

**Examining Public Service Motivation in the Voluntary Sector: Implications for Public Management**

**A submission to Public Management Review**

**Louisa Lapworth (corresponding author)**

Department of Business and Management

Business School

Oxford Brookes University

Headington Campus

Oxford, OX3 0BP

Email: [louisalapworth@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:louisalapworth@brookes.ac.uk)

**Philip James**

Department of Leadership, Work and Organisation

Middlesex University

The Burroughs

Hendon

London, NW4 4BT

Email: [p.w.james@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:p.w.james@mdx.ac.uk)

**Nick Wylie**

Faculty of Business and Law

Coventry University

Jaguar Building, Room 10

Priory Street

Coventry, CV1 5FB

Email: [nick.wylie@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:nick.wylie@coventry.ac.uk)

### **Notes on authors**

Louisa Lapworth is Senior Lecturer in Business and Management at Oxford Brookes University. Her research interests include motivation and human resource management in the voluntary sector.

Philip James is Professor of Employment Relations at Middlesex University. He has published on a wide variety of employment-related issues. His current research interests include the employment effects of public service outsourcing, and labour standards in both domestic and global supply chains.

Nick Wylie is Principal Lecturer in HRM at Coventry University (UK). His interests are in the changing role of management and the HR function and in particular the role of the internal consultant.

# **Examining Public Service Motivation in the Voluntary Sector: Implications for Public Management**

## **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 voluntary sector employees. In doing so, they explore how far their motivations 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 indicate that public sector managers involved in outsourcing public services need to be sensitive to their distinctive features.

## **Key words**

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

**Word count:** 7787 (including tables, notes but excluding references)

## 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 has helped to advance understanding of public sector work, public sector workers and public management more broadly. 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 how this risks blurring PSM 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 employees (rather than volunteers) align with PSM<sup>1</sup>.

The focus on both PSM and the role of the voluntary sector acknowledges that each have become increasingly significant within Public Management research. Interest in the voluntary sector has become more acute given the involvement of public managers in the outsourcing of services to non-profit organisations (Brandsen and Pestoff 2006) whereas PSM has been used to explore some of the underlying logics within Public Management (Meyer et al. 2014). Drawing the two areas together reflects an assumption that PSM must apply to those working in the voluntary sector because of the extensive role they play in the delivery of public services (Osborne 2006; Perry and Hondeghem 2008). In fact, there would appear good *prima facie* grounds for believing this to be the case given the general nature of work in the voluntary sector and the degree to which employees in the two sectors interact and cooperate given the outsourcing of public services (James 2011; Office for Civil Society 2010). In addition organizations in both sectors have important commonalities in terms of their core purpose, their relationships with various external stakeholders, and the challenges

of assessing the impact of their work (Lee 2012). In line with this, there are suggestions that those working in the two sectors share similar concerns for the well-being of others and place a relatively high importance on what they do in their work, compared with the financial rewards that they gain (Cunningham 2008). Given these similarities the voluntary sector can be argued to provide a highly appropriate context in which to explore the broader applicability and specific nuances of PSM, as well as its broader relevance to public sector managers involved in overseeing the delivery of services by organisations located in the sector.

Such an analysis further provides a platform from which to engage with a second concern with PSM research, namely its domination by quantitative research methods and methodologies (Koumenta 2011). Thus, by drawing on semi-structured interviews with voluntary sector employees, the article contrasts with studies that focus on statistically measuring PSM's incidence in different contexts and its relationship to a range of individual and organizational outcomes. This allows us to respond to recent calls for more qualitative studies of PSM that are better able to explore the mechanisms through which PSM effects individual behaviour and attitudes (Perry and Vandenabeele 2015; Wright 2008; Wright and Grant 2010).

The analysis that follows therefore 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. How far do these motivations and orientations extend beyond the elements encompassed within current conceptualizations of PSM?

