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An Examination of Public Service Motivation in the Voluntary Sector and Related Issues

Abstract

Building on research about the nature of Public Service Motivation (PSM) and its application outside the public sector, the authors provide a qualitative based examination of PSM's relevance to voluntary¹ sector employees. In doing so, they explore how far their motivations and orientations extend beyond those encompassed within current conceptualisations of PSM and whether PSM research can be enriched through the adoption of qualitative methodologies. The findings suggest that PSM accounts for some, but not all, of the motives of voluntary sector employees and lend support to the view that the quantitative bias in PSM research needs to be countered.

Key words

Public service motivation (PSM), voluntary sector, charities, non-profit organizations, voluntary sector ethos

Word count: 7839 (including tables, references, notes)

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Public Service Motivation (PSM) suggests that motivation in the public sector is based on a distinctive set of values, attitudes and behaviours (Perry and Wise 1990; Vandenberghe 2007). Since its origins, PSM research has grown rapidly and it can be argued that the concept has helped to advance understanding of public sector work and public sector workers. However, despite its evident contribution, PSM has become subject to emerging critique and challenge. One particular area of concern has been the appropriateness of applying the concept to other types of work and workers and how this runs the risk of blurring it with more general bases of motivation, such as altruism (Bozeman and Su 2015). This article seeks to engage with this concern by examining how far the motives and orientations of voluntary sector workers (in particular, employees rather than volunteers) align with those encompassed by the notion of PSM.

There is often an assumption that the close operational associations between the public and voluntary sectors mean that PSM must apply to (and may be higher in) those working in the voluntary sector (Perry and Hondeghem 2008). There would appear good *prima facie* grounds for believing this to be the case given the general nature of work in the sector and the degree to which employees in the two sectors interact and cooperate as a result of the outsourcing of public services (James 2011; Office for Civil Society 2010). In addition there are suggestions that those working in both sectors share similar concerns for others and place an emphasis on what they do in their work, over and above the financial reward that they gain (Cunningham 2008). Consequently, an exploration of PSM's relevance to voluntary sector employees offers a valuable means of shedding light on its wider applicability.

The offered analysis further provides a platform from which to engage with a second critique of PSM research, namely its reliance on quantitative research methods and methodologies. Thus, by drawing on qualitative interviews with voluntary sector employees, this article provides an opportunity to explore whether critics are right to take issue with the way in which current research is dominated by a focus on measuring PSM's incidence in different contexts and its relationship to a range of individual and organizational outcomes. This approach therefore acts as a response to calls for more qualitative studies of PSM, which are better able to explore the mechanisms through which PSM effects individual behaviour and attitudes (Perry and Vandenabeele 2015).

The article begins by briefly reviewing the scale and focus of PSM research. This review reflects on twin concerns about the quantitative nature of this research and the issue of the concept's application outside of the public sector, including in relation to the voluntary sector. Details of the reported study of voluntary sector employees are then provided, before attention turns to detailing its findings. These findings suggest that PSM goes some way to explaining the work motivations of voluntary sector employees but that it does not fully account for the specific nuances of work in this sector. The article concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for existing theory and future research.

CONCEPTUALIZING AND RESEARCHING PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION

The original focus of PSM research was to compare motivation in the public and private sectors (Perry and Wise 1990). This was based on a rejection of traditional theories of motivation that emphasized self-interest and goal-orientation as the dominant forces impacting upon behaviour (Perry 2000; Shamir 1991). More recently, PSM has been refined into a multi-dimensional construct (Kim and Vandenabeele 2010) and research has expanded

to consider links between the concept and a wide variety of phenomenon (see Perry, Hondeghem and Wise [2010] and Perry and Vandenabeele [2015] for detailed reviews). For example, many studies have sought to establish causal relationships between PSM and a range of individual outcomes, such as commitment and job satisfaction (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman and Johnson 2005; Taylor 2008), as well as organizational ones, such as organizational performance (Kim 2005; Vandenabeele 2009). More widely, reviews of PSM research have been able to highlight a significant degree of success in its claim to explain the nature and distinctiveness of public sector work or public administration (Perry and Vandenabeele 2015; Ritz, Brewer and Neumann 2016). Indeed, such is the breadth of PSM research that it has become arguably the dominant focus in the study of public sector work and has started to impact areas such as leadership (Wright, Moynihan and Pandey 2012), human resource management (Giauque, Anderfuhren–Biget and Varone 2015) and organizational change (Wright, Christensen and Isett 2013).

