

Back to the Roots: Reconceptualizing Public Service Motivation from a Social Identity Perspective

Lorenza Micacchi ¹

Adrian Ritz ¹

¹ KPM Center for Public Management, Universität Bern, Switzerland

INTRODUCTION

Since the groundbreaking work by Perry and Wise (1990), the concept of Public Service Motivation (PSM), offering an alternative perspective on the distinctive functioning of public sector organizations, has experienced a notable surge in popularity. In its initial phase, considerable efforts were directed towards refining both the conceptual framework and its constructs. Subsequently, during its second wave, this academic domain has witnessed a broader expansion, delving into the examination of antecedents and outcomes, alongside a concerted endeavor to evaluate its construct validity (Perry, 2014), and the spread of more encompassing definitions as the set of "beliefs, values, and attitudes...that concern the interest of a larger political entity" (Vandenabeele, 2007; pp. 547).

As the field evolved, a third stage of growth emerged, as identified by Perry & Ritz (2022). This phase is characterized by an ongoing commitment to address research gaps left by prior investigations while concurrently pinpointing potential avenues for future research and key open questions (Vandenabeele et al., 2014; Perry & Vandenabeele, 2015). Especially more recent developments within this ongoing third wave have been marked by the imperative to grapple with the repercussions of the burgeoning empirical evidence surrounding PSM and by the need to cope with more recent critiques. Firstly, the proliferation of studies on this motivation across diverse institutional and cultural contexts has resulted in the dissemination of empirical findings, at times conflicting with one another. Secondly, the pressure of expectations from both public and HR managers toward new strategies for managing and optimizing desirable outcomes has increased. Thirdly, as the construct gained increased resonance both within and beyond the public administration field, critiques have also emerged (Bozeman & Su, 2015; Prebble, 2016; O'Leary, 2019). Consequently, as acknowledged by previous efforts to systematize the research field, various shortcomings have surfaced, prompting suggestions that "PSM research might not be there yet" (Ritz et al., 2016; pp. 424), and emphasizing the imperative for scholars to critically assess the concept to ensure a fruitful future for research on the topic.

Based on these premises, more recent contributions have predominantly focused on addressing key areas for improvement within this research field, primarily advocating for a more "nuanced" perspective. Subsequent scholarly work has delved into accounting for the differentiated effects of PSM's sub-dimensions (Gans-Morse et al., 2022), emphasizing the necessity to consider the importance of context in interpreting the relationship between PSM and its outcomes (Awan et al., 2020). Further studies have dedicated efforts to bolstering the validity of the construct, differentiating it from related concepts (Piatak & Holt, 2020; Ritz et al., 2020; Nowell et al., 2016; Vogel, 2022; Witesman et al., 2023), while others have concentrated on proposing novel approaches to enhance the practical implications of academic research on PSM (Homberg & Vogel, 2016; Christensen et al., 2017; Piatak et al., 2020; Ripoll & Ritz, 2021; Witesman & Christensen, 2023). Eventually, further contributions have focused on proving a finer-graining understanding of PSM origins (Vogel & Kroll, 2016; Florczak et al., 2023), antecedents (Jensen et al., 2019; Kroll & Porumbescu, 2019), and outcomes (among the others, Pedersen, 2015; Esteve et al., 2016; Christensen & Wright, 2018, Bellé & Cantarelli, 2018), including the propensity of PS Motivated individuals to chose a public sector employer (Vandenabeele, 2008; Christensen & Wright, 2011; Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013; Asseburg et al., 2020; Ritz et al., 2023). In contrast, some investigations (Giauque et al., 2012; Van Loon et al., 2015; Schott & Ritz, 2018) have ventured into exploring the darker aspects of PSM, aiming to overcome an overly optimistic (and somewhat simplistic) view of the concept.

Despite the commendable merit of these contributions in fostering a more comprehensive and nuanced view of PSM addressing key critiques and limitations characterizing the field, they have not felt the urge to review the conceptual ground of the PSM field. However, given the influx of mixed empirical results and, more significantly, theoretical critiques such as those based on rational theory, it becomes evident that the PSM concept itself requires further refinement.

Efforts to revise the concept have been circulating for several years. The seminal work by Vandenabeele (2007), followed by the contribution of Perry & Vandenabeele (2008), embarked on a

similar endeavor by introducing the concept of a public service identity and proposing a promising link with identity theory. Despite numerous contributions utilizing the identity theory lens to provide a more detailed understanding of PSM's functioning (Bednarczuk, 2018; Ripoll, 2019; Wang et al., 2020), there has been a surprising absence of systematic and comprehensive attempts toward a reconceptualization of PSM according to Social Identity Theory. Nevertheless, we posit that this conceptual endeavor holds potential benefits for the PSM academic field, for at least three fundamental reasons.

Firstly, a reconceptualization of PSM according to this theory could effectively address critical pitfalls currently characterizing the field. This includes the challenge of reconciling its original conceptualization with rational and public choice theory, all the while preserving its deeply embedded nature within public institutions. Second, such a reconceptualization has the potential to facilitate the diffusion of PSM academic literature beyond the confines of Public Administration, thereby strengthening its connections with organizational behavior and sociological literature. Third, it could open up new avenues for future research, aiming to rejuvenate its connection with public Human Resource Management (HRM) practices. Part of the significance of the PSM concept lies in its ability to account for the specificities of public sector organizations. It emphasizes the necessity of tailored solutions for public HR management, particularly during times when private-sector-oriented practices may seem like a panacea for enhancing public-sector performance. Framing PSM as a Public Service Identity (PSI) would offer public managers and policymakers a more nuanced perspective on the potentially more active role of public institutions in capitalizing on the distinctive characteristics of the public sector workforce. Simultaneously, this conceptual shift would contribute to the academic literature by shedding light on new mechanisms governing the behavior of PSM-otivated individuals.