3. Can existing PSM related research be enriched through the adoption of qualitative methodologies?

In seeking to answer these questions while drawing on wider debates in Public Management, we begin by briefly reviewing the relevance of PSM to public management and the scale and focus of PSM research, paying particular attention to its quantitative nature and the issue of the concept's application outside of the public 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 the sector. The article concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for existing theory and future research into PSM, as well as for management practice in both the voluntary and public sectors.

## **PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION**

A central contention in this article is that theoretical and policy developments have reinforced the need for the study of Public Management to incorporate insights and understanding of other sectors involved in the delivery of public services. For example, at a theoretical or conceptual level, definitions of related domains such as New Public Service (Denhardt and Denhardt 2011) and Public Value Governance (Bryson, Crosby and Bloomberg 2014) explicitly incorporate a role for non-profit or third sector organisations and perspectives. More specifically examining PSM's applicability in the voluntary sector engages with debates within Public Management about the dominance of the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm (Diefenbach 2009; Osborne 2006 & 2017; Osborne et al. 2015). These challenges have focussed on NPM's central objective of reforming public service

organisations (PSOs) through the application of private sector techniques and values, such as an emphasis on managerial efficiency and cost reductions (Radnor and Osborne 2013). Thus, it has been argued that while NPM has led to some efficiency gains in PSOs, it has also diminished their long-term sustainability and ability to adapt to a complex and changing environment (Osborne et al. 2015). As a result, those advocating alternatives to NPM have suggested that there is a need to reaffirm a service rather than product-based logic which acknowledges the distinctive features of PSOs, such as their reliance on end-users to co-create value (Osborne 2017; Osborne et al. 2015).

This suggests that if public managers are to embrace the implications of the conceptual shift away from NPM then they need to engage with PSM as one means of assessing the prevalence of these service logics. Moreover, given the on-going policy of outsourcing or devolving public services it would also seem clear that this engagement needs to extend beyond those in traditional public sector roles to incorporate *all* individuals and organisations engaged in delivering public services. Indeed, outsourcing means that public sector managers are increasingly required to effectively ‘steer’ the delivery of such services through others (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). This is arguably particularly the case when processes of competitive tendering have created situations whereby public bodies remain accountable for this delivery while being reliant on the work of those employed by outside organisations. Deciding whether, and to whom, services should be outsourced has become an increasingly complex part of the role of many public managers (Girth et al. 2012). It is also important to note that this complexity applies not only in the UK, where there is a long-standing commitment to engaging the services of the voluntary sector (Kelly 2007), but in many other countries where there is evidence of a blurring between the public and voluntary or non-profit sectors (see Baines et al. 2014; Brandsen and Pestoff 2006; Evans, Richmond

and Shields 2005). Consequently, although our empirical focus is on the UK, an assessment which sheds light on the potential (or otherwise) for PSM to act as a universal measure of appropriate public service-based logics can make a significant contribution to the theory and practice of Public Management internationally.

### **PSM AS A UNIVERSAL MEASURE?**

Since its origins as a concept PSM has been utilised to suggest that those working in the public sector tend to place relatively greater weight on doing work that contributes to society (Grant 2008; Rainey and Steinbauer 1999). As such the universal application of PSM across a wide range of work associated with public service delivery has been a consistent theme within the PSM literature 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 performance (Kim 2005; Vandenabeele 2009). 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 has been examined and found to have some resonance. Researchers have also investigated the presence of PSM across a wide range of occupational groups associated with public sector work, including 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).