The scale of PSM research is undoubtedly impressive. For example, in their meta-analysis Ritz, Brewer and Neumann (2016) identify over 70 different countries where PSM had been examined and found to have some resonance. In a similar vein, researchers have investigated the presence of PSM across a wide range of occupational groups associated with public sector work. Some studies have discovered evidence of PSM amongst specific groups such as health professionals (Andersen 2009), teachers (Andersen, Heinesen and Pedersen 2014), lawyers (Wright and Christensen 2010) and fire-fighters (Lee and Olshfski 2002). In other cases PSM researchers have sought to analyse incidences of PSM across all occupational roles within public sector organizations: in just one study Bright assessed PSM amongst 'medical doctors, building inspectors, community health workers, registered nurses, police officers, management analysts, caseworker ... and engineers' (2008, 153). In addition

to analysing PSM at the occupational level there have also been attempts to broaden its application outside of the public sector by either comparing PSM across sectors (mainly public-private), examining it in the for-profit sector (Liu et al. 2015) or obtaining data on PSM across all sectors without differentiating between them (Ritz, Brewer and Neumann 2016). This has, in turn, led some to argue that PSM is not exclusive to the public sector (Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012; Liu et al. 2015; Moulton and Feeney 2011), moving the concept away from its original focus on government institutions (Brewer, Ritz and Vandenabeele 2012).

While the extent of PSM research is a key strength, the manner in which PSM research has broadened its focus poses some important challenges to its relevance. Most notably it can be argued that, in seeking to establish the breadth of PSM's application, it has begun to lose its claim to describe a distinctive phenomenon (e.g. the work motivations of public sector workers). Therefore, not only does the claim that PSM applies outside of the public sector fit uneasily with its original mission to identify the distinctive nature of motivations in the public sector, but it challenges what Wright and Grant (2010) refer to as contextual-realism, i.e. the ability to identify the specific practices that might explain how PSM can be developed in any given environment. Perhaps even more fundamentally, Bozeman and Su (2015) suggest that in seeking to identify the presence of PSM amongst a range of different groups and contexts it has increasingly struggled to differentiate itself from the concept of altruism and also from other forms of motivation based around the principle of serving others.

An important factor that has driven this widening of PSM research is the domination of quantitative research methods that typically prioritise breadth over depth of understanding.

A large majority of PSM studies use survey-based research, cross-sectional data and statistical analysis (Ritz, Brewer and Neumann 2016). This means that there is an emphasis on issues of measurement and generalizability to wider populations, often at the expense of internal validity (Wright and Grant 2010). Questions of causality have not been resolved in PSM research and there remains significant debate about whether PSM is a dependent or independent variable (or both) (Bozeman and Su 2015; Wright and Grant 2010). These are fundamental questions because they reveal uncertainty about whether PSM emerges from a process of socialization or from an inherent disposition towards public work (Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012; Moynihan and Pandey 2007). To address this there have been intermittent calls for alternative research methods that are better suited to exploring these issues. Both Perry and Vandenabeele (2015) and Bozeman and Su (2015), for example, encourage the greater use of experimental or quasi-experimental work in PSM research as well as arguing that qualitative methods are required to develop the field.

A qualitative examination of the motives of voluntary sector workers can consequently be argued to provide a useful means of engaging with the above concerns regarding the wider applicability of PSM and the way in which it has largely been researched to date. Drawing on work by Mann (2006), amongst others, it has been suggested that a 'seemingly compelling locus for PSM is nonprofit organizations' (Bozeman and Su 2015, 702). Indeed, in some instances the two sectors are treated as largely the same (see Perry 2000), while there is an emerging literature which is moving towards examining PSM or associated topics in the voluntary sector (e.g. Lee and Wilkins 2011; Park and Word 2012; Taylor 2010; Word and Carpenter 2013). These studies often adopt a comparative perspective testing whether PSM, related concepts or behaviours resonate most strongly in the public or voluntary sector.

Alongside this research, it has been argued that employees in the voluntary sector possess a distinct ethos. In particular, the notion of a voluntary sector ethos (VSE) has been put forward to capture the motives that typically inform the worker's presence in the sector and the way in which they go about their work (Cunningham 2008). To date the nature and existence of such an ethos has not been systematically explored. Strikingly, however, the elements that have been argued to form an integral part of it draw on the Public Service Ethos (PSE) (Cunningham 2010), a concept which bears a similarity to the notion of PSM, despite some differences (Rayner et al. 2011). So, in addition to a concern for others as a key work motivator (over and above their salary), as seen in a PSE, Cunningham suggests that a VSE includes a 'philosophical or religious commitment to promote social change, and a desire to have autonomy in work and participation in decision making' (2010, 701). Certainly there would seem grounds to suggest that the four dimensions encapsulated within Kim and Vandenberg's (2010) model of PSM have some resonance in the voluntary sector (see further below). Thus, *Attraction to Public Participation* links directly to the need for voluntary organizations to provide a public benefit (Clark et al. 2009; Word and Park 2009); *Commitment to Public Values* can be seen in the prevalence of equity, sharing and reciprocity within voluntary organizations (Lohmann 1992; Perry et al. 2008); *Compassion* and empathy have been identified amongst volunteers (Clerkin, Paynter and Taylor 2009; Houston 2008); and *Self-Sacrifice* or selfless behaviours can be related to a greater acceptance of lower pay and conditions amongst voluntary sector employees (see Cunningham 2008; Lee and Wilkins 2011).

It must nevertheless be acknowledged that there are grounds for being cautious about too readily assuming similarities about the motivations of public and voluntary sector

workers. Voluntary sector organizations are seen as valuable providers of public services due to their possession of a number of distinctive attributes, including their 'specialized skills and experience' (HM Treasury 2002) their particular ability to develop relationships with users, and their distinctive culture and values (e.g. Cunningham 2001, James 2011). Furthermore, concerns have been expressed about how the competitive outsourcing of public services is impacting on core missions and values within the voluntary organizations (Cunningham and James 2011). Mission drift has been seen to occur as outsourcing moves the voluntary sector away from its claim to provide care to those in need (Clutterbuck and Howarth 2007). Meanwhile, Burt and Scholarios (2011, 105) have suggested that outsourcing has the 'potential to undermine the organizational characteristics and arrangements that are held to make charities uniquely valuable'. Others have gone further such as Greer, Greenwood and Stuart (2011, 155) who claimed that voluntary sector organizations are in danger of 'losing their soul' because their relationship to the public sector is now so fundamental (Davies 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Against the conceptual and empirical backcloth discussed above, the analysis reported below empirically addresses three central questions:

1. To what extent is the notion of PSM relevant to the work motivations and orientations of voluntary sector employees?
2. Do these motivations and orientations extend beyond those encompassed within current conceptualizations of PSM?
3. Is it correct to argue that existing PSM related research can be enriched through the adoption of qualitative, interpretivist methodologies?

In order to address these questions, we have adopted Kim and Vandenberg's (2010) dimensional model of PSM (see table 1 for a summary). This model is derived from a comprehensive analysis of the PSM literature and adopts a broad approach to conceptualizing PSM which accords recognition to the fact that it can derive from processes of rational choice and value-based and affective motives. Under it PSM is viewed as combining three dimensions, Attraction to Public Participation, Commitment to Public Values and Compassion, each of which are underpinned by a fourth, Self-Sacrifice.

