



Application of public service motivation to non-western countries understanding the role of culture and values

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Abstract

Public Service Motivation has gained traction among public administration scholars ever since Perry provided a measurement scale to account for the motivation profile of public service employees. However, the PSM as we know it today is primarily the product of western scholarship with its application and research being restricted to developed nations. It has been until recently that its application as a motivating factor has been studied on the public servants of non-western nation states, that too in the countries constituting East Asia. The aim of this paper is to provide for a review of PSM with an emphasis on the role that culture and values of a nation play in shaping the outlook of its public service employees, particularly with respect to their service delivery as agents of the state.

Keywords: Public service motivation, culture, values, non-western states, developing nations

Introduction

Researchers have for long studied the 'antecedents' of public service motivation in order to explain the phenomenon of motivation of public servants better. One of the first to discuss the progenitors of public service motivation was Perry (1997) [19]. Perry identified several factors such as parental socialization, religious socialization, professional identification, political ideology, and demographic characteristics that could have a potential impact on the development of public service motivation later in life.

A similar study was carried out by Vandenabeele (2011) wherein the role of institutions in the creation of a public service ethic was analysed. Vandenabeele begins his research by commenting on the dearth of literature on the origins of public service motivation noting that, "... research has mainly focused on its measurement and its consequences, whereas relatively ignoring its origins. (p. 88)". The study aimed to analyse the antecedents of public service motivation and the role of various institutions in its creation. The term "institutions" here, is an umbrella term encompassing formal and informal social/political structures consisting of family, education, gender, age cohort, political affiliation, and organization for which one works. Citing the works of Camilleri (2007) [9], Bright, (2005), DeHart-Davis, Marlowe, & Pandey, (2006) [10] Vandenabeele confirmed the four-dimensional structure of public service motivation, noting the subtle differences that can be observed on a wider global level. According to the study, the family history and the values within the institution where one works were found to be positively related to public service motivation. Other antecedents included Gender, Age (with older employees exhibiting higher levels of PSM), and Education. The research suggests that public service motivation among public sector employees partly existed before they entered into the services and is partly developed in the services (p. 102). Vandenabeele, thus, concluded that the institutional arrangements (along with their associated

identities and Values) influence the development of public service motivation (p 102).

Another important component in the growing literature on public service motivation pertains to 'institutions' and associated 'values' and the extent to which such variables affect the origin and working of PSM. Vandenabeele explored the differences in public service motivation among public sector employees in United States of America, Netherland, France, Britain and Germany. The thesis takes into account two variables- a) state specificity and b) expectations and role of the public servant. In case of French civil service, amid the background of tumultuous political upheavals and uncertainty the one constant throughout the ages had been the public service. This 'political vacuum' wherein the services operated allowed the civil service to build a strong position within the French society and to fully develop within itself an administrative and technical 'corps' comprising of elite, senior civil servants. What is observed, therefore, is a split between the higher and lower service consequently mirroring in the accompanying division in public values.

The Asian continent presents a fascinating case study for the application of public service motivation and its accompanying dimensions. Since the dimensions are heavily value laden, their application and working as well as the concept of PSM itself depends on the cultural context as well as the socio historical traditions of the concerned country. Many scholars have studied the application of PSM in different Asian countries and the extent to which such dimensions are modified or remain the same. Kim, S. (2009) tested the applicability of Perry's public service motivation and accompanying dimensions as developed in United States of America in the context of Korean civil service. Perry (1996) [18] conceptualised PSM as a multi-dimensional concept and provided four components- Attraction to Policy making (APM), Commitment to public interest (CPI), Compassion (COM) and self-sacrifice (SS). Being heavily value laden, the author underlies the