In terms of the operationalization of PSM, early work saw PSM as multi-dimensional and underpinned by rational, normative and affective motivations (Perry and Wise, 1990). In one of the most widely cited studies of PSM Perry (1996) suggested that it was a four-dimensional construct made up of attraction to policy making, commitment to public interest, compassion and self-sacrifice. More recently, Kim and Vandenabeele (2010) developed a refined version of PSM in an attempt to address problems identified with the measurement scale reliability and validity of Perry's model (e.g. Clerkin and Cogburn 2012), the length of its supporting measurement instrument (Kim et al. 2013; Perry and Vandenabeele 2015), and its application outside of the US. This model draws on alternative forms of motivation

(instrumental, value-based and identification) and suggests that PSM represents attraction to public participation, commitment to public values, compassion and self-sacrifice. Significantly, this model has not only met with general approval as an appropriate measure (Kim et al. 2013) but is claimed to be 'a *universal* construct that can be used globally and that is likely to generate cumulative knowledge' (Kim and Vandenabeele 2010, 702, *emphasis added*). Of course for this claim to universality to apply (given the developments in Public Management outlined above), the model's constituent dimensions must not be exclusive to the public sector and PSM as a whole must be broadly understood as a relative concept that is likely to resonate more or less strongly in particular contexts. That said, universal models such as Kim and Vandenabeele's have stimulated a concern that in seeking to establish the breadth of PSM's application, the concept loses its claim to describe a distinctive phenomenon (e.g. the work motivations of public sector workers) or to attain 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. It has similarly prompted Bozeman and Su (2015) to suggest that it is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate PSM 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) and hence place an emphasis on issues of measurement and generalizability to wider populations, often at the expense of internal validity (Wright and Grant 2010). Such surveys have, however, left questions of causality unresolved and prompted significant debate about whether PSM is a dependent or

independent variable (or both) (Bozeman and Su 2015; Wright and Grant 2010). It consequently remains unclear whether PSM emerges from a process of socialization or from an inherent disposition towards public work (Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012; Moynihan and Pandey 2007) and hence whether such motivation is a stable or dynamic trait that can evolve and change under the influence of organisational level factors (see e.g. Belle 2012). Again, establishing a clear position on these debates is difficult if there is a reliance on cross-sectional survey data and so there have been intermittent calls for alternative research methods to be adopted in the study of PSM. Both Perry and Vandenabeele (2015) and Bozeman and Su (2015) have, for example, encouraged the greater use of experimental or quasi-experimental work in PSM research as well as arguing that qualitative methods need to be more widely employed. In fact, experimental methodological approaches have recently been employed in several PSM related studies (see e.g. Belle 2012; Grant 2008) allowing a clearer picture to emerge around some of these issues. For example, using experimental methods, Belle (2012) found evidence of the dynamic nature of PSM and how it can be shaped specifically by exposure to end-users and also self-referral.

A qualitative examination of the motives of voluntary sector workers can be argued to provide a useful means of engaging with these 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, if we look more broadly, *Attraction to Public Participation* can be identified to link 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 associated with 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 has been related to a greater acceptance of lower pay and conditions amongst voluntary sector employees (see Cunningham 2008; Lee and Wilkins 2011). Certainly, in some instances the voluntary and public 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 and its component dimensions resonates most strongly in the public or voluntary sector. In some cases these attempts have sought to specify PSM models that apply solely in the voluntary sector, although this can take the form of simply refining PSM dimensions. For example, Word and Carpenter (2013) replace 'commitment to public service' with 'commitment to community service' and remove 'attraction to policy making' in their study. However, given the potential significance to Public Management of PSM as a universal measure and the extent to which it has been more widely tested, our focus is on evaluating the adequacy of Kim and Vandenabeele's (2010) PSM model as a means of capturing motivations in the voluntary sector.

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 (Lee 2012), and the (relative) application of the different PSM dimensions to them. 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 undermining the core missions and values of voluntary organizations (Cunningham 2008; Cunningham and James 2011). For these reasons, an exploration of how far PSM applies within the voluntary sector would seem particularly timely. If PSM is not adequate to explain the motives and orientations of voluntary sector employees, this would suggest that there is indeed something distinctive about them. Insofar as this is the case, it in turn carries potential implications for their effective management.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In order to address the research questions introduced above, we adopted Kim and Vandenberg's (2010) improved dimensional model of PSM (see table 1 for a summary). As identified above, this model is derived from a comprehensive analysis of the PSM literature and conceptualises PSM as combining four dimensions, Attraction to Public Participation, Commitment to Public Values and Compassion, each of which are underpinned by Self-Sacrifice.

