

Bringing Society In: Toward a Theory of Public-Service Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to develop a theory of motivation that brings society in to the motivation equation and reflects variations across institutions in the motivation process. A literature review identifies anomalies in dominant theories of motivation and reinforces the need for models that are more inclusive of social and institutional variables. Foundational premises of a revised theory of motivation are presented. The article concludes with a theory of motivation that accounts for motivational processes encountered in government and voluntary organizations.

The empirical study of public-service motivation (PSM) has advanced noticeably during the decade covering the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory's* (*J-PART*) existence. Ten years ago, Lois Wise and I (1990) published the "Motivational Bases of Public Service" in *Public Administration Review*. This was the first attempt to formalize the public-service motivation construct. We then defined PSM as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations" (p. 368).

Some of the research progress since 1990 is directly attributable to the forum that *J-PART* provides. In 1996, *J-PART* published "Measuring Public Service Motivation" (Perry 1996), in which I identified a multidimensional scale to measure public-service motivation. This was followed closely by a second *J-PART* article, "Antecedents of Public Service Motivation" (Perry 1997). The article provided additional empirical evidence for the validity of the PSM scale.

Other scholars sought simultaneously to assess the utility of public-service motivation. Crewson (1995a and 1995b), using data from the General Social Surveys, Federal Employee Attitude Surveys, and the Institute of Electronics and Electrical Engineers,

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concluded that public-sector employees place greater value on service than do private-sector employees. Brewer and Selden (1998) investigated the relationship between public-service motivation and whistle blowing. They found that whistle blowers behaved in ways consistent with the predictions of Perry and Wise (1990). Whistle blowers are more likely to be high performers who report high levels of achievement, job commitment, and job satisfaction. Lewis and Alonso (1999), using a condensed version of the public-service motivation scale contained in the 1996 Merit Principles Survey, found a positive relationship between PSM and performance, as predicted by Perry and Wise (1990). Lewis and Alonso (1999) cautioned, however, that the evidence based on their analysis of secondary data was far from conclusive. Brewer, Selden, and Facer (forthcoming) applied Q-methodology to the forty survey items I reported in my 1996 *J-PART* article and identified four distinct types of individual orientations towards public service.

In the only study that concluded PSM was not a meaningful construct, Gabris and Simo (1995) found no differences between public, private, and nonprofit employees in perceived need for service, helping, pay, or job security. Unlike other studies, however, Gabris and Simo did not use an explicit measure of PSM, but instead tested for differences in attributes across samples of individuals who are employed in different sectors.

Although we have made progress during the past decade, we still have much to learn about public service motivation. In the present study, my goal is to develop a theory of motivation that serves as an alternative to the rational choice theories that dominate our thinking about motivation in organizations. It embeds motivation in organizations in a larger context—thus the reference in the title to *bringing society in*. The contextual dependence of motivation has been developed persuasively elsewhere (Perry and Porter 1982; Rainey 1979 and 1983). The limitation of past efforts is that they stopped short of developing a full-fledged theory to support the public-service motivation construct.

I will begin this article with a critique of motivation theory, particularly with respect to its ability to explain phenomena experienced in many public and nonprofit organizations. Next I will identify foundational premises of a theory of motivation. I will conclude the article with presentation of a model of motivation that better accounts for behaviors observed in many government and voluntary organizations than does rational choice theory.

A CRITIQUE OF MOTIVATION THEORY

Twenty years ago, Lyman Porter and I (Perry and Porter 1982) reviewed the empirical literature about motivation in public organizations in light of theory that had been developed based largely upon research in business organizations. We identified five themes that merited further research; among them were goal clarity, the individual-organization match, and the measurability of individual performance. The Perry-Porter critique shares several themes with a more recent critique (Shamir 1991) of motivation theory as a whole. Because Shamir's critique is more recent, is likely to resonate with many public administration scholars, and provides a good foundation for an alternative theory, I will summarize it here.

Shamir identifies five shortcomings of motivation research. The first is motivation theory's individualistic bias. Individuals are conceived to be rational maximizers, largely following the neoclassical paradigm dominant in economics and psychology. Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory exemplifies the motivation-as-utility- maximization approach through the mathematical calculation of motivation, incorporating quantification of valences (values), expectancies (self-efficacy), and instrumentalities (organizationally determined outcomes). Expectancy theory has some predictive power (van Eerde and Thierry 1996), but the theory is difficult to test and the validity of the measures used to assess instrumentality and valence has been questioned (Landy and Becker 1987).

Even if the technical questions that surround the testing and operationalization of rational choice theories are resolved, they fail to explain much of the behavior we witness in organizations. One category of behavior that rational choice theories are ill equipped to explain is prosocial behavior. Brief and Motowidlo (1986) focus on the necessity of prosocial behaviors within organizations for recruitment and retention, for meeting performance standards, and for advancing the interests of an organization. This latter category of prosocial behaviors includes cooperation with coworkers, organizational protection and promotion, and preparation for higher levels of responsibility within the organization.

Kanungo and Conger (1993) raise the question of why, when it comes to altruistic behavior, there is such a disjunct between our family and personal lives, and our business lives. Altruistic behaviors can enrich personal and home life, but we find a discrepancy between the competitive, self-interested

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environment of the free market and acts of altruism. They advance the argument that in a global marketplace that is becoming increasingly complex and interdependent, altruism can actually lead to enhanced organizational effectiveness.

Despite Brief and Motowidlo (1986), Kanungo and Conger (1993), and others' (Organ 1988) acknowledgement that prosocial behavior or altruism is adaptive for organizational functioning, scholarship reflects a bias in that motivation constructs are still largely calculative (Romzek 1990). The individual bias discounts the relevance of collective factors in motivation. In his critique of economics, Etzioni (1988) called these the "I" and "we" perspectives. The individualistic bias diminishes the power of motivation theory to explain behaviors that transcend self-interest (Mansbridge 1990; Monroe 1996). It also diminishes motivation theory's explanatory power in the context of other, less individualistic cultures and subcultures.