Without this renewed and comprehensive theoretical perspective, the PSM literature faces the risk of heightened skepticism both within and outside the realm of Public Administration. This skepticism may be exacerbated as the field struggles with the challenge of reconciling the increasingly mixed

empirical evidence regarding the differentiated impact of contextual factors at various levels (macro, meso, and micro). This challenge is crucial to demonstrate that PSM can indeed “fulfill its promises convincingly”.

In this context, the principal aim of the current study is to bridge the identified gap through the delineated structure. Firstly, it will furnish the theoretical underpinnings of the research proposal. Subsequently, the research questions propelling this endeavor will be expounded upon.

In conclusion, the contribution section will encapsulate and synthesize the research proposal’s contributions. As a final remark, it is essential to underscore that this work does not intend to “upend” the PSM literature. Instead, its purpose is to cohesively consolidate the various elements while drawing upon the insightful contributions of previous scholars who have significantly shaped the field. In essence, it seeks to revisit the “roots” of the concept, reverting to its original conceptualization.

TOWARD A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHENOMENON: GROUNDING EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC SERVICE IDENTITY (PSI)

This paragraph provides the theoretical groundwork underpinning the research proposal and serves as a conceptual bridge between Public Service Motivation and Social Identity Theory (SIT). Initially, it presents an outline of the fundamental theoretical tenets of SIT. Subsequently, it delves into both classic and contemporary theoretical advancements in the realm of PSM, emphasizing their intersections with the SIT framework. Eventually, it provides an overview of the theoretical implications and benefits in transitioning from a motivational-based to an identity-based perspective of the concept.

SIT: theoretical predicament and integration in Public Administration

The concepts of identity and identification hold a longstanding presence within organizational studies (Ashfort et al., 2008) since they provide an answer to individual behaviors within organizations based on the self-referential response to queries such as "Who am I?" or "Who are we?", elucidating how individuals make sense and navigate the social and institutional context around them.

From a theoretical perspective, this micro-level examination is firmly grounded in two closely interconnected theoretical frameworks: social identity theory -SIT- and self-categorization theory -SCT (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). Concerning the former, this theoretical perspective is rooted in the assumption that groups are not just “external entities”, instead the norms, values, and behaviors associated with being part of a social group can be internalized, thus contributing to shaping an individual's sense of self (Tajfel, 1970).

Regarding SCT, it represents a different research strand within SIT, aiming at providing deeper insights into the processes underlying group identification and its impact at the individual level. More precisely, it explicitly addresses the process by which individuals classify themselves—referred to as the self-categorization process. This process, in turn, influences individual behaviors based on the individual's perception of belonging to a group, the social ingroup. In detail, the self-categorization process accentuates the perceived similarity of the individual to the relevant group prototype, i.e., to the entity encapsulating all attributes that differentiate the individual, as part of a specific social group, from members of other groups. The prototype's attributes, encompassing beliefs, feelings, attributes, and behaviors, become integrated into the individual's self-concept through the process of identification (Mael & Tetrick, 1992). Unlike social identity theory, self-categorization theory proposes that both personal and social identities can influence individual behavior and cognitions simultaneously. Indeed, a situation can trigger cues that remind the individual of his/her affiliation with a particular group, leading to the activation of salience (Treppe & Loy, 2017).

Specifically concerning social identities, the social category that becomes salient among the myriad of social stimuli depends on the activation of two psychological mechanisms (Oakes, 1987). The first is cognitive accessibility, suggesting that the social context makes certain categories accessible to the individual at the cognitive level, in a more structural (more deeply rooted in the individual self-concept) or situational (based on specific characteristics of the environment) way. The second mechanism is fit, which deals with individuals choosing the identities, among the various accessible ones and is based on the comparison between expectations in terms of behaviors related to the social group to which the individual feel belonging and the social outgroup, i.e., what he/she thinks is not.

The culmination of the interplay between cognitive accessibility and perceived fit with the social field results in the salience of that identity. Salience triggers a depersonalization process, wherein individuals seek to accentuate similarities with their group, thereby "redefining his or herself in a way coherent with the needs, peculiarities, and norms of the ingroup" (Turner, 2010). This depersonalization process is the driving force behind individuals' adherence to behaviors assumed by the prototype associated with the ingroup. In other words, the interaction between the individual and the context, leading to the salience of a particular identity, guides the individual's self-regulation process, i.e., the cognitive mechanism directing individuals in defining (regulating) what they pay attention to, how they think, feel, and act (Oyserman et al., 2017; pp. 139). Since the individual's self-concept is complex, and the different nested identities are organized according to a salience hierarchy (Stets & Burke, 2003), the more one specific identity is salient, the more the individual enacts those attitudes and behaviors embedded into that specific identity.

In summary, the process of identity construction is fundamentally dynamic and iteratively shaped by the social context (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Despite this dynamic nature derived from its interaction with the environment, social identities also exhibit more stable aspects. These relate to the traits—foundational characteristics—associated with that identity and the motives (or reasons) that propel

individuals into the identification process, as proposed by identity-motivational theory (Oyserman et al., 2012).

PSM and SIT: an overview of key contributions integrating these theories

Since its inception, PSM scholarship has exhibited conceptual ties with social identity theory, influencing both its initial conceptualization and subsequent efforts to refine its theoretical nature. By examining previous conceptual contributions, we aim to illuminate an integrative pattern in the theoretical bridging between PSM and SIT, encompassing implicit and explicitly articulated connections.

The journey begins with Perry's seminal contribution in 2000, where he sought to differentiate PSM from traditional motivational theories. Drawing on Shamir's (1991) insights, Perry framed PSM as a type of motivation not rooted in individual pleasure but in the affirmation of one's identity and collective affiliations. He emphasized PSM's foundation in values and social norms, echoing perspectives from scholars in institutional theory (Scott, 1987; Friedland & Alford, 1987), who underscored the role of institutions in shaping these values and norms. Perry outlined this process across three levels: sociohistorical context, motivational context, and individual characteristics, the latter encompassing the self-concept and the self-regulation process. In this vein, he argued the pivotal role of the self-concept in elucidating individual behaviors in environments characterized by structural features, such as goal ambiguity, and specific public values that align with what March & Olsen (1989) define as the "logic of appropriateness".

In summary, Perry's work represents an initial step toward integrating PSM with SIT, emphasizing the role of institutions and socialization processes in shaping individual behaviors. While introducing key concepts central to social identity theory, it also acknowledges the environment's significance in explaining attitudes and behaviors. However, a deeper integration required a more profound conceptualization of the psychological mechanisms underlying the connection between one's identity

and the environment, a gap addressed by subsequent contributions to PSM theory by Vandenabeele (2007) and Perry & Vandenabeele (2008).

The second theoretical cornerstone: introducing the concept of PS identity

The contribution by Vandenabeele (2007) shares several aspects with Perry's work, yet it delves deeper into various conceptual issues. Firstly, the author explicitly emphasizes the link between PSM and institutional theory, again relying on the concept of the logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1989). However, Vandenabeele goes a step further, explaining the mechanisms connecting the macro/meso-level (institutions) with the micro-level. In doing so, he incorporates the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Ryan & Deci (2000). More precisely, the author explicitly considers the role of fulfilling psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the internalization process of institutional values within what the author terms the individual PS identity – the identity underlying PSM. Furthermore, he relies on the concept of the self-regulation "continuum" within SDT to elucidate the conceptual link between one's PS identity and individual behaviors. Additionally, in comparison to Perry's earlier contribution, Vandenabeele more explicitly highlights the importance of the environment and its iterative relationship with individual motivation. This is captured by one of his theoretical propositions stating that "To the degree that a public service identity is more autonomous, it will result in a more consistent and intense public service behavior, given that the institution in which the individual operates embraces public service values" (pp. 553).

A closer look at social identity theory, and especially at the self-categorization strand, could contribute to conceptual refining and enrich Vandenabeele's theoretical endeavor, in at least two different ways. First, concerning the integration between PSM and SDT, in line with the SIT *predicament*, it is not identities per se that are more or less controlled (as stated by Vandenabeele), but instead, their self-regulation process, which revolves around why individuals decide to internalize

(or not) one specific identity and to act according to the prototype embedded into that identity. Moreover, the last stage of the extrinsic self-regulation continuum, i.e., the integrated phase, could be reexamined in the light of self-categorization theory, suggesting potential new theoretical avenues for research and practice so far neglected. When the values and beliefs associated with the PS identity are coherent with those embedded into other identities experienced by the individual (such as the role identity of being a public servant), the individual would not suffer cognitive dissonance among these different identities. Consequently, individual actions become more consistent with the values inherent in the PS identity and the integrated stadium would be reached. To illustrate, consider a scenario where a public servant is faced with a request from an underprivileged individual for access to state social benefits. Although the user is in dire need of assistance, he/she does not fully meet the criteria established by law to qualify for such benefits. In this situation, the frontline public servant may experience a personal conflict between his/her inclination to meet the needs of the underprivileged (an identity trait rooted in compassion, thus being potentially associated with their PS identity) and their obligation to uphold the regulations governing access to social benefits (linked to his/her role identity as a public servant). Consequently, the individual may perceive a cognitive dissonance between these two identities—the PS identity and the role identity of a public servant. This conflict arises from differing behavioral expectations associated with these identities, leading to a struggle to integrate them and resulting in a dilemma when determining the appropriate course of action in such circumstances.

The second potential refinement routed in deeper integration with SIT addresses the strong correlation proposed by Vandenberg with the broader social context. In detail, a perspective more deeply rooted in self-categorization theory suggests a more explicit consideration of the mechanism of salience in his proposition. Thus, his above-mentioned assertion could be rephrased as follows: "When the environment highlights the PS identity, behaviors associated with this identity can be enacted, thereby activating the PS identity."

To summarize, Vandenberg's contribution serves as a cornerstone in amalgamating PSM theory with social identity theory, introducing the concept of the PS identity and acknowledging the environmental role in activating it. These insights are further expanded upon in a subsequent contribution by Vandenberg & Perry (2008).

The third theoretical cornerstone: shedding light on the mechanisms behind PS identity

Perry & Vandenberg (2008) add significant pieces to the puzzle of integrating social identity theory and PSM. Firstly, they highlight social identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) as the mechanism through which institutional values are transmitted to individuals, influencing their behavior. This process aligns with the conceptual foundations of SIT, where individuals internalize values associated with social groups they identify with, particularly those related to the public interest.

Secondly, they offer a comprehensive understanding of the internalization process, drawing from various theories such as socialization, social identification, cultural identity theory, and social learning. These perspectives suggest a consistent process of internalization aligning with the principles of SIT.

Thirdly, they identify four different theories (social cognitive theory, self-determination theory, predisposition-opportunity theory, and goal-setting theory) as relevant explanatory mechanisms for the self-regulation process in institutional and organizational contexts.

Fourthly, they reinforce the idea that identity is crucial for self-regulated behavior and that the likelihood of behavior being driven by PSM depends on the publicness of one's identity and contextual factors. Again, this reasoning aligns with a view of public service motivation as an identity. Nevertheless, the necessity of introducing an intermediary concept like motivation to elucidate individual behaviors appears somewhat unclear. Conversely, these actions might seamlessly be

explicated by the combined result of possessing (internalizing) the PS identity and the salience of this identity.

In essence, Perry and Vandenberg's contribution clarifies the psychological mechanisms underlying the possession of a PS identity and the role of contextual factors in driving behavior. However, an explicitly stated conceptual link with SIT is not elaborated upon. This theoretical gap is addressed by the contribution of Ripoll (2019).

The fourth theoretical cornerstone: PSM as an (moral) identity

In his conceptual paper aiming to bridge PSM theory and ethics, Ripoll (2019) extends previous scholars' theoretical groundwork by explaining the why, how, and when of their relationship. He ties PSM to moral identity theory, defining PSM as a "public service identity reflecting public institutional logics." (ibidem, p. 25). This definition aligns moral virtues with the moral values inherent in PSM, "providing content to its instrumental values" (ibidem, p. 26). Moreover, Ripoll emphasizes the role of the environment, employing the concept of identity accessibility to understand PSM's link to ethical or unethical outcomes.

This contribution is one of the first explicit attempts to relate PSM theory and SIT; nevertheless, a closer look at more recent developments in SIT might help grasp a more nuanced perspective on some of the theoretical implications of the author's study. More precisely, what Ripoll defines as the "virtues" rooted in moral identities might actually represent traits common to the PS (social) identity. Most recent psychological perspectives on social identity theory (Oyserman et al., 2012) seem to confirm this theoretical argument, relying on the concept of traits as the basic characteristics or features that are hierarchically organized into one's identities. The process of "psychological embeddedness" of these traits into one's specific identity is explained by the fact that they, over time, have proven effective in goal pursuit in several contexts in which that particular identity was salient. Consequently, they have been irremediably associated with that specific identity. However, the same

trait could be common to several different individual identities. Once one specific identity is made salient, this implies that the traits connected to that identity are made salient, and these salient traits ultimately influence the individual self-regulation process (Browman et al., 2017).

In other words, relying on Ripoll's argument, we can postulate that the PS identity has some common traits with the individual's moral identities without this fact necessarily implying that it represents itself as a moral identity, as stated by Ripoll. Instead, what could be derived from this contribution is that the conceptualization of a PS identity (rather than a motivation) could be more appropriate, given that, as proved by the author, both the concept of self-regulation and identity salience could be ultimately applied to PSM theory, contributing explaining its link with outcomes like unethical behavior.

In summary, prior investigations into the conceptual nature of PSM have been intertwined with varying degrees of explicitness with SIT. While earlier contributions sporadically incorporated SIT concepts like self-concept and self-regulation, subsequent studies emphasized the interplay between the environment and individual identity, highlighting the institutional roots of PSM. These efforts have progressively elucidated the nuances in the relationship between PS identity and behavior, culminating in a direct reference to identity salience. However, no prior research explicitly addressed whether PSM might be better understood through a social identity framework rather than a motivational standpoint. The subsequent paragraph endeavors to elucidate why employing a social identity framework aligns more cohesively with PSM theory, thereby creating space for a new conceptualization and, consequently, measurement approach.

The benefit of transitioning from a motivational to an identity lens in PSM theory

Before delving into the conceptual rationales supporting the suitability of an identity lens for PSM, it is pertinent to offer a concise overview of what motivation ultimately is and how it could be defined.

Previous contributions have delineated motivation as "a force within an individual that pushes or propels them to satisfy basic needs or wants" (Yorks, 1976, p.21), and as "a state-oriented behavior characterized by direction, intensity, and persistence" (Ritz, Neumann, and Vandenabeele, 2016; pp.347; Heckhausen, 1989).

Drawing from these definitions, scholars have applied different motivational theories to understand how characteristics of the public sector influence individual motivation and behavior. As synthesized by Ritz, Neumann, and Vandenabeele (2016), these theories span from process-based frameworks—such as expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), goal-setting theory (Latham & Locke, 1991), and equity theory (Adams, 1965)—to content-based theories, which link motivation to the fulfillment of individual needs—such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (1968), and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Despite their divergent emphases, all these theories converge on the notion of motivation primarily as an "inner" force (emerging from individual psychological needs, as posited by content-based motivational theories) that drives individuals and may be influenced by characteristics of the institutional and organizational milieu (particularly, according to process-based theories).

When it specifically pertains to PSM, prior scholars (Vandenabeele & Schott, 2020) have already posited that PSM could be more inherently aligned with the concept of identity rather than motivation due to its institutional nature rooted in public values and norms. This alignment suggests a theoretical affinity with the notion of identity, also considering the emphasis on context and environment in conceptualizing PSM.

As elucidated in preceding sections, the reflections on the institutional origins of PSM and its context-dependency have been theoretically framed within the institutional theory paradigm, particularly drawing upon the concept of the "logic of appropriateness" (March & Olsen, 1989). This framework elucidates how individuals internalize institutional norms and values within their identity

and subsequently behave in accordance with what is deemed appropriate by the internalized norms and values. While instrumental in elucidating the institutional underpinnings of PSM, this theoretical paradigm primarily focuses on the macro or meso-level (i.e., the level at which institutions operate), elucidating the mechanisms through which they are entrenched at the micro (individual) level. Moreover, centered on the concepts of norms and values, these theoretical tenets are deeply entrenched in a normative approach, delineating what individuals should be and do according to institutional norms and values (recurring to March and Olsen's words, what individuals "ought to be"). Consequently, relying solely on this theoretical lens may risk overlooking the micro-level perspective, elucidating subsequent processes that occur after these norms and values are internalized and integrated into the more intricate entity of the self-concept, composed of different identities.

This gap could potentially be bridged by incorporating the perspective of social identity theory, particularly leveraging self-categorization theory. On the one hand, a similar conceptual approach is deeply entrenched at the micro-level, facilitating the comprehension of individual behaviors within the context of this intricate complexity that encompasses conflicting traits, including values and behavioral norms, ingrained in coexisting identities. In doing so, it also partially departs from a normative approach, since different values and beliefs, even sometimes conflicting, might coexist within the individual, thus leading to behaviors not necessarily in line with what an individual "ought to be" according to one specific identity's prototype.

Additionally, it accentuates the role of the institutional and social environment in elucidating individual behavior, particularly through the concept of salience. Here, the external context is not merely regarded as activating an internal individual force (as posited by process-based theories of motivation) or elucidating the internalization process of institutional norms and values (as suggested by institutional theory) but also plays a pivotal role in elucidating why and under which circumstances individuals tend to act in alignment with the traits embedded within a specific identity (such as the public service identity). Thus, public organizations and their broader social and institutional milieu

may not only activate the forces associated with one's PSM and elucidate the internalization (and thus the genesis) of the PS identity, but could also serve as crucial determinants of the individual self-regulation process. Consequently, the application of the SIT paradigm frames how individuals within public organizations ultimately behave as a result of deeper or weaker integration between different identities within the self, including the role identity of being a public servant. The following figure (Figure 1) graphically represents the key tenants behind the theoretical reconceptualization of PSM as a PS identity and its deeper integration with self-categorization theory.

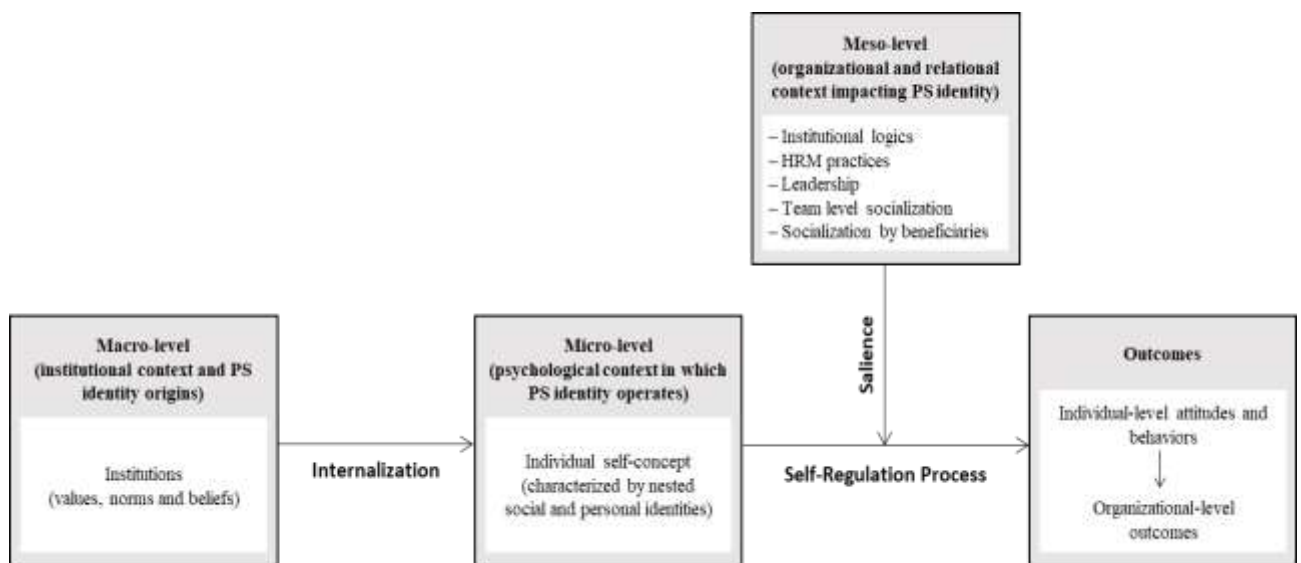


Figure 1: Conceptual model

In essence, employing SIT and self-categorization theory offers a nuanced perspective on the relationship between possessing a PS identity and behaving within public organizations. It disentangles PSM from related concepts lacking institutional roots and contributes to a stronger link between theory and practice in public administration. However, to establish a comprehensive theoretical grounding for PSM within SIT, it's necessary to employ various methodologies to address the following research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With specific reference to the research questions, three key issues demand attention to enhance our understanding. The first critical step involves conducting a comprehensive analysis of existing empirical studies within the PSM literature. It is essential to scrutinize how prior empirical advancements in PSM theory could be theoretically interpreted through the framework of SIT, and how this theoretical lens could help tackle some of the open debates in the field. This raises two interconnected research questions:

RQ1a: What open questions characterize the theoretical debate on PSM theory in the more recent development of the “third wave”?

RQ1b: Does the social identity lens represent a valuable theoretical perspective in addressing both the lingering and new open questions characterizing this debate?

The second crucial step revolves around a deeper conceptualization of the Public Service (PS) Identity as a social identity. Therefore, it is rooted in the following overarching research question:

RQ2a: What features characterize the PS identity, i.e., the response individuals provide to the question “Who Am I?” based on this identity?

This research question can be further articulated into sub-questions pertaining to the theoretical characteristics of social identities. Specifically, for an identity to be recognized as a social identity, it should be theoretically associated with a sense of belonging to a distinct social group that shares specific values and norms. However, identifying the social group constitutes the preliminary step, and the subsequent one involves defining the key features (or traits in identity theory terminology) embedded in the social prototype associated with being part of that specific social group. Thus,

to further theoretically ground the PS identity concept, there is a need to explore the features associated with possessing this specific identity (being part of the social in-group) and those characteristics that are not part of it, i.e., the features that characterize the out-group(s) and thus refer to what previous scholars in the field of social identity have referred to as “counter identity/ies”. This reasoning leads to the following sub-research question:

RQ2b: What are the features (traits) lying behind the PS identity? What are the traits linked to the counter-identity/ies?

Eventually, in the theoretical grounding and definition of the PS identity, part of the conceptual endeavor relies on distinguishing the traits associated with possessing this identity from those aspects embedded in related identity, such as the identity of being a public servant. Therefore, we can formulate the following:

RQ2c: How do these features connect to the ones associated with a public servant role identity?

The third fundamental line of inquiry pertains to the construct of PSM and involves the re-evaluation of the measurement approach. If PSM is now conceived as a social identity, instead of a motivation, this transition has implications not only for the conceptualization but also for the measurement of PSM. Thus, the fourth research question is the following:

RQ3a: How can the PS identity be measured?

The latter might be conceptually tied to another sub-research question, which delves more deeply into the links between this new proposed construct and traditional measures of PSM.

RQ3b: How does this new measurement approach perform compared to the traditional (multi or mono-dimensional) ones employed in PSM theory?

CONCLUSION

The proposed research aims to enrich PSM theory by embedding it within social identity theory, offering several significant contributions to the field. Firstly, the research intends to provide an updated overview of recent studies within the PSM domain, presenting a contemporary interpretation of the field's "state of the art" and identifying current issues and potential research avenues.

Secondly, it seeks to develop the concept of PS identity, clarifying its characteristics and its relationship with other relevant concepts in the public sector context, such as public ethos. This conceptual development addresses the need to define what is public about PSM.

Thirdly, the research aims to address critiques of the PSM field by prioritizing theoretical considerations over empirical and measurement issues (Pandey et al., 2017). Departing from this trend, this research proposal places theoretical considerations at the forefront, establishing the conceptual foundation for the PS identity concept before proposing a measurement construct and highlighting potential future empirical research avenues.

Fourthly, reframing PSM as an identity rather than a mere motivation has implications for understanding its nature and functioning. Beyond its immediate implications for the nature of the concept, this shift opens up avenues for gaining new insights into its functioning. Indeed, framing PSM as a PS identity could provide a theoretical lens for reconciling previous empirical evidence on both its "state" and "trait" nature. Indeed, identities exhibit both stability, being central components of the self-concept resulting from enduring socialization processes, and malleability, being influenced by external factors and situational cues, aligning with the theoretical foundations of identity salience. Furthermore, this conceptual shift may offer new theoretical perspectives for comprehending the intricate and sometimes unexpected relationships between PSM and various outcomes emerging from more recent PSM theory contributions. This includes its connections with ethical behaviors and its association with undesired outcomes within the so-termed "dark side of PSM" research strand (Ritz

& Schott, 2018). Ultimately, it could potentially offer a renewed comprehension of the relationship between PSM and managerial practices, emphasizing the active role of public organizations and their broader social and institutional environment in fostering the development (through internalization processes) and the activation (through cognitive accessibility and salience processes) of the PS identity.

Before embarking on empirical investigations, it is crucial to initiate the effort of theorizing this PS identity (theory development) and devising suitable measures based on these conceptual premises to facilitate comprehensive theory testing. By introducing a reshaped conceptualization and delving into its theoretical underpinnings, this research proposal essentially revisits the "roots" of the PSM concept. In doing so, it revitalizes foundational conceptual contributions in the field, bringing to the forefront tacit meanings implied in these works while fostering the PSM theory synergy with other disciplinary fields.

REFERENCES

- Abdelal, R. (Ed.). (2009). *Measuring identity: A guide for social scientists*. Cambridge University Press.
- Adams, J. S. (1965). Inequity in social exchange. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 267-299). Academic Press.
- Alvesson, M., & Sandberg, J. (2020). The problematizing review: A counterpoint to Elsbach and Van Knippenberg's argument for integrative reviews. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(6), 1290-1304.
- Aquino, K., & Reed II, A. (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 83(6), 1423.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of management review*, 14(1), 20-39.
- Ashforth, B. E., Harrison, S. H., & Corley, K. G. (2008). Identification in organizations: An examination of four fundamental questions. *Journal of management*, 34(3), 325-374.
- Ashworth, R. E., McDermott, A. M., & Currie, G. (2019). Theorizing from qualitative research in public administration: Plurality through a combination of rigor and richness. *Journal of public administration research and theory*, 29(2), 318-333.
- Asseburg, J., Hattke, J., Hensel, D., Homberg, F., & Vogel, R. (2020). The tacit dimension of public sector attraction in multi-incentive settings. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 30(1), 41-59.
- Awan, S., Bel, G., & Esteve, M. (2020). The benefits of PSM: An oasis or a mirage?. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 30(4), 619-635.
- Bednarczuk, M. (2018). Identity and vote overreporting by bureaucrats: Implications for public service motivation. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 48(2), 148-158.
- Bellé, N., & Cantarelli, P. (2018). Randomized experiments and reality of public and nonprofit organizations: Understanding and bridging the gap. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 38(4), 494-511.
- Bozeman, B., & Su, X. (2015). Public service motivation concepts and theory: A critique. *Public Administration Review*, 75(5), 700-710.
- Brewer, G. A., Selden, S. C., & Facer II, R. L. (2000). Individual conceptions of public service motivation. *Public administration review*, 60(3), 254-264.
- Browman, A. S., Destin, M., & Molden, D. C. (2017). Identity-specific motivation: How distinct identities direct self-regulation across distinct situations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 113(6), 835.
- Burke, P. J., & Tully, J. C. (1977). The measurement of role identity. *Social forces*, 55(4), 881-897.

- Christensen, R. K., & Wright, B. E. (2011). The effects of public service motivation on job choice decisions: Disentangling the contributions of person-organization fit and person-job fit. *Journal of public administration research and theory*, 21(4), 723-743.
- Christensen, R. K., & Wright, B. E. (2018). Public service motivation and ethical behavior: Evidence from three experiments. *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration*, 1(1).
- Christensen, R. K., Paarlberg, L., & Perry, J. L. (2017). Public service motivation research: Lessons for practice. *Public Administration Review*, 77(4), 529-542.
- Esteve, M., Urbig, D., Van Witteloostuijn, A., & Boyne, G. (2016). Prosocial behavior and public service motivation. *Public Administration Review*, 76(1), 177-187.
- Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (1991). *Social cognition*. McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Florczak, C., Rasmussen, S. H. R., Jensen, U. T., Stritch, J. M., Christensen, K., Nørgaard, A. S., & Klemmensen, R. (2023). Exploring the foundational origins of public service motivation through the lens of behavioral genetics. *Public Administration*, 101(3), 993-1013.
- Friedland, R. and Alford R. (1991). Bringing Society Back In: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradictions. In *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, pp. 232-266. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gans-Morse, J., Kalgin, A., Klimenko, A., Vorobyev, D., & Yakovlev, A. (2022). Public service motivation as a predictor of corruption, dishonesty, and altruism. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 32(2), 287-309.
- George, B., Andersen, L. B., Hall, J. L., & Pandey, S. K. (2023). Writing impactful reviews to rejuvenate public administration: A framework and recommendations. *Public Administration Review*, 83(6), 1517-1527.
- Giauque, D., Ritz, A., Varone, F., & Anderfuhren-Biget, S. (2012). Resigned but satisfied: The negative impact of public service motivation and red tape on work satisfaction. *Public Administration*, 90(1), 175-193.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational research methods*, 16(1), 15-31.
- Glaser B. & Strauss A.L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine Publishing Company, New York.
- Glaser B. (1992) *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis*. Sociology Press, Mill Valley, CA, USA.
- Grøn, C. H., Bro, L. L., & Andersen, L. B. (2020). Public managers' leadership identity: Concept, causes, and consequences. *Public Management Review*, 22(11), 1696-1716.
- Haslam, S. A., & Ellemers, N. (2005). Social identity in industrial and organizational psychology: Concepts, controversies and contributions. *International review of industrial and organizational psychology* 2005, 20, 39-118.
- Hatmaker, D. M., Smith, A. E., Pandey, S. K., & Subedi, S. (2017). Coauthorship networks in public service motivation scholarship: Implications for the evolution of a field. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 37(3), 295-322.
- Heckhausen, H. (1989). Leistungsmotivation. *Motivation und Handeln*, 231-278.

- Heine, F., Van Witteloostuijn, A., & Wang, T. M. (2022). Self-sacrifice for the common good under risk and competition: An experimental examination of the impact of public service motivation in a volunteer's dilemma game. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 32(1), 217-232.
- Herzberg, F. 1968. "One more time: how do you motivate employees?" *Harvard Business Review* 46 (1):53--62.
- Homburg, F., & Vogel, R. (2016). Human resource management (HRM) and public service motivation (PSM) Where are we, and where do we go from here?. *International Journal of Manpower*, 37(5), 746-763.
- House, R. J. (2004). An overview of the GLOBE research program. *Transformative organizations: A global perspective*, 483(2003).
- Jensen, U. T., Andersen, L. B., & Jacobsen, C. B. (2019). Only when we agree! How value congruence moderates the impact of goal-oriented leadership on public service motivation. *Public Administration Review*, 79(1), 12-24.
- Kihlstrom, J. F., & Klein, S. B. (1994). The self as a knowledge structure. In R. S. Wyer & T. K. Srull (Eds.), *Handbook of social cognition*, 2nd ed. (Vol. 1, pp. 153-208). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Kim, S., Vandenberg, W., Wright, B. E., Andersen, L. B., Cerase, F. P., Christensen, R. K., ... & De Vivo, P. (2013). Investigating the structure and meaning of public service motivation across populations: Developing an international instrument and addressing issues of measurement invariance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 23(1), 79-102.
- Kjeldsen, A. M., & Jacobsen, C. B. (2013). Public service motivation and employment sector: Attraction or socialization?. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 23(4), 899-926.
- Kroll, A., & Porumbescu, G. A. (2019). When extrinsic rewards become "sour grapes": An experimental study of adjustments in intrinsic and prosocial motivation. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 39(4), 467-486.
- Latham, G. P., & Locke, E. A. (1991). Self-regulation through goal setting. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, 50(2), 212-247.
- Mael, F. A., & Tetrick, L. E. (1992). Identifying organizational identification. *Educational and psychological measurement*, 52(4), 813-824.
- March, J.G. and J.P. Olsen 1989. *Rediscovering Institutions*. New York: Free Press.
- Marvel, J. D., & Resh, W. D. (2019). An unconscious drive to help others? Using the implicit association test to measure prosocial motivation. *International Public Management Journal*, 22(1), 29-70.
- Maslow, A.H. 1943. "A theory of human motivation." *Psychological Review* 50 (4): 370-396.
- Nowell, B., Izod, A. M., Ngaruiya, K. M., & Boyd, N. M. (2016). Public service motivation and sense of community responsibility: Comparing two motivational constructs in understanding leadership within community collaboratives. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 26(4), 663-676.

