Abstract

“Trumpism” and Its Impact on Local Public Service Motivation: An Institutional Perspective

By

Sajjad Haider and Douglas F. Morgan¹

Abstract

We use the phrase “Trumpism” as a placeholder for a variety of antigovernment forces at the national and local levels that have made it harder and perhaps less satisfying to undertake a public service career. This paper draws from regime theory and institutional theory to explore how public service motivation (PSM) is affected by a combination of institutional autonomy and the community culture or sense of place within which public employees live and undertake their public service work. The framework is used to explain why PSM of 25 local career administrators interviewed for this study has not been adversely impacted by a combination of political attacks on public institutions, legal limitations on taxing and governing authority and larger global forces of change. The article concludes that high levels of institutional autonomy and embeddedness of local governing bodies in the community provide career administrators with greater ability to maintain high levels of autonomous public service identity. The purpose of this identity differs by gender. Women associate their PSM with building a better community, while men associate their PSM with preserving and perpetuating the principles, structures and processes of democratic governance.

¹ Communicating author for questions and further information.
“Trumpism” and Its Impact on Local Public Service Motivation: An Institutional Perspective

This paper explores the role of local governing institutions in sustaining public service motivation (hereafter PSM). Most all of the empirical research on PSM assesses various antecedents that may affect the motivation of individuals to serve in public sector organizations, but to date there are no empirical studies that explore the institutional (in contrast to organizational) enabling conditions that are associated with sustaining high levels of PSM. In the sections that follow we first describe what we mean by an “institutional” approach to the study of PSM, why this approach matters and why we have focused on local government institutions. Second, we review the literature on PSM that is most directly relevant to the specific research questions that are the object of this study. Third, we describe the design and methodology of our study. Fourth, we discuss our findings and their implications for future research.

An Institutional Perspective on PSM Research Studies: What is an Institutional Perspective, Does it Matter and Why Focus on Local Government?

What is an institutional versus an organizational approach to PSM?

Studies of PSM have focused on a variety of organizational factors that are related to high PSM, such as job/grade, job tenure, place of work, organizational tenure, human resource management practices, organizational culture, and red tape. But these organization-related factors are not to be confused with institutional influences. We use the term *institution* in the conventional way it is used by
institutional theorists (Scott 2008, DiMaggio and Powell 1990, 1-38; Selznick 1990, chapter 9). Institutions are social structures and processes that have attained a high degree of stability, resilience and legitimacy. In their most developed form, institutions acquire legal status and authority. Institutions are valued not only for what they can do, but for what they represent as stewards of the larger community good. The Green Bay Packers, for example, mean far more to their fan base than what they have become as a game-winning, money-making and high performing organization. The team engenders ways of dressing, conversing, and living in anticipation of, and during, the football season. It is literally and figuratively “owned” by the community. It is the pride of the community. Likewise, the transformation of a set of religious beliefs, practices, and policy decisions into something like the Catholic Church; the development of the market economy in the United States; and the role of the U.S. Forest Service in public land management exemplify institutions built through evolutionary transformation processes (Morgan, Green, Shinn and Robinson 2013, 43). Once organizations get transformed into institutions, they become embedded in the larger community of which they are a part, making it difficult to separate the meaning of the public interest from the institution itself.

Our working hypothesis is that employees in organizations that have become highly institutionalized will have higher levels of PSM than employees working in organizations that do not enjoy this kind of status. This assumption is an extension of existing research, which shows that PSM is higher in organizations that have processes of socialization in place that introduce employees to a public institutional ethos (Brewer, 2008, p. 149). “This socialization process within the organization plays an integral role in shaping the public ethos among public servants” (Bataglia and French 2016, 127). Once in place, this ethos helps maintain an organization’s trust and legitimacy with elected officials and the larger public it serves (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013). Highly institutionalized public
organizations start with the advantage of having already acquired a public ethos that automatically associates their work with the common good. This is reflected in studies of the levels of citizen trust in our public institutions.

Public Trust: Why does an institutional framework to PSM matter?

According to Gallup polls that have been measuring trust in institutions since 1972, there has been a long-term steady decline for most all major American institutions, including schools, the military, newspapers, churches, banks, labor unions, the various branches of government, the medical profession, T.V. news and local businesses. Only the military, the police and small businesses have trust ratings above 50% (Gallup 2018). Since Donald Trump was elected President Edelman’s annual Trust Barometer showed overall trust in the four institutions it measures - the government, media, business and non-governmental organizations - falling more steeply in the United States than in any of the 28 countries surveyed. Edelman attributed this precipitous decline to president Trump’s repeated attacks on the media, the judiciary, the police and the institutions of justice, which has left the average citizen “confused about what is fact and what is fiction” (Edelman 2018). Institutions vary in their capacity to stand up in the face of attacks on their legitimacy and authority. Some have more autonomy, more embeddedness in the community, and more trust than others. The conditions that create these differences is what we mean by the institutional enabling conditions for PSM and is the focus of our exploration in this study.

We have chosen to focus our study on local governments because they have acquired considerable institutional autonomy and embeddedness, although this varies to some extent because of the differences in types and kinds of legal authority delegated to local governing bodies by the state within which they reside. Despite these differences, trust in local governing institutions has remained
consistently high in the face of steady declines in citizen trust in national governing institutions. Pew studies consistently show that local systems of government across the nation enjoy a 72% level of trust compared to 57% and 28% for state level and the national government, respectively (Pew 2013 and Gallup 2014). Surprisingly, we have found no studies that seek to explain these differences in levels of trust, although there are studies that identify issues of proximity, impact, nonpartisanship, perceptions of access and control, and consistency and predictability of service delivery as important explanatory factors (see Harian 2014, Ryzin 2011, Mundy 2007). All of these factors mentioned in the literature provide reinforcing evidence for our working hypothesis that PSM will be much higher in local governments because of their institutional autonomy and embeddedness in the community.

*Why Our Focus on Local Government PSM*

Our interest in public service motivation at the local level is prompted by several important institutional facts about the role of local governments in the United States. First is the large number of independent local governing jurisdictions that having varying degrees of autonomy. By 2012 there were 90,057 separate local governmental entities in the United States, each of which is self-governing and levies taxes and charges fees to deliver services to the citizens it serves (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 Census of Governments, vol. 1, no. 1, Government Operations, Series GC02 (1)-1 and U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Census of Governments). These jurisdictions provide a wide array of vital services, including police and fire, schools, libraries, parks, water, sewer, transportation, hospitals, parks, zoos, solid waste disposal, soil and water conservation, zoning and land use enforcement. These are the kinds of daily services that matter most to citizens.
Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of 85 public goods and services that are provided by the federal government, the 50 state governments and the 90,057 local units of governments within the United States Morgan (Robinson Strachota and Hough 2015, 514). This list was compiled after examining the chart of accounts representing a complete range of government organizations (states, counties, special districts, municipalities, school districts, metro-area governments, states and the federal government). There are only six categories of services that are exclusively provided by the federal government, with the remaining 79 governmental products and services provided by state and local jurisdictions. Although the federal government has just six exclusive service roles, it is a major player in many of the other 79 products and services through policy guidance, financial support, and procurement and contracting regulations and provisions.

Comparative employment figures for the federal, state and local levels of government reinforce the important conclusion that local governments are more impactful on the daily lives of citizens than the federal and state levels of government. Table 1 provides a summary comparison of the total employment by level of government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>2.8 (13.8)</td>
<td>2.4 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.8 (23.6%)</td>
<td>5.3 (12.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>12.7 (62.6%)</td>
<td>14.0 (63.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several facts are notable in Table 1. First, federal employment dropped between 1999 and 2012 by 400 thousand employees while state government employment grew by almost that amount and local government employment grew by 1.3 million. Second, local government exceeded federal employment in 2012 more than five-fold and state employment by nearly three-fold. But if we make this comparison by the amount of money spent on wages, salaries and benefits, the gap between local government and their counterparts at the state and federal level grows even larger. In 2012 local government spending on wages and salaries was nearly 1.5 times higher than the combined amount for state and federal governments (U.S. Bureau of Census. 2012). The rate of increase for salaries is rising much more rapidly for local governments, largely because of the rising costs of health care and retirement benefits.

**Literature Review of PSM, Institutional Autonomy and Contextual Place-Based Influences**

Public Service motivation is defined as the combination of rational, normative and affective influences that create a strong motivation to serve others in a public calling (Perry 1997, Perry and Wise 1990). Rational motive is linked with the notion of utility maximization (Perry 1996). Whereas norm-based motives refer to the actions and behavior that is caused by conformance to the prevailing social norms of the day. Affective-driven motivation encapsulates the love, affection, compassion and emotional aspects of human behavior (Perry 1996). Taken together, these rational, affective and normative influences have been organized into the following four categories that are used by researchers to operationalize PSM: sense of duty, compassion, commitment to the public interest, and desire to participate in policy-making.
There have been 326 studies of PSM conducted between 1990 and 2014. These studies show that those choosing careers in public and nonprofit organizations have higher levels of PSM than those working in the private sector and for profit organizations (Bright, 2008; Houston, 2000; Perry, 1997; Perry & Wise, 1990, 2000; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Taylor, 2008). These differences in PSM between public and nonprofit sector employees are closely aligned with the separate rational, affective and norm-based dimensions of public service motivation. For example, a 2012 study of 32 Danish nursing assistants working in both the public and private sectors showed that public sector nurses were much more prosocial and policy-centered than those working in the private sector. By contrast, “nurses who easily become emotionally involved are more likely to seek employment at private hospitals” (Kjeldsen 2012, 58, 65). The 326 PSM studies also show that “public service motivation tends to be positively related to job satisfaction, choosing a public sector job, individual and organizational performance, organizational and job commitment, person–organization fit, and organizational citizenship behavior” (Ritz, Brewer and Neumann 2016, 420).

Most all of these 326 studies have been organization- and individual-centered in their unit of analysis (Shamir 1991). A few of the PSM studies have examined some of the institutional antecedents of PSM, such as the influence of family, religion, and education (Emerson 2014). But there have been no studies exploring the role of institutional factors like the degree and kind of legal autonomy or the alignment of the organizational culture with the community “sense of place”. This is a bit surprising given the resurgence of scholarship over the last decade that uses “polity” or “regime” as the unit of analysis for understanding performance, political change, governance and leadership development (Rohr, 1989; Morgan, et. al. 2008; Ozawa 2005; Elkins and Soltan 1993; Johnson 2002; Stone 1989; Leo 1998; Lauria, 1997). Regime theory emphasizes the alignment of organizational structures, practices and actions with
the context, culture and values of the place (Kemmis 1990). We draw from regime theory and institutional theory to explore how PSM is affected by a combination of institutional autonomy and the community culture or sense of place within which public employees live and undertake their public service work. In the sections that follow we explain how we operationalize these two concepts for purposes of our research.

**Institutional Enabling Conditions**

In an important theoretical article published by Vandenabeele (2007), the author combined self-determination theory with institutional theory to hypothesize that PSM would be higher and more autonomous in institutions that embrace and promote public service values. But all institutions are not equal in their autonomy. For example, at this time in its history the U.S. Department of Justice enjoys a different degree and kind of autonomy than our local city and county police organizations (Lewis, Provine, Varsanyi Decker 2013; also see Applegate 2003). In this study we used three criteria as a measure of autonomy: home rule, nonpartisan local elections, and the city-manager system of government.

**Home rule** is shared by all participants in our survey sample. Home rule has been defined in a variety of ways. From a narrow legal point of view home rule is defined as those governments in which the form and the organization of the government is specified by a locally-approved charter rather than by a general or specific state law. But this narrow legal view has been replaced by a more complex view that takes into account additional autonomy factors that include structural, functional, finance, and personnel authority (Wolman, McManmon and Brunori 2008; U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations 1993). Our survey sample
includes city and county jurisdictions within the state of Oregon. Based on a 1993 nationwide analysis of local autonomy by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations on a scale of 1 (high) - 5 (low) Oregon ranked 1.5 in functional authority, 2 in finance, and 1.5 in personnel autonomy. The U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations concluded in a 1981 report that Oregon counties had a greater degree of local discretionary authority than counties in any other state (US ACIR 1981, p. 59). An important and unusual dimension of this autonomy is the authority to “enter into a written agreement with any other unit or units of local government for the performance of any or all functions and activities that a party to the agreement, its officers or agencies, have authority to perform on their own (Oregon Revised Statutes, 190.010). This means that local governments have the autonomy to strike deals with other jurisdictions to create collective service agreements for public safety, social service provision, water and waste water treatment, education, public health, transportation, etc. without getting state permission.

**Non-Partisan local elections** are the norm in all of the jurisdictions in our sample survey. Nonpartisan elections were originally put in place as part of the good government reform movement of the early decade of the 1900’s on the theory that political parties are irrelevant to providing good service. Also by removing partisan cues from the ballot it would encourage more cooperation among elected officials and reduce the influence of party politics in the daily administration of local affairs (MacManus and Bullock 2003). While subsequent studies have shown that nonpartisan elections result in a diminished level of voter turnout, increased advantages of incumbency, and greater influences of conservative and prod-development forces (Schaffner, Streb & Wright 2001, Ji 2005), there is general agreement that nonpartisan elections provide an additional layer of insulation of local communities from outside influences.
The Manager-Council Form of Government is used by all of the jurisdictions in our sample survey. This system was first introduced in the early 1900’s as part of the Progressive movement’s “good government” reform initiatives. By hiring a full-time professionally trained manager who is an at-will employee of the elected Council, reformers believed this arrangement would create a degree of separation between politics and administration that would have two advantages. First, it would temper the influence of politics on the daily operations of the organization, thereby give more institutional autonomy to focus on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of policy implementation and the daily management of the organization (Newall 2004). Second, the council-manager form would enable a professionally trained manager to have the time and knowledge to attend to the organizational conditions associated with building and sustaining high levels of PSM (Moynihan and Pandey 2007). While this argument makes sense on its face, we have found no empirical studies comparing PSM between strong mayor systems and council-manager forms of government.

Contextual Place-Based Influences on PSM

We hypothesize that “place matters” in shaping the PSM of local public officials. By place we simply mean an awareness of the history, the culture and the geo-physical space where public service takes place. Some public institutions are the product of a long history where it is hard to separate the meaning of the jurisdiction from the place where it resides. For example, Plymouth,
Massachusetts is both a jurisdiction and a place? But many jurisdictions are artifacts of convenience, responses to the accidents of growth or efforts to carve out legal independence to obtain desired services (Burns 1994). Some governing jurisdictions have little institutional history that is worth carrying forward into the future. We hypothesize that PSM will be higher where there is a strong awareness of place on the part of public servants. This hypothesis is supported by classic studies of the interplay of external place-based forces on the practices and behaviors of public organizations (Selznik 1949, Kaufman 2006). These local place-based influences explain why there are contradictory practices by public agencies on their employees living where they work. Some organizations, like the U.S. Forest Service, worry about the capture of public servants by local political interests, thus requiring limited terms of employment in a given place. Other jurisdictions require residency as a condition of employment to ensure that “the baker will eat their own bread”. As the major progenitor of PSM research observed in an article taking stock of where PSM research should go in the future, “A key to formalizing a theory of public-service motivation is an understanding of the environmental variables that shape individual preferences and motives (Perry 2000, 480).

Other PSM-Related Factors

As part of our interest in institutional and place-based influences on PSM, we also are interested in how issues of age/generational differences, levels of organizational responsibility, and gender come into play as part of our subjects’ PSM story.
**Age and Generational Differences.** There is considerable research documenting important generational cohort differences with respect to choosing public service as a calling. The concept of “generational cohort” captures the influence that political events in a given period have in shaping what people value and how they view their membership in a larger community of fellow citizens. Traditionalists (those born before 1945) and Baby Boomers (1946-1964) have overall higher levels of engagement than Generation X (1965-1980) and Millennials (1981-1995). In a major study of generational differences, millennials are the least engaged and their percentage of the citizenry as a whole is rising as the traditionalist die off (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Carpini, 2006). We are interested in exploring variations in PSM based on these generational differences, especially since there is evidence that these differences do not show up as important factors in PSM (Einoff 2016, Jurkiewicz and Brown 1998). But these generational differences may show up as factors related to our interest in the role of place-based and institutional factors that affect PSM and/or its various sub dimensions. For example, millennials may care less about the place-based and intuitional influences that shape PSM and care much more about the organizational setting and work conditions that fuel their desire “to make a difference”.

**Level and Kind of Position Responsibility.** We are interested in exploring how the level and kind of organizational responsibilities may influence how place-based and institutional factors impact PSM. For example, top leadership in public organizations has been found to play an important role in fostering public service motivation (Wright, Moynihan & Pandey 2012). But how do the place-based and institutional dimensions shape the way in which this leadership role is carried out? Another important consideration is job design, which has been found to be an important influence on PSM (Grant 2007). In small and medium-sized public organizations job design
and issues of motivation are largely in the hands of small HR units working in close partnership with supervisors and middle level managers. For this reason, we are interested in the views of human resource managers regarding how the sense of place and institutional influences come into play when hiring and designing jobs to motivate employees. For those at the entry level of the organization, especially those who may be looking for their first job, we want to know how placed-based and institutional factors shape their PSM.

*Gender Differences.* Since 1990 there have been 64 studies exploring the relationship between gender and public service motivation (Ritz, Brewer and Neumann 2016, 419). These studies suggest that gender counts. For example, in one study of managers in state health and human service agencies women scored higher on Perry’s compassion subscale but also on attraction to policy making, while there were no statistically significant gender differences on Perry’s subscales of “sense of duty” and “commitment to the public interest” (DeHart-Davis, Marlowe and Pandey 2006). Studies of career patterns also show strong gender differences. For example, females have less of a straight-line career ladder pattern and more of a winding pattern of mixing career with family priorities that take them out of the work force (Sullivan and Mainiero 2007). This is reflected in employment statistics, which show that 87.6% of men were employed fulltime in 2016, compared to 75.1% for women. Part time employment of men was 12.4% compared to 24.9% for women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017). Our interest in gender for purposes of this study is in the way that the compassion subscale and the pattern of career employment may interface with the place-based and institutional factors that affect PSM. For example, is the “sense of place” stronger for women than men and, if so, how does this influence their PSM? Are women more likely to have less PSM because they take jobs rather than pursue careers?
Design and Methodology of Study

We employed a purposive sampling technique to recruit study participants. Initially, we chose a sample pool of twelve jurisdictions and 37 individuals located in the State of Oregon. All jurisdictions shared the same level of institutional legal autonomy described above in our literature review. Where possible, we paired one city and one county located in the same geographic area in order to capture any differences that might arise from variations in functional responsibilities. We targeted the CEO of each jurisdiction and the director of human resources for interviews. We asked the director of human resources to provide us with the name of an employee who had worked for the organization for less than two years as a way of getting more age and experience variation. These different organizational levels provide an opportunity for us to explore how institutional and contextual factors might vary by level and kind of organizational responsibility. Out of twelve jurisdictions in our pool, eight jurisdictions positively responded with a response rate of 66.6%. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of our interview pool.

Table 2 Characteristics of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Under 30</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>35-45</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Over 45</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Over 45</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position Responsibility</td>
<td>Entry level</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Senior Admin</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After obtaining IRB human subjects approval of our project, we sent emails and made followed up phone calls to our subjects, clearly explaining the purposes and modalities of the study. After obtaining Informed Consent from our subjects, we undertook in-person one hour interviews (two telephone interviews were the exception). The interview questions were formulated to solicit responses from the interviewees in the following three key areas (See Appendix B for more detailed interview guide).

1. **Story of career path:** Tells us the story of how you arrived at your current your public service position.

2. **Internal organizational Influences on PSM:** What internal factors within the organization (such as culture, personnel practices, organizational structure and process, budgeting, MIS and other factors have influenced your commitment to public service?

3. **External influences on PSM:** What external factors (such as technological changes, globalization, national and local political forces, i.e., political divisiveness in the community, disagreement among elected officials, relationship between elected board and administrative leadership, partisan gridlock in Washington D.C., the recent election of President Trump, etc.) have influenced your commitment to public service?

We transcribed the interviews and used Glazer and Strauss’ (1967) grounded theory recommendations to code and analyze the data. This approach is in keeping with suggestions by several researchers who advocate using grounded theory to tease out the importance of contextual influences like culture, place and institutional setting (Perry and Vandenabeele 2015, p. 692; also see Charmaz 2006 and Oktay 2012). Appendix C provides a summary of the coding stages and categories we used and Appendix D provides a sample of the coding analysis and interview summaries.
Key Themes: Summary and Discussion

Several key themes emerged from this study.

- Institutional autonomy plays a central role in energizing and sustaining high levels of PSM.
- PSM is greatly influenced by the contextual community setting.
- There are important gender differences in PSM that are related to the influences of institutional and community setting factors.
- Senior leadership plays an important role in how institutional and contextual setting factors are used to strengthen PSM.

Institutional Autonomy and PSM

Institutional autonomy was the single most common reason our interviewees gave for being able to sustain their public service motivation in the face of external demotivators. As one interviewee observed, “[T]he great news about local government, unlike the state legislature or for that matter even for Congress, it’s not really hard to change. If you don’t like something, let’s change it…That’s the beauty of local government; it’s not hard to change” (J.H. 20, 24:10, 09:37). “I think that [cynicism tends to be less when dealing with local government officials and issues because] we are your neighbor, your neighborhood, your community, and for that reason we are more accessible, and as a result we are far more accountable” (J.H. 20, 27:39 and 28:59; also see KP 5, 29:44, 32:43; K.P. 4, 13:49; R.V.-09, 13:21; R.S 15, 19:05). This accountability is held not simply by an organization but it is held by the larger institutional embeddedness of the organization in the community. As one interviewee observed, “Our job is kind of preserving institutions” (S.W. 23, 10:10). “Local government protects the whole national scene now, and this is where we can make a difference” (KP 5, 32:43).
The degree of institutional autonomy by local governments influences what employees can “tune out”. As one human resource manager observed, I care what is going on in the world, but you know what I’m doing isn’t much affected by the Federal government (M.H. 07, 10:43:55, 45:33; M.P. 14: 27:18). “What’s happening at the Federal level is not how we are as the County here...[T]here is nothing specifically good or bad going on that would change my motivation (M.R. 12, 18:34). This observation from a newly hired direct service employee is part of a larger organizational culture where the senior leaders deliberately work hard “to insulate [employees] from a lot. So that allows them to do their jobs” (D.B. 13, 33:52).

**The Importance of Place: Urban-Rural Differences**

All interviewees identified the place where they live as a strong factor in contributing to their PSM. As one interviewee observed from her personal experience before moving to another community from which she now commutes, previously I felt “more connected with the community that I was serving. Now I feel more of a public service disconnect, because now I’m spending all of my money, and all of my recreational time in X and just spending my 8-5 here” (S.P. 11, c.a. 6.:30). The importance of place was especially strong for those who had deliberately chosen to live in a given place before choosing their job (18 out of 25 interviewees) or were born and raised in the communities where they are currently employed (X out ?). . and . For this large roup of interviewees and/or choose their job beca.
Even for those choosing their career and then choosing where to live, place was identified as important to PSM. Place played a strong role

**Q 9: Interviewer (21:01)**

**To what extent is public service motivation affected by place and how much is just about the person?**

**Ans: Interviewee**

I think both. There is a public sector motivation that comes from who you are, your experiences, your occupations. “…[P]lace is where your passion is exercised. …..If you are working in a place where the citizens don’t see the relevance of what you are doing and there is not compatibility with citizen expectation, you can get hammered in ways that undermine your motivation. … I don’t think that because you have high public service motivation, you can exercise it anywhere”.

Place showed up frequently as a positive factor related to sustaining high levels of PSM through time. When asked about the importance of the contextual geographical factors on their PSM, all interviewees saw it as a reinforcing factor. As one interviewee observed from her personal experience, when I lived in the community instead of now where I live elsewhere, I felt “general. “The time that I

The majority of females (9 out of 16) were either born and raised in the place where they currently work or deliberately chose to reside in the community for family reasons. For this group, “place” provides a target of opportunity to use their talents and abilities to improve the lives of their fellow citizens in a shared place. For our male interviewees place was desirable from a recreational point of view or because it was a “good stepping stone” in their career advancement.
Add quotations.

Gender: The Discovery of PSM Anchored in Community v. Launching a Career Devoted to Making Democracy Work

The majority of females (9 out of 16) were either born and raised in the place where they currently work or deliberately chose to reside in the community for family reasons. For this group, “place” provides a target of opportunity to use their talents and abilities to improve the lives of their fellow citizens in a shared place. For our male interviewees place was desirable from a recreational point of view or because it was a “good stepping stone” in their career advancement.

1. Building Trust in Democratic Institutions: Demotivating Factors Are Inherently Part of Local Public Service and What Makes it Rewarding: Especially for senior leaders, many of the negative aspects of their job are necessarily and intentionally part of the design of our governmental system and managing this design is what is most rewarding. “[T]here is an …active management of the ambiguity that not everybody has to manage in the private sector. The ambiguity comes by design, by having to be available to challenges (D.B. 13, 11:11). “One of the things important to me, probably more so now than early on, is caring more about managing the process than managing the result. Early on I believed ‘this is right’ and ‘this is what we need to do’. Whereas now I don’t necessarily feel strongly about the end result, but I feel strongly about the process to ensure that the people
who you are serving have the ability to affect the outcome through the process” (S.W. 23, 03:51; also see S.L. 17, 12:41). “Our job is kind of preserving institutions” (S.W. 23, 10:10). “Local government protects the whole national scene now, and this is where we can make a difference” (KP 5, 32:43). One senior manager proudly described facilitating a community deliberation process regarding how local law enforcement officers should use their discretion with respect to turning over illegal immigrants to federal immigration and law enforcement officials. “Working with the council and community to figure out both what is possible and what is supportable is a learned skill, which is far removed from my training as a civil engineer. I really enjoy this part of my work” (G.B. 10, ??).

In Table 1 we summarize the differences in gender in terms of how public service careers were launched, what motivates, and what demotivates. For all 16 of our female interviewees, PSM was “discovered” on their pathway to finding a meaningful career. Female respondents early on in high school were extensively involved in community related activities, volunteering, girl scouts and having human relationship skills that engraved in them the spirit of helping others. Whereas, male interviewees seldom talked of this kind of phenomenon. Females did not go to college or take their first job in the public sector because they saw it as an outlet for their PSM. How they got into the public sector is typically expressed in the following mater-of-fact way: “People are here because it’s a good job, they enjoy the work, have great pay, great benefits, not so much because it’s a public service…. they already lived here, their families are here. They feel lucky that they have a good job” (M.N. 18, 26:27). But after taking the job and experiencing public service female
interviewees discover how well it aligns with “who they really are”. “Some of my friends and colleagues often ask me why I went into the public sector. I tell them that the people I hire throughout the organization have an impact on the community” (M.P. 16, 08:01).

Table 1 Gender Differences and PSM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Path to Public Service</th>
<th>What Motivates</th>
<th>What Demotivates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td>- Early interest</td>
<td>- Policy-making</td>
<td>- Learning new role of working with elected officials. Process &amp; relationship more important than knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Previous family experience in pub. serv.</td>
<td>- Working with elected officials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Place important for recreational and career purposes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>- Transition from business</td>
<td>- Work flexibility</td>
<td>- Toxic work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Path of discovery</td>
<td>- Helping people succeed</td>
<td>- Poor leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Seeing impact of work on organization</td>
<td>- Inability to use talents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Family-related: stable and consistent job</td>
<td>- Ability to “tune-out” negative external influences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Seeing impact on community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Place important for family reasons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By contrast to the discovery by females of their PSM, seven out of our nine male interviewees settled on a public service career early on and pursued it aggressively and systematically in their education, internships and subsequent job searches. They sought out roles that would provide them with the exercise of control and power in the service of seeing big impacts on the communities they serve. A big piece “of motivation is being able to maintain ownership over, and see the results. How to improve the cities, improve the services that we provide, improve the life for the folks who live here….be in positions high up…working in big projects” (W.N. 19, 09:12; for similar views see S.L. 17, G.B. 10).

While males emphasize external governance-related motivators, female interviewees emphasize the importance of creating an organization that is relationship-based more than rule or policy-based. They emphasize hiring employees who have a “positive attitude about their work” and creating an organizational culture where employees continue to “actually enjoy the work they are doing” (A.W. 3, 22:30). You might expect this attitude to be characteristic of the 9 human resource managers we interviewed, given the focus and purpose of their work. But it was also characteristic of all other females, regardless of organizational level of responsibility. This is consistent with studies showing that women care more about the internal processes of the organization than external policy and political consequences (Tabvuma and Homberg 2014). The one male human resource manager in our pool stood out in contrast to his 8 female counterparts in his attraction to accommodating the multiplicity of needs among various organizational units, managing the variety of union contracts and the sheer complexity of processes in the public sector compared to his 20-year previous experience as an HR director in the private sector (S.R. 14, 5:19).
Age, Generation and Position Responsibility Differences

We have chosen to collapse our discussion of “age and generational differences” with “levels of position responsibility” because of the close overlap of our findings with respect to these two categories. All eight of our interviewees under 30 years of age were female, probably an artifact of our reliance on the organization being surveyed to provide us with what they considered an “exemplary employee under thirty”. All of these younger employees emphasized the importance of the same motivators and demotivators discussed above in Table 1. But younger employees also emphasized the value of job flexibility, the ability to see the impact of their work, the opportunity to grow and the need to be challenged in their job. Those who came from the private sector emphasized the value of “not having your affection bought” and now becoming part of “a culture which really fosters people to develop their skills and … [help employees] take off in new and emerging roles” (A.W. 03, 13:36).

Eight out of the nine senior leaders we interviewed were males. Characteristically, they emphasized their role “in making local democracy work”. One leader observed, I am “motivated about this democracy, the liberty and so much that you have today….We are also protecting democracy here…and serving the community that we love. …[We] interpret the public interest, and the second thing we do is maintain public trust” (D.B. 13, 22:07). Another observed that “our job is kind of preserving institutions” (S.W. 23, 10:10).
“Local government protects the whole national scene now, and this is where we can make a difference” (KP 5, 32:43). The one female senior leader emphasized strengthening her community over strengthening democracy and the value of working in partnership with elected commissioners who all share a common desire to make the community better (SB 25, 08:29). Unlike her male counterparts, she did not view her current leadership work as a stage in their professional advancement.

**Senior Leadership Plays a Strong Role in Creating High Levels of PSM**

But these senior leaders don’t want to simply protect their employees from external potentially negative influences; they want to invest considerable time and resources in instilling a pride and enthusiasm for the uniqueness of local government public service.

I think it’s worth investing, giving everybody an opportunity to open the door and walk into the uniqueness of public service. It’s an amazing privilege to walk through that door. So we try to provide context, try to provide meaning; they may not understand the larger meaning of their job. Motivated by love for your country, motivated about this democracy, the liberty and so much that you have today. And for some people that works. We are also protecting democracy here at the county and we are also serving the community that we love. There is an intimacy about what we do that no one can argue when you are serving this bigger cause. Does everybody buy into it, No. But we can make a difference and invest a little bit more in them. The importance and pride attached to the local government is phenomenal. And I believe that one thousand percent. And at the end of the day, everything is local. (D.B. 22:07).
Discussion and Implications of Findings: The Importance of Local Government Institutional Conditions that Reinforce and Give Meaning to PSM

Our findings surface some important questions regarding the institutional enabling conditions that allow PSM to flourish and to be tethered to positive democratic values. We discuss some of these unaddressed research questions in the sections that follow.

*What can an institutional approach contribute to the study of PSM?*

Our findings call attention to the institutional conditions that make it possible for local public servants to “find”, align and sustain their PSM in our local government systems. Most PSM research has been driven by an organization and individual-centered approach that so far has surfaced 26 antecedents to PSM (Ritz, Brewer and Neumann, 2016). But these antecedents are moderated and/or mediated by institutional influences that help to explain why trust in government is so much higher in local governments in the United States than is the case at the state and federal levels.

*What prevents PSM from becoming a foe of democratic governance?*
PSM has been treated by researchers as a highly desirable attribute “and they have tested its relationship to other desirable concepts but not to undesirable ones”, but there is a “dark side” to the concept (Ritz, Brewer and Neumann 2016, 422). Take for example, the case of Albert Speer, who spent 20 years in Spandau prison for war crimes. By all accounts he had high levels of PSM that was brigaded to an organizational genius in the service of the Nazi regime (Singer and Wooten 1974). Speer’s life is a sober reminder that high PSM requires the right kind of institutional enabling conditions to serve good ends.