[Table 1 here]

The setting for the research was the UK, which has a long and significant history of voluntary sector involvement in society (Kendall and Knapp 1996). Latest figures from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations show that within the UK there are around 166,000 charities working in a range of areas and employing almost 860,000 people – a workforce that is bolstered by the 14.2 million people who formally volunteer at least once a

month (NCVO 2016 and 2017).

The research described here 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. All those interviewed were salaried employees, rather than volunteers and there was also a variety in terms of career length, and level and type of role. Taken together, these characteristics 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]

Our approach was informed by an interpretivist or constructivist epistemology in which priority is given to how participants perceive their work motivations. To remain consistent with this perspective semi-structured interviews were chosen as the central data collection method in order to undertake a '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, interviews 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 as well as aspects of their work motivations, values and orientations that did not relate to these dimensions. This meant that our approach combined both a deductive element in which we sought to assess Kim and Vandenberg's (2010) pre-existing model of PSM, and an inductive approach where we aimed to develop understanding and insight based on a more open set of interview questions (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). Although qualitative work typically prioritises inductive processes, our stated objective of examining PSM in the voluntary sector meant that a deductive element was appropriate in this instance. This allowed us to more systematically examine PSM dimensions with each participant, whilst also benefitting from the opportunity to explore in greater detail other motivational factors during each interview.

Our analytical approach also reflected the combined deductive and inductive approach through the use of template analysis. This is a flexible form of thematic analysis in which a coding template is developed at an early stage in the analytical process, thereby allowing for the inclusion of more deductive or *a priori* themes to be applied to the full data set (Brooks et al. 2015; King 2012). Template analysis also allows for the later inclusion of additional (inductive) themes based on a close reading of the data, which in our case supported the identification of additional motivations that could not be explained by PSM dimensions. Hence, based on a detailed interrogation of the data across numerous readings, we initially coded our data in line with a template drawn from the four PSM dimensions to evaluate the extent to which these resonated with voluntary sector employees. We then extended the

template to add additional themes based on an analysis of data which could not be coded into the existing template and PSM dimensions.

Before presenting the findings it is important to acknowledge some limitations of the data and sample, common to much qualitative research. Clearly the number of interviewees and organizations forms a small sample of the overall population available. Also, 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, which means that the presentation of the findings that 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 Vandenabeele (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, for example 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. As detailed above, our respondents broadly confirmed the relevance of each of

the four key dimensions of PSM (Kim and Vandenabeele, 2010) to their decisions to work in the voluntary sector and also, at times, the particular types of organizations in which they choose to work. These 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 elements of PSM are of relevance beyond the public sector. Moreover, while this research was conducted within the UK, the fact that PSM is exhibited within a range of international contexts (Vandenabeele and Van de Walle 2008) and the universal claims of the Kim and Vandenabeele (2010) model would suggest that these findings may extend beyond the UK.

At the same time, by showing that they possess motivations that extend beyond PSM, the findings also indicate that PSM dimensions do not comprehensively account for the motives and orientations of voluntary sector employees. 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 sought to use these specific dimensions 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.

These additional motives identified indicate some support for the related notion of a voluntary sector ethos; defined by Cunningham (2010, 701) as a ‘philosophical or religious commitment to promote social change, and a desire to have autonomy in work and participation in decision making’. More specifically, by identifying motives not captured by PSM models, the study demonstrates that attempts to explain motivations in the sector must extend beyond reformulations of PSM dimensions. At the same time, given the nature of the research described here, it is necessary to be cautious as to how far these additional elements can be claimed to be unique to voluntary sector employees. Thus it may well be that the identified elements are of relevance to those working in the public sector but that existing quantitative based PSM research has lacked the sensitivity required to identify them. This would therefore point to a limitation with PSM and the possibility that there may be a need to consider extending the dimensions contained within PSM. Insofar as this is the case, the obtained findings therefore point to the need to further refine current understandings of what motivates public sector workers. 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 distinct voluntary sector ethos.