- O'Leary, C. (2019). Public service motivation: A rationalist critique. *Public Personnel Management*, 48(1), 82-96.
- Oakes, P. J. (1987). The salience of social categories. In J. C. Turner (Ed.), *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. New York: Basil Blackwell; 117–141.
- Ongaro, E., & Valotti, G. (2008). Public management reform in Italy: explaining the implementation gap. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 21(2), 174-204.
- Ospina, S. M., Esteve, M., & Lee, S. (2018). Assessing qualitative studies in public administration research. *Public administration review*, 78(4), 593-605.
- Oyserman, D., Elmore, K., & Smith, G. (2012). Self, self-concept, and identity. In M. Leary & J. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (2nd ed., pp. 69–104). New York: Guilford.
- Oyserman, D., Lewis Jr, N. A., Yan, V. X., Fisher, O., O'Donnell, S. C., & Horowitz, E. (2017). An identity-based motivation framework for self-regulation. *Psychological Inquiry*, 28(2-3), 139-147.
- Pandey, S. K., Pandey, S., Breslin, R., & Broadus, E. (2017). Public service motivation research program: Key challenges and future prospects. Chapter, 19, 314-332.
- Pedersen, M. J. (2015). Activating the forces of public service motivation: Evidence from a low-intensity randomized survey experiment. *Public Administration Review*, 75(5), 734-746.
- Perry, J. and Ritz, A. 2022. Public Service Motivation. In K. Schedler (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Public Management*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 172-175.
- Perry, J. L. (2000). Bringing society in: Toward a theory of public-service motivation. *Journal of public administration research and theory*, 10(2), 471-488.
- Perry, J. L. (2014). The motivational bases of public service: Foundations for a third wave of research. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, 36(1), 34-47.
- Perry, J. L., & Vandenabeele, W. (2008). Behavioral dynamics: Institutions, identities, and self-regulation. *Motivation in public management: The call of public service*, 56-79.
- Perry, J. L., & Vandenabeele, W. (2015). Public service motivation research: Achievements, challenges, and future directions. *Public Administration Review*, 75(5), 692-699.
- Perry, J. L., & Wise, L. R. (1990). The motivational bases of public service. *Public Administration Review*, 367-373.
- Phinney, J. S., & Ong, A. D. (2007). Conceptualization and measurement of ethnic identity: Current status and future directions. *Journal of counseling Psychology*, 54(3), 271.
- Piatak, J. S., & Holt, S. B. (2020). Prosocial behaviors: A matter of altruism or public service motivation?. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 30(3), 504-518.
- Prebble, M. (2016). Has the study of public service motivation addressed the issues that motivated the study?. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 46(3), 267-291.
- Ripoll, G. (2019). Disentangling the relationship between public service motivation and ethics: An interdisciplinary approach. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 2(1), 21-37.

- Ripoll, G., & Ritz, A. (2021). Public service motivation and human resource management. In *Research handbook on HRM in the public sector* (pp. 245-259). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Ritz, A., Brewer, G. A., & Neumann, O. (2016). Public service motivation: A systematic literature review and outlook. *Public Administration Review*, 76(3), 414-426.
- Ritz, A., Neumann, O., & Vandenabeele, W. (2016). Motivation in the public sector. In T. R. Klassen, D. Cepiku, & T. J. Lah (Eds.), *Routledge International Handbooks. The Routledge handbook of global public policy and administration* (pp. 346–359). Taylor and Francis.
- Ritz, A., Schott, C., Nitzl, C., & Alfes, K. (2020). Public service motivation and prosocial motivation: two sides of the same coin?. *Public Management Review*, 22(7), 974-998.
- Ritz, A., Weißmüller, K. S., & Meynhardt, T. (2023). Public value at cross points: A comparative study on employer attractiveness of public, private, and nonprofit organizations. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 43(3), 528-556.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary educational psychology*, 25(1), 54-67.
- Schott, C., & Ritz, A. (2018). The dark sides of public service motivation: A multi-level theoretical framework. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 1(1), 29-42.
- Schott, C., Neumann, O., Baertschi, M., & Ritz, A. (2019). Public Service Motivation, Prosocial Motivation and Altruism: Towards Disentanglement and Conceptual Clarity. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 42(14), 1200–1211.
- Shamir, B. (1991). Meaning, self and motivation in organizations. *Organization studies*, 12(3), 405-424.
- Skelcher, C., & Smith, S. R. (2015). Theorizing hybridity: Institutional logics, complex organizations, and actor identities: The case of nonprofits. *Public administration*, 93(2), 433-448.
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2003). A sociological approach to self and identity. *Handbook of self and identity*, 128152(1), 221-9.
- Strader, E., Griffie, V., Irelan, P. C., Kwan, L. Y., Northcott, E., & Pandey, S. K. (2023). Race in representative bureaucracy theory: A problematizing review. *Public Administration Review*, 83(6), 1687-1703.
- Tajfel, H. (1970). Experiments in intergroup discrimination. *Scientific american*, 223(5), 96-103.
- Trepte, S., & Loy, L. S. (2017). Social identity theory and self-categorization theory. *The international encyclopedia of media effects*, 1-13.
- Turner, J. C. (2010). Social categorization and the self-concept: a social cognitive theory of group behavior.
- Van Loon, N. M., Vandenabeele, W., & Leisink, P. (2015). On the bright and dark side of public service motivation: The relationship between PSM and employee wellbeing. *Public Money & Management*, 35(5), 349-356.
- Vandenabeele, W. (2007). Toward a public administration theory of public service motivation: An institutional approach. *Public Management Review*, 9(4), 545-556.

- Vandenabeele, W. (2008). Government calling: Public service motivation as an element in selecting government as an employer of choice. *Public Administration*, 86(4), 1089-1105.
- Vandenabeele, W., & Schott, C. (2020). Public Service motivation in public administration. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.
- Vandenabeele, W., Brewer, G. A., & Ritz, A. (2014). Past, present, and future of public service motivation research. *Public Administration*, 92(4), 779-789.
- Vogel, D., & Kroll, A. (2016). The stability and change of PSM-related values across time: Testing theoretical expectations against panel data. *International Public Management Journal*, 19(1), 53-77.
- Vogel, M. D. (2022). When service calls: Public service motivation and calling as complementary concepts for public service. *International Public Management Journal*, 25(4), 620-638.
- Vroom, V. H. (1964). *Work and motivation*.
- Wang, T. M., Van Witteloostuijn, A., & Heine, F. (2020). A moral theory of public service motivation. *Frontiers in psychology*, 11, 517763.
- Witesman, E. M., & Christensen, R. K. (2023). Elevating public service motivation research and practice. *International Public Management Journal*, 26(1), 46-65.
- Witesman, E. M., Walters, L., & Christensen, R. K. (2023). Creating a public service topology: Mapping public service motivation, public service ethos, and public service values. *Public Administration*.
- Wright, B. E., Christensen, R. K., & Pandey, S. K. (2013). Measuring public service motivation: Exploring the equivalence of existing global measures. *International Public Management Journal*, 16(2), 197-223.
- Yorks, L. (1976). *A radical approach to job enrichment*. Amacom, New York.