What makes a study of PSM of local career administrators in the United States so interesting is that they are not simply agents of a centralized political party or a centralized administrative state. They have significant institutional and legal authority. In most other parts of the world, this is not the case. Without this local autonomy and the institutional enabling conditions, we see lots of PSM “gone awry” where local officials “game” their reports to curry favor up the chain of command and engage in self-dealing at the expense of local citizen service and accountability (Gong 2006, Chen 2004). When local government officials have to serve as “double agents”, their agential authority is compromised and their PSM does not result in consistently good outcomes.

The Role of Isomorphism: Professional Standards and Legal Mandates

One of the seldom discussed institutional dimensions of local government is the wide uniformity of services across the United States, even in the face of divergent governing systems. This is because professional administrators are in charge of local government
services and they adhere to a myriad of “best practice” requirements established by national professional associations (i.e., the International City-County Managers Association, the Municipal Finance Officers Association, multiple professional accounting organizations, American Society for Testing and Materials, American Society of Civil Engineers, American Library Association, National Association of Social Workers, the American Society of Civil Engineers, National Fire Protection Association, just to mention some of the more common). These external professional standards ensure a high level of uniformity of structure and predictability in the delivery of local services, what has come to be called isomorphism (see especially DiMaggio & W. Powell 1983). This isomorphism raises some important questions about its relationship to PSM. It may be the case that high PSM and high trust in local government is more a product of isomorphism than a product if institutional enabling conditions.

Limitations of Research

We recognize that this study has some limitations in its research design and findings. Our study is confined to a small sample of cities and counties in a geographically limited part of the United States. Our study does not include any special districts, which constitute 33% of the local governments in the United States and have grown by more than 85% since 1962. The jurisdictions we sampled function within a larger culture of “progressive” and “conservative populism” (Clucas, Henkels and Steel 205, 4), which is characterized by the following institutional features: nonpartisan local elections, the long ballot, the initiative and referendum process, reliance on commissions to oversee state agencies, legally strong local governments, weak political parties, and reliance on
professional career administrators to run local governments under the supervening authority of part-time elected officials. In fact, these institutional features help to explain our findings. In doing so they contribute to our larger claim that an institutional perspective on public service motivation is an important missing piece of the current PSM research.

**Conclusion: Some Institutional Hypotheses**

H1: Special service districts provide employees with a more autonomous public service identity than a general purpose government.

**Rationale:** While our study surfaced the value to employees of working for an organization that provides lots of different services to the community, they also expressed frustration that came from competing resources, multiple missions, and coordinating challenges across units.

H2. Higher levels of institutional autonomy (financial, legal, organizational) are associated with higher levels of autonomous public service identity. **Rationale:** The ability for employees to ignore external political noise is positively related to institutional independence and autonomy.

H3: Senior level leadership is essential in ensuring that PSM is anchored in, and informed by, the democratic values and processes served by the organization.
H3a: In the absence of this leadership, PSM will default to the process and relationship-centered values that dominate human resource management units.

**Rationale:** These hypotheses arise from the differences we found between senior leaders who emphasize their democratic governance role compared to leaders who emphasize their role in recruiting and keeping the next generation of highly enthusiastic and inspired leaders.

H4: Isomorphism plays a lesser role in generating high levels of autonomous public service identity than the degree of jurisdictional autonomy. **Rationale:** Senior leaders emphasized the need and difficulty of abandoning their training as specialists and “knowers” in order to take on their democratic facilitation and collaboration roles.
Appendix A **Summary of Public Goods and Services Provided by Federal and Local Governments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courts Planning</th>
<th>Governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Adjudication</td>
<td>• Organizational management and administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prosecution</td>
<td>• Voting operations and regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public defense</td>
<td>• Long-range planning and forecasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Records and warrants</td>
<td>• Tax collections and regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appellate review</td>
<td>• Financial and budgetary operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Policy and research analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Intergovernmental relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Governing board administrative support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Public records and citizen input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Development</td>
<td>Utilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Business regulations</td>
<td>• Electrical supply and distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Market development</td>
<td>• Water supply and distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Industrial regulation and market support</td>
<td>• Wastewater treatment and collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Land-use planning and regulations</td>
<td>• Stormwater treatment and collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Housing supply and regulations</td>
<td>• Natural gas regulation and distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Infrastructure planning and private integration</td>
<td>• Right-of-way regulation and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public health</td>
<td>• Solid waste collection and treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facility operations</td>
<td>• Energy research development and regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safety inspections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Product regulation and testing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Immunization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Epidemiology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Research and development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facility operation and maintenance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• General administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Publications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency operations</td>
<td>Incarceration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning and training</td>
<td>• Facilities operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessment</td>
<td>• Diversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Response teams and operation centers</td>
<td>• Parole and probation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rehab and repair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services</td>
<td>Park cultural services recreation and open space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grants and provision of various forms of social insurance</td>
<td>• Land and facilities operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Museums, cemeteries and historical sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Libraries and document repositories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Arts and cultural amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Public assembly facilities and spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recreation programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Open-space management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergency shelters</th>
<th>Patrol and prevention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food and income support</td>
<td>Investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency medical aid</td>
<td>Training and certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social behavioral interventions</td>
<td>Records and evidence control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>Special teams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fire operations**
- First responder
- Prevention
- Special teams
- Training and certification
- Water supply management
- Communications

**Transportation**
- Public transit
- Roadbed construction and repair
- Heavy rail and freight regulation
- Air system
- Water transport
- Private conveyances regulation
- Pipeline conveyances

**Unique federal authorities**
- Interstate commerce services and regulations
- Regulation of the commons (airway, bandwidth, etc.)
- National defense and security
- International relations treaties and agreements
- Regulation of the economy: Money coinage, supply, treasuries and commercial regulations
- Judicial enforcement
Appendix B  Interview Guide: Change in Public Service Motivation through Time

Introduction (10 minutes)

- Welcome and greet the interviewee: Interviewer, co-researcher and note taker introduce themselves and thank the interviewee for taking the time for the interview.
- Ask the interviewee to briefly introduce themselves.
- Review the purpose of the study.
- Ask for informed consent and permission to audio record the interview
- Ask interviewee if they have any questions before beginning the interview regarding

Exploratory Question #1 (15 minutes): Your Public Service Journey

i. Please tell us about your public service journey? For example, when did you first start thinking about a public service career; what prompted you to take your first job? What factors have influenced taking/leaving subsequent positions you have held?
   [Let the interviewees describe their career path.]

ii. Looking back, what have been the high and/or low points in your career?

iii. What has kept you in the public service HR profession?

Follow-up prompts [When interviewees describe their career change]:

- What prompted you to make the career change?
- What motivated you to seek this new career?

Exploratory Question #2 (15 minutes) Major Motivators and/or De-motivators

i. What factors or aspects of your job have motivated you the most during your career? Could you recall a moment when your motivation went to the highest level? What caused this to happen? What has given you pride in public service employment?

ii. What about de-motivators? What have they been? Could you recall a moment when your motivation went to the lowest level? What caused this to happen?

Follow-up prompt [When interviewees need help distinguishing between de-motivators (i.e., low pay and poor working conditions) and positive motivators (i.e., recognition and sense of accomplishment):]
• How much do you think pay, recognition, reward, title, status and other job-related factors affect employee 
motivation in the public sector compared to private sector employees?
• What is most motivating in the long term versus the short-term?

Exploratory Question #3 (15 minutes) Internal and External Influencers

What do you think influences you and other public employee’s motivation to keep working in the public sector?

Follow-up prompts [When interviewees fail to mention specific organizational and political factors]:

■ Have you noticed any political factors that have affected you or other HR professionals to stay motivated to work in public sector?
■ Have you noticed any aspects of organizational culture that have affected you or other HR professionals to stay motivated to work in public sector?

Follow-up prompts [When interviewee has private sector experience]:

• Have you noticed any differences between the motivation of public sector employees from those in the private sector?
• Have you noticed any distinctive difference in the factors that motivate public sector employees compared to those in the private sector?
• Have you noticed any distinctive difference in the socio-economic background of employees in the public sector compared to those in the private sector?

Wrapping up (5 Minutes)

This is the end of the interview, please let us know if you have any questions for us? Thank you so much for sparing time and sharing your invaluable thoughts.
Appendix C: Grounded Theory Process for Organizing and Coding Interview Information

1. Interviews
2. Transcribing
3. Initial Coding
4. Focused Coding
5. Categories
6. Concepts
7. Themes
8. Constructing Grounded Theory

Concurrent and constant comparative analysis
Appendix D: Sample Coding of Interview Information for Importance of External Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code #</th>
<th>Open / Initial Codes</th>
<th>Focused Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Concepts and Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


| 1.1 | Not affecting much; Not affecting on day-to-day basis; Terming external elements irrelevant | Not affecting much Irrelevant | External factors; less relevant Not affecting much; Irrelevant | Themes: 1) External factors; less relevant 2) Selective issues matter 3) Determined to serve in rain and shine |
| 1.2 | Affected by bigger national issues; Economic crash / recession | Affected by bigger national issues | Selective issues matter Bigger national issues | 4) Leadership vacuum 5) Negative media reporting |
| 1.3 | Believing in community | Believing in community | Making decisions and efforts to mitigate the negative effects | Concepts: Bigger national issues matter |
| 1.4 | Making efforts to mitigate negative impacts of external issues; Taking timely decisions to handle issues | Making decisions and efforts to mitigate the negative effects | Least interested in news; Lack of understanding of government work | Least interested in news and politics |
| 1.5 | Selectively relevant; Keeping an eye on selective national issues; Issues that directly affect | Selective issues matter | Making decisions and efforts to mitigate the negative effect | Maintaining public trust and making timely decision to mitigate the negative effects |
| 1.6 | Negative media reporting; | Negative media reporting affects recruitment of police officers | Least interested in news and politics | |
| 1.7 | | | Leadership vacuum Crusting out of baby boomers and leadership vacuum; | |
| 1.8 | Affecting hiring of police officers; Inaccurate news reporting; Fake news; negativity  
Not interested in news; Lot of misinformation; News depressing;  
Young generation opting for nonprofits; social business models; Baby boomers crusting out of labor market; creating leadership vacuum;  
Determined to serve; Diminishing Federal and State resources; Soaring determination; | Least interested in news and politics  
Crusting out of baby boomers and leadership vacuum  
Determined to serve in rain and shine | Young Gen opting for social entrepreneurship  
**Maintaining public trust**  
Believing in community  
**Determined to serve in rain and shine** |
References


Gallup Poll. (2014). Majority of U.S. employees not engaged in work,


Endnotes

Our citations refer to the interviewee and the location in the transcripted taped interview of their remarks. Our transcribed summaries are anonymous and available for review by others. Our transcriptions are not literal but literal summaries. We have edited out “you know”, “Ums”, “Ahs”, pauses, restarts of answers, side conversations, repetitious restatements and interruptions.

We rely on Phillip Selznick’s definition of institutions as those “orderly, stable and socially integrated patterns” that get “fixed” and legitimated (usually through law) out of “unstable, loosely organized or narrowly technical activities”. Schools, churches, nonprofit organizations and governmental entities are established “not by decree alone, but as a result of being bound into the fabric of social life” (Selznick 1993, 232).