[Table 1 here]

The research drawn upon involved thirty five semi-structured interviews across nineteen voluntary sector organizations operating as charities in the UK (see table 2 for more details). Purposive sampling was undertaken to ensure that the research included a range of different types of charities (environment, health, international development, social welfare and youth) and, in line with the nature of the sector itself, significant variations in size of employing organization. Across the sample there was also a variety in terms of career length, and level and type of role. Taken together, these characteristics therefore ensured that we were able to examine the extent to which the PSM dimensions were similar across different contexts and for individuals with different responsibilities and functions.

[Table 2 here]

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the central data collection method because they are consistent with a qualitative research methodology that draws on an interpretivist perspective. This allowed the research to gain an insight into the nuances and complexities of participant's work motivations because interviews of this nature enable 'detailed investigation of each person's personal perspective [and] ... in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomena is located' (Lewis 2003, 58). As outlined above, this is a distinctive approach within PSM based research that has typically prioritised issues of generalizability through a reliance on quantitative research.

To draw out the core features of each participant's work motivation, each interview initially explored the career history of participants, examining their reasons for entering voluntary sector work. Participants were then asked to reflect on the core PSM dimensions and aspects of their work motivations, values and orientations that did not relate to these dimensions. Interviews were approximately one hour in duration and were recorded and transcribed. This data was coded in line with the PSM dimensions outlined above, identifying core recurring themes within each in order to establish commonalities amongst the varied experiences of research participants. This process involved detailed interrogation of the data across numerous readings and this familiarity with the data enabled the themes and sub-themes to be refined in order to better understand attitudes towards PSM.

Before presenting the findings it is important to acknowledge some limitations of the data and sample. Clearly the number of interviewees and organizations forms a small sample of the overall population available. As with most qualitative research, this means that it is necessary to be cautious with regards to generalizability, although the themes identified were,

in the main, well represented across interviewees. Our data is based on UK organizations and so it is not possible to claim that findings will apply in all contexts. Finally, and again in line with the presentation of most qualitative work, illustrative quotes are used to demonstrate each theme – this means that the presentation of the findings, which follows, is by definition selective.

THE RELEVANCE OF PSM TO VOLUNTARY SECTOR EMPLOYEES

In line with the research questions set out above, our initial aim was to examine the extent to which the four core dimensions of PSM resonated with interviewees. In this section each of these is discussed in turn.

Attraction to Public Participation

This aspect of PSM was clearly in evidence amongst our interviewees with many talking about the importance of participating within society and being someone who gets involved in their communities and engages with issues. For example, Oliver explained: 'I try and have a social conscience and find opportunities to engage in things and participate in things'. Some even expressed confusion at why others don't get involved in society:

I find it really hard to understand when people don't show any interest in engaging ...
I'm not sure why you don't get a little nagging at your conscience after a while.
(Ellen)

A desire to participate was also evident in an acute awareness of the challenging issues faced within society. Ben, working in an environmental charity, argued that 'green issues are the challenge that's facing our generation ... if you're socially aware you know that there are some

real issues that we need to deal with'. Interviewees also placed a high value on using their insight to be active, rather than passive, and to practically address such issues. Helen explained how she aimed to help young people 'engage practically with their own communities and participate as global citizens', while Samuel emphasized that he was driven by 'practical responses, doing something'.

More widely, the value of actively participating in society was linked to a sense of responsibility and duty. For example, Mark described being 'a member of the global family' and suggested that 'we've all got a part to play'. This sense of responsibility to participate was also discussed in terms of supporting the vulnerable or those unable to help themselves:

As a society, if we're not taking note of what people need in terms of their suffering or the care they may need, then who else is going to do that? ... If there are vulnerable people who are unable to get that support from their immediate family then there is a responsibility in society to do something. (Isabel)

Commitment to Public Values

As with Attraction to Public Participation, respondents also expressed a strong commitment to a range of public values, at times using very emotive language to discuss them. For example, the importance of transparency and equality were highlighted (as well as a corresponding concern with inequality) and there was also, according to Margaret, a 'horror of corruption'. Interestingly, the focus of attention was not simply on injustices and a lack of accountability within society. Rather, respondents were acutely aware of situations within their employing charities that were not consistent with their values. For example, where senior management did not comply with laid down policies, one interviewee mentioned how

management undertaking overseas trips while instructing employees to reduce travel could 'create shock waves ... and very long lasting repercussions' (Margaret).