A second bias in motivation theory is toward what Shamir (1991) calls "strong situations." Most motivational research assumes "the importance of clear and specific goals and of reward-performance expectancies for individual motivation" (p. 406). Shamir argues that "strong situations," characterized by clear goals, abundant rewards, and reward-performance contingencies, are not likely to prevail in public organizations (Perry and Porter 1982) or in cultures where rewards are scarce or power distance (Hofstede 1980) between individuals is low.

We in public administration sometimes err in stretching the absence of strong situations too far, that is, we claim that all public organizations are characterized by ambiguous and multiple goals and conflicting reward-performance expectancies. Many types of motivational situations are within public organizations (Perry and Rainey 1988) and efforts to develop theoretical generalizations should acknowledge this. But the intrasector variations in the public sector do not eliminate two considerations that arise from Shamir's general point. First, extant theory sidesteps the more difficult and interesting motivational situations, just the type of situations we encounter frequently in the public sector. In short, motivation theory gives too little attention to the messy situations that people encounter in public contexts.

Second, motivational situations or contexts (Perry and Porter 1982) often are dictated by institutions and are embedded in laws, rules, and external expectations. This argument has been articulated often in the public administration literature (Rainey 1979; 1983; 1997). Evidence that supports the role of institutions emanates from outside the field of public administration as well.

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For example, Brown's metanalysis (1996) of the correlates of job involvement found stronger relationships with several organizational and job attitude variables in private organizations than in public organizations. He speculated that one reason for the differences was that "governance and reward systems in the different types of organization may create different needs and expectations" (p. 252). These issues, raised originally in Perry and Porter (1982), largely have remained unexplored.

A third deficiency of motivation theory (Landy and Becker 1987; Shamir 1991) is its failure to specify the behaviors to which it applies. No distinction is made between categories of behavior—"the broad and the specific, the immediate and the long term, the discrete and the continuous" (Shamir 1991, 408). Katz's (1964) categorization of the type of behavior necessary for organization effectiveness runs the gamut from immediate and discrete to broad and long term, but motivational theory is largely geared toward explaining only the former behaviors. The array of motivational theory is sometimes bewildering (Rainey 1997). But in fact, the specific domains of competence of many motivation theories are only poorly identified.

Shamir (1991) is also critical of motivation theory's conception of intrinsic motivation in largely task-specific, hedonistic terms (Deci 1975; Deci and Ryan 1985). The possibility that a "task may not lead to any rewards, not even pleasure, and yet the task would be motivating due to its meaning for the individual, for instance in terms of the affirmation of his or her identity and collective affiliations" draws almost no attention in existing motivation theories (Shamir 1991, 409). Shamir contends that symbols and emotional expression lie outside even the broadest conceptions of intrinsic motivation, despite their probable influences on human motivation.

Finally, Shamir notes that values and moral obligations are excluded from conceptions of intrinsic motivation in current theories of work motivation. He observes that theories of work motivation give little recognition to either moral obligation or to values as conceptions of the desirable. He cites Schwartz's (1983) theory of deontic work motivation as one of the few attempts in the motivational literature to acknowledge moral obligation despite the important role that obligation plays in writings about motivation in Japan and other non-Western cultures. Although values as preferences are central to many motivation theories, values—social norms—as they are understood in the sociological literature (Etzioni 1988; Knoke and Wright-Izak 1982; Coleman 1987) receive almost no attention.

THEORETICAL PREMISES

I will begin the identification of an alternative theory of motivation by defining some foundational premises. Four premises are discussed that redirect our attention about motivation toward a more inclusive perspective.

Premise 1. Rational, Normative, and Affective Processes Motivate Humans

The dominant motivational perspective arises from a rational choice model of behavior. Individuals choose among courses of action based upon the principle of utility maximization. In its simplest form, the rational actor calculates costs and benefits associated with alternative actions and then chooses the alternative that maximizes expected value.

The dominance of rational choice models masks both empirical failures of the model and viable competing perspectives.¹ Knoke and Wright-Isak (1982) put normative conformity forward as a plausible alternative motivational disposition. Citing Talcott Parson's seminal theory, they argue that social action "combines elements of voluntary individual will and collectivism represented by the internalization of social norms" (p. 215). The process of normative regulation created by social norms "determine[s] the ends sought and sets constraints on the means used to pursue these ends" (p. 216).

¹Knoke and Wright-Isak (1982) cite two lines of research that simultaneously provide convincing evidence about the limitations of rational processes and the plausibility of normative processes in motivation. These studies are Marwell and Ames (1979 and 1980) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1969). For a general critique of rational choice theory in political science, see Green and Shapiro (1994).

²As Robertson and Tang (1995) demonstrate, the theories competing to explain collective action are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They explain commitment to collective action using two competing frameworks, rational choice and organizational behavior. Their analysis suggests that we may overstate the competitive advantages of a particular theory in claiming its superiority over others. Thus, the conceptual distinctions I draw between different explanations for social behavior may be sharper than can be sustained by empirical tests.

Knoke and Wright-Isak (1982) and Shamir (1991) identify yet a third foundation for motivational processes. Knoke and Wright-Isak call this process affective bonding, which refers to behavior that is grounded in emotional responses to social contexts. Shamir (1991) suggests that motivation can be self-expressive. By this he means that behavior is not goal directed or purposive, but rather is expressive of feelings and self-concepts. This concept of self-expression differs from Knoke and Wright-Isak's (1982) concept of affective bonding, which is goal directed or purposive. The important similarity is that emotions and affect are legