefit to the society at one's own costs
- Contributing to the public interest/public values at one's own costs

Interpersonal altruism

- Conferring a benefit to an individual in one's direct contact at one's own costs Organizational citizenship behaviour
- Improving the functioning of the employing organization beyond formal job description
- Helping colleagues beyond formal job description