

Three Essays on the Measurement, Antecedents, and Consequences of Public Service Motivation (PSM)

TAO Lei

Abstract

As a core theoretical concept in public management studies, public service motivation (PSM) is defined as individuals' intrinsic proclivity to deliver services that benefit the interests of others at large. Pertinent scholarly inquiries, while mushrooming, still confront three major challenges that need to be further addressed – a unitary measurement scale, a lack of methodological rigors, and oversimplified model specifications. This dissertation takes a step toward by filling these research voids and supplementing nuanced knowledge to the current PSM research.

Specifically, the first essay aims to fine-tune the existing PSM measurement scale by enriching the rational component associated with the operationalization of individuals' service motivation in the Chinese context. A mixed-methods approach incorporating both focus group interviews and questionnaire surveys will be applied. The second study employs a nationally representative panel dataset to test two underexploited antecedents of PSM, namely the extracurricular activities and the parent-child relationship. A propensity score matching technique will be adopted, ensuring that causal relationships of interest can be attained. The third article offers experimental evidence on the linkages among PSM, clients' characteristics, and unethical behaviors.

The contributions made by this dissertation are threefold. First, by incorporating items that fully capture individuals' rationality into the current PSM measurement scale, this dissertation strengthens the explanatory power of PSM theory in predicting work attitudes and behaviors of public servants. Given that little attention has been paid to examining the motivational bases of Chinese public servants, this dissertation eventually contributes to the furtherance of PSM studies in China. Second, novel quasi-experimental and experimental evidence are offered to not only shed light on the antecedents and consequences of PSM, but also help establish solid causal claims between PSM and other significant constructs. Practically, the causal mechanisms identified in this dissertation enlightens the practitioners on how to effectively design and put forth policies to better appeal, retain, and motivate the most talented in the public sector.