significance of testing the components across different nationalities and cultural contexts. Commenting upon the cultural context of Korean civil service, the paper highlighted the significance of 'Confucian' values and ideals in Korean society which has shaped the attitudes of public servants as well as the Government itself. A direct result of such a philosophical approach is the fact that the Korean people see themselves not as individualistic 'silos' but rather as a part of an organic whole, hierarchically arranged with familial relations with eternally ordained responsibilities.¹ Within such a structure the government officials hold positions of respect and honour with the services boasting a history of being the most prestigious and honoured profession in Korea. Hassan *et al* (2022) further tested the universality of Perry's scale in Asian Context by testing the scale in public sector universities of Pakistan. Categorized as a developing nation with strong Islamic values and belief systems the cultural context of Pakistan presents a vastly different picture when compared to the environment wherein the concept of PSM was first developed. While the US society is described as homogenous, secular with strong individualistic ideals. Pakistan, however, is a society represented by strong familial value system with overarching subservience to God as is written down in the holy Quran. The bureaucracy in Islamic republic of Pakistan, in its present form, has its origins from the Indian Civil services (ICS) as introduced by Lord Cornwallis during the British rule in the 18th century. Among the changes so introduced the most significant reforms aimed at promotion by seniority, departmentalisation and salary according to corresponding responsibility. In 1912 the doors of the civil service were finally opened to natives of the Indian sub-continent and the foundations of the modern civil service of India as well as Pakistan were formally established. Although the sub-continent was formally partitioned into the twin nation states of India and Pakistan in 1947, the bureaucratic traditions of the two countries, nonetheless, share common legacies. Presented with such different belief systems the core structure of PSM is bound to undergo a certain level of mutation. The article explored how such a variation is manifested and the ways it can be quantified for further research. The paper found that 18 out of Perry's 24 items were applicable in the context of Pakistan, the items that were found to be invalid were from the dimensions of self-sacrifice and Compassion.

National Culture and Values: A Cross- National Framework

One of the major institutional factors affecting the performance of employees across sectors is the culture of the institutions of which he/ she is a part. This in part becomes all the more important when the institution of the nation state is taken into consideration. For the purpose of this paper culture can broadly defined as the 'shared beliefs, customs and way of life of a group of people.' For much of public administration's research the samples have broadly been taken from developed, western states. These states can be broadly classified as secular, capitalistic and individualistic nations with a strong humanistic ideology. PSM as a scholarly subject is no different. Indeed, the birth of the concept as the brain child of Perry took place in the garden of American intellectual movement of early 1990's. It therefore comes as little surprise that the major factors

considered to be antecedents of PSM were based not on normative ethical constructs but as measurable empirical factors (to the extent that a concept such as motivation can be measured). It wasn't until 1997 that these antecedents were even recognized by Perry (1997) ^[19] parental socialization, religious socialization, professional identification, political ideology, and demographic characteristics that could have a potential impact on the development of public service motivation later in life. All these items can be identified as the organisational or state culture and thus need to be investigated further if the nuances of PSM are to be better understood. For a country like India where religion plays a dominant role in society, culture with its accompanying values effect the role of employees in both private and public sector. In this direction, Kim (2015) examined public service motivation as an 'individual'³ variable related to national culture. For this Hofstede's framework (1980) ^[11] is an effective point of reference. According to Hofstede (1984) ^[12] culture can be viewed as, 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one human group from another'. For analysing these differences four Hofstede identified four dimensions related to power, uncertainty avoidance, interpersonal ties, and gender roles. For Hofstede, Power is identified as, 'the extent to which the less powerful people in a society and organizations perceive the equality or inequality of power'. For institutions, power is expressed as the extent to which the subordinates participate in the decision-making process and are able to communicate with their seniors. In case of western nations, the power inequality is perceived to be low and the employees are freely able to express their discontent and/or resentment towards the managerial practices. Conversely, in developing nations like India, the Power inequality is considerably high with rigid hierarchies and an over emphasis on rules. Such a power deficient environment is bound to create dissatisfactions and impact employee motivation. Similarly, if one is to consider the factor of individualism wherein 'each for his/her own' is the dictum, western nations tend to have a higher level of individualism while low income developing nations collectivism tends to prevail. Thus, in India employees tend to be more inclined towards group-oriented behaviour, targetted towards their families, or in case of public servants; their country. Third dimension of Hofstede's theory considers the extent to which the citizens feel threatened by unknown or ambiguous forces. The culture responds by providing stabilising factors viz. career stability, provision of rules, establishment of absolute truths, etc. Societies with high uncertainty avoidance scores include East and Central European countries and Latin countries along with Japan and Germany while they are reported to be lower in English- speaking, Nordic and Chinese countries. With respect to Gender and gender associated roles, 'masculine' society can be viewed as, 'a society wherein challenge, earnings, advancement, and recognition are considered to be more important. Feminine societies are thought to be one wherein social 'gender' roles overlap. In any society, both feminine as well as masculine sets are important, however, while masculine countries strive towards performance, feminine countries are seen to be more oriented towards welfare of the nation as a whole (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010). In words of Kim (2015) we can conclude that PSM for public servants is greatly enhanced in feminine societies.

Conclusion

While research on public service motivation has seen an upward trend in the last few decades, the impact of state-specific factors on PSM remains somewhat restricted. In the article the possible effects of cross-national factors (as given by Hofstede) on PSM are illuminated, however, the implications for developing and lower income countries including India need to be further analysed to truly make the concept holistic and universal.

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