Combined with these values, was a clear disposition towards long-term thinking (Kim et al. 2012). Even if interviewees were able to make a difference in someone's life in the short term, they were concerned about the longer-term consequences. For example, Amy discussed 'intergenerational equity' as part of her concern for fairness and justice:

You can't use everything up so that the generations to come are buggered, and also that sense that we, as the developed world, have had it pretty good or at least we've sorted out a lot of the crap, and yet it's impacting on the other side of the world.

Compassion

A disposition to be compassionate towards others is another key dimension of PSM that largely resonated with voluntary sector employees. Interviewees saw themselves as compassionate towards those in difficulty and their colleagues, with those working in health organizations claiming that this was a fundamental value. Indeed, while compassion is normally linked with a concern for other people, even those working in non-client focussed organizations, such as an environmental charity, discussed having compassion for the environment.

At a more specific level, there was a deep concern for individuals and an acute awareness amongst interviewees of the challenges faced by others. In Elisabeth's case she compared this with her own situation:

I lie in bed and think my bed's really comfortable and it's quiet and [I think about] how many people don't have a comfy bed and they're lying there lonely and don't have any hope and you suddenly feel a connection and a responsibility to respond which comes from that.

At the same time, interviewees raised some concerns with the notion of compassion. For example, Joseph argued that it could be patronising whereas others felt that compassion should drive action and that it was 'meaningless' to have an 'emotional reaction' without being moved to do something (Helen).

Self-Sacrifice

As highlighted above, self-sacrifice is used by Kim and Vandenaabeele (2010) as a broader dimension which effectively underpins PSM. In our study there were two distinct views related to making sacrifices. First, there were respondents who felt they made a variety of sacrifices in areas including remuneration, career and reputation, and health. For example, a number of individuals discussed the financial sacrifices that they made, including a lower salary in comparison to work in other sectors. Relatedly, a number of interviewees discussed how they had moved into the voluntary sector from secure jobs in other sectors and had therefore sacrificed careers and reputation in making these choices. James, who had worked in the public sector, explained that:

I'd been promoted [in the public sector] and then six months later left to join [the charity] which, for my family, was the height of folly. I was [previously] in a safe job, could have been there for forty years, retired at sixty.

Interviewees further talked about how long hours and the intensity of their work had led to physical or health-related self-sacrifice. A number of interviewees described being exhausted, while Jennifer explained how she had been 'masochistic' with her health in the way she had worked in a previous charity.

A second theme to emerge in relation to self-sacrifice was the uneasiness that a number of those interviewed felt with regard to its applicability to them. Some felt that they were 'lucky' and 'privileged' (Emma) and that they were gaining something from working in the voluntary sector, even if they were also making a sacrifice. For example, Mark had taken a pay cut to work in the sector, but had gained the opportunity for flexible working to enable him to undertake childcare. In a similar vein others set the enjoyment that they gained from their work, or the opportunity to do something that they were committed to, against any perceived sacrifice. Indeed, for some, the idea of sacrifice made little sense as the things that they had given up were not considered important. For example, Joseph, recognised that others with a different worldview may see that he had given up a large salary and a certain way of life but that this was simply not important for him. Similarly, Ellen said:

I recognise that I probably could have taken a career path that might have been more lucrative by now, but I've never wanted to, so it doesn't feel like I've sacrificed anything by not going down that route. I think you can only say that you are being self-sacrificial if you have given up something you actually wanted in the first place.

In other cases, the fact that they had chosen to work in this sector, meant that some interviewees felt they could not describe what they did as a sacrifice. When they also compared their situation with others then, as Samuel who had previously lived in a remote

community in Africa explained, 'in comparison to those people I'm not being self-sacrificial at all'.

GOING BEYOND PSM

The evidence from the study presented thus far indicates that, in general, the four core dimensions of PSM resonated with voluntary sector employees. However, in line with our research questions, we explored with interviewees whether they had alternative ways of encapsulating their work ethos. In this section we discuss three further themes that emerged from the interviews undertaken.

A Belief in a Cause

For many interviewees, the desire to make a difference and contribute to society in some way went hand in hand with a belief in a cause. Respondents were able to clearly articulate these causes, which often included such things as helping the poor overseas, working with disadvantaged young people, helping adults suffering from cancer, and protecting the environment.

These identified causes were often reported to have provided the impetus behind choosing to work for a particular charity. Robert, for instance, explained that he 'wanted to work for either a children's health charity or a social, homeless charity'. In a similar vein, Ben described how, when he took the decision to move out of the private sector, he was open to working in various charities, but that the:

Number one thing that I wanted above anything else, my holy grail, would have been a job for an environmental charity. If one of those came up I would be just so over the moon.

For most, the cause was more important than the organizations in which they worked, and served to override other employment factors. Moreover, the cause remained important to respondents beyond their ability to actually achieve change. They described the very challenging and demoralising circumstances in which they worked and, in this, also demonstrated high levels of resilience:

[It] can be quite frustrating because at the end of the day we're at the mercy of this massive system and there isn't masses I can do a lot of the time. (Jennifer)

You've got to be able to be knocked back, because everything you do is only a little step towards the next and sometimes it feels like a finger in the dyke. (Amy)

Indeed, interviewees' high levels of passion for the cause appeared to enable them to continue working within such circumstances.

A Holistic Focus

An additional theme to emerge from the data was that interviewees took a holistic view of their context. This often involved attaching equal importance to the individual (or user), their immediate community, and global concerns, and were able to hold these in tension with one another. For example, interviewees' attention to individual value and significance was discussed in terms of clients or beneficiaries, as well as colleagues and employees. Not only

was every individual viewed as important, interviewees emphasised the need to actually articulate this value, such as through expressing appreciation for volunteers or in the way in which Susanna described talking to asylum seeker clients:

I think there's real value in saying, actually, we're on your side and we want to see you do well. Even if [the things you're facing] can't get sorted out, you're still worth something, ... we know you exist and you're here and you're important.

Interviewees further expressed a broader concern for relationships with others in their community. As Joseph explained: '[It's about] trying to understand who am I linked to and what impact are my actions, or inactions, going to have on those people'. In addition interviewees described the importance of being part of a work community and many interviewees referred to their organization as a family:

The community of the organization has always been important, the sense of family, the sense of connectedness, the sense of being a community, sense of relational ... [people] say that it's a different kind of place to work, it's more like a family ... and that is important to people. (Anna)

In addition to the emphasis on individuals and community, interviewees completed this holistic focus by locating themselves within a bigger story of humanity. As we saw above, Amy saw herself as having a responsibility to future generations, while Susanna explained how, when talking to a friend about how stressed she was, she compared herself to others:

I said ... it could be worse, I could be stuck in a container in a Libyan desert trying to get away from Eritrea, I could be on a dingy going from Greece to Italy and being one of the people who gets knocked overboard and the boat doesn't stop for'.

In many respects this holistic focus builds on the PSM dimensions of compassion and self-sacrifice identified above because it often required interviewees to make comparisons with others. Indeed, it appeared to often require an ongoing iterative analysis in which their concern for individuals, communities and global issues led to a near constant reflection and evaluation of themselves and their context.

An Oppositional Identity

A final theme to emerge from the analysis was that interviewees consistently described themselves as being different to a variety of 'others'. This could include their families, suggesting that they were the 'black sheep', or that they were taking the 'less traditional' pathway compared to siblings. They also highlighted differences between themselves and friends or former colleagues, explaining how they needed to believe in what their employer was doing rather than being paid for work that they may not enjoy. They also believed that they were seen as different or 'mad' by their friends, families, and former colleagues.

Combined with this feeling of difference, interviewees described how they were opposed to things. An element of rebellion against expectations was highlighted by Chloe, who suggested that her colleagues were rebelling against middle class expectations of becoming a banker, lawyer or doctor. Rebellion sat alongside a desire to challenge the status quo and those in authority, as Patricia explained: '[People in the voluntary sector are] a bit more free thinking and therefore are prepared to stand up for things'.

A clear object of interviewees' opposition was the private sector and those who worked within it. Private sector employees were characterised as 'cut-throat' by Barbara, while the organizations were described as viewing employees as 'just a number' by Emma. Metaphors such as 'a dog eat dog world' (Kim) and 'the dark side' (Chloe) were also employed by interviewees in their discussion of the private sector. Another object of interviewees' opposition was money, with some expressing their disinterest either simply in money itself or in making money. This attitude was, at times, linked to views of the private sector, as Emma explained: 'When you're working in a big corporate organization they don't care and ... they're just money making and that's all they're interested in'. In particular, interviewees were opposed to shareholder profits and either 'lining someone else's pocket' and 'feed[ing] some millionaire' (Maria) or being part of an organization that existed to make money:

This is where my efforts will help the community rather than just help increase the share price for shareholders. (Doug)

DISCUSSION

The findings from our study suggest that PSM does resonate amongst voluntary sector employees. Our respondents, as detailed above, broadly confirmed the relevance of each of the four key dimensions of PSM set out by Kim and Vandenabeele (2010) (attraction to public participation, commitment to public values, compassion and self-sacrifice) to their decisions to work in the voluntary sector and also, at times, the particular types of organizations they choose to work in. In providing this confirmation, their responses also lend some weight to those who argue that there are similarities in the work motivations

and orientations of public and voluntary sector workers and to the view that the notion of PSM can potentially be of relevance beyond the public sector.

At the same time, however, by showing that they possess motivations that extend beyond PSM, the findings also indicate that these PSM dimensions do not adequately account for the motives and orientations of voluntary sector workers. These additional motives encompassed a belief in a specific cause; a holistic understanding of their surrounding social environment; and an oppositional perspective or identity. Taken together, these elements suggest that participants were engaged in a form of identity work in which they used a *belief in a mission or cause*, a *holistic worldview* and an *oppositional identity* to assert a 'narrative of the self' (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft and Thomas 2008; Gergen and Gergen 1997). As demonstrated above, rejecting or even rebelling against private sector values meant that voluntary sector work was presented as the inevitable option for many participants – i.e. they claimed to have few alternatives to undertaking work that allowed them to properly express their oppositional identity. In addition, a belief in a specific cause meant that the type of work or the employing organization had to be carefully chosen in order to be consistent with the individual's identity.

Given the nature of the research undertaken, it remains uncertain how far these additional motivational elements are unique to voluntary sector workers and whether they therefore lend support to the idea of a voluntary sector ethos (Cunningham 2008). Thus, it may well be that they are of relevance to those working in the public sector but that existing quantitative based research has lacked the sensitivity required to identify them. If this is the case, the obtained findings not only point to the need to further refine current understandings of what motivates public sector workers but also cautions against overly stating the potential

for their motivations to be similar to those working for private organizations. The notion of an 'oppositional identity', for example, would appear unlikely to loom large in the latter's motivations. If, however, these additional elements of a belief in a cause, a holistic worldview and an oppositional identity are not relevant to public sector workers, there is clear scope for exploring and developing the idea of a voluntary sector ethos.

The above findings and uncertainty would seem to have potentially important implications for how PSM is conceptualized and future research relating to it is designed. They raise, for example, the possibility that existing formulations of the concept may be too broad to capture the specific nuances of work motivations in other contexts or, indeed, to fully capture those of public sector workers. They also lend support in two ways to those that argue that the current understanding of PSM could be usefully refined through the placing of less reliance on survey based methods (Bozeman and Su 2015). Firstly, by raising a concern that existing quantitative approaches may be failing to identify particular motives and the nuances surrounding them. Secondly, by showing how the motives of workers can themselves be a product of a broader sense of self-identity and hence pointing to how an understanding of them can be potentially enriched by establishing connections between research undertaken in the fields of work motivations and identities, a process that itself would seem to be most productively pursued through qualitative based studies.

The presented findings also have potential implications for those that lead and manage voluntary organizations. Thus, at one level, they suggest that many of those working in the sector are driven by potentially highly supportive values that could be productively harnessed, by leaders and managers, to further organizational missions. A feature that in turn points to the value of voluntary organizations adopting approaches to recruitment and

selection that are well suited to identify those possessing them. At another level, however, the findings highlight that a failure to establish and protect an adequately alignment between these values and human resource strategies and practices, relating for example to rewards, may well engender motivational problems. Finally, while it is possible to use the concept of PSM to understand how employees may behave in the public sector, managers should also be cautious in assuming it provides a comprehensive explanation.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the relevance of the notion of PSM to the work motives and orientations of voluntary sector employees. It has, in doing so, additionally shed light on how far they extend beyond those encompassed within current conceptualizations of PSM and whether PSM related research can be enriched through the adoption of qualitative, interpretivist methodologies.

The study's findings suggest that the dimensions of PSM distinguished by Kim and Vandenberg (2010) are of considerable relevance to voluntary sector employees. They also, though, indicate that their motives and orientations are informed by a number of other identity-related considerations. How far this variation reflects differences in the motivations of public and voluntary sector motivations, as opposed to a failure of previous quantitative based research to identify them, has unfortunately necessarily been left unclear. This uncertainty has been argued to point to the need for current research on PSM to be supplemented by the undertaking of qualitative studies that are better placed to obtain a more rounded understanding of the nature of PSM, as well as its relevance to workers outside of the public sector.

Notes

1 The term 'voluntary' sector is used throughout this article due to its common use within the UK context. However, this term is considered to be interchangeable with the term 'nonprofit' sector, more commonly used in US contexts.

Table 1: PSM dimensions based on Kim and Vandenberg (2010, 703)

PSM Dimensions	
Attraction to Public Participation	Disposition ‘to working in the public sector, participating in the policy process and community activities, participating in activities for social development ... in order to do good for others and society’.
Commitment to Public Values	Disposition to pursue public values which ‘may include public interest, social responsibility, democracy, social equity, fairness, social justice, neutrality and accountability’.
Compassion	Identify ‘with others, such as vulnerable people, the disadvantaged, the public, community, society, country’.
Self-Sacrifice	‘Willingness to substitute service to others for tangible personal rewards’.

Table 2: Interviewee and organizational characteristics

Pseudonym	Sector	Organization Size (Workforce)	Beneficiary Facing?
Amy	Environment	100-500	No
Ben	Environment	100-500	No
Maria	Environment	100-500	No
Samuel	Environment	100-500	Yes
Andrew	Health	100-500	No
Barbara	Health	50-100	No
Emma	Health	50-100	No
Eve	Health	0-50	Yes
Isabel	Health	50-100	Some
Lucy	Health	50-100	No
Olivia	Health	50-100	No
Robert	Health	100-500	No
Anna	International	0-50	No
Chloe	International	500-1000	Some
Elisabeth	International	0-50	No
Helen	International	1000-5000	No
Kathryn	International	1000-5000	Some
Kim	International	500-1000	Some
Laura	International	1000-5000	No

Margaret	International	500-1000	No
Mark	International	500-1000	No
Sophie	International	1000-5000	No
William	International	1000-5000	No
Doug	Social Welfare	1000-5000	No
Jennifer	Social Welfare	0-50	Yes
Joseph	Social Welfare	0-50	Yes
Patricia	Social Welfare	0-50	Yes
Susanna	Social Welfare	0-50	Yes
Ellen	Youth	500-1000	Some
James	Youth	0-50	No
Jill	Youth	100-500	No
Joanne	Youth	0-50	Yes
John	Youth	0-50	No
Oliver	Youth	500-1000	Some
Paul	Youth	500-1000	No

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