The study’s findings consequently have potentially important implications for how PSM is conceptualized and researched in the future. For example, as mentioned above, they raise the possibility that, despite claims to universality, existing formulations of the concept may be insufficient to fully capture specific work motivations of all groups associated with the delivery of public services. They also lend support in two ways to those who argue that the current understanding of PSM could be usefully refined by reducing reliance on survey based methods (e.g. Bozeman and Su 2015). Firstly, the findings raise a concern that existing quantitative approaches may be unlikely to identify particular motives and the nuances

surrounding them. Secondly, they show how the motives of workers can themselves be a product of a broader sense of self-identity and hence point 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.

Our analysis also has potential implications for those that lead and manage voluntary organizations and, by extension, Public Managers involved in commissioning voluntary organizations. Following Belle (2012), our findings also indicate that some motivational dimensions, including those associated with PSM, are dynamic in nature. This suggests that voluntary sector organisations can foster and develop important values amongst employees through the adoption of supportive management practices, including the facilitation of staff contacts with intended service beneficiaries (Belle 2012; Grant 2008), the adoption of participative and empowering modes of working, the creation of equitable pay structures and visible and consistent commitment to the organization's mission. Indeed, our findings indicate that in some cases a failure to establish and protect an adequate alignment between these values and human resource strategies and practices, relating for example to rewards, can potentially engender motivational problems. That said it is important to note that some aspects of motivation were evident amongst individuals prior to seeking work within the voluntary or public sectors, meaning that PSM constitutes both a dependent and independent variable (Wright and Grant 2010), and that attention should also be given to recruiting employees with high levels of PSM and other identified values.

As mentioned above, there are also implications for public management. First, the findings suggest that developing an insight and understanding of PSM is important for Public

Managers as a means of evaluating those who seek to take on responsibility for public service delivery. In commissioning the delivery of public services from voluntary organizations, public bodies should have regard to the importance of the values identified, both when selecting those to deliver services and when adopting approaches towards their monitoring and supervision. For example, in relation to the former, such bodies could usefully pay attention to how far those bidding for contracts or grants appear to both seek and possess staff with values of this type and to adopt management approaches that are likely to support and/or encourage them. Second, and more widely, PSM and the apparent overlap in the motivations of public and voluntary workers may support attempts to move away from managerial strategies based around the values of New Public Management to ones that place a greater emphasis on service logics and the co-creation of value between PSOs and end-users (Osborne 2017). Thus, we might speculate that the pursuit of such logics and value creation may be more viable and sustainable where the range of work motivations and orientations identified here are present in PSOs and voluntary sector organisations. However, whilst our findings point to some possibilities in this emerging area of public management, more research is required to develop these potential implications. Nonetheless, greater cross-fertilisation between PSM and debates in public management theory would seem to present an interesting avenue for future PSM research, although this may require a continued willingness to adopt alternative methodologies more in line with those presented here.

## **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 methodologies.

The study's findings suggest that the dimensions of PSM identified 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, its position within the study of public management, and 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 Vandenabeele (2010, 703)**

<b>PSM Dimensions</b>	
<b>Attraction to Public Participation</b>	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’.
<b>Commitment to Public Values</b>	Disposition to pursue public values which ‘may include public interest, social responsibility, democracy, social equity, fairness, social justice, neutrality and accountability’.
<b>Compassion</b>	Identify ‘with others, such as vulnerable people, the disadvantaged, the public, community, society, country’.
<b>Self-Sacrifice</b>	‘Willingness to substitute service to others for tangible personal rewards’.



**Table 2: Interviewee and organizational characteristics**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Organization Size (Workforce)</b>	<b>Beneficiary Facing?</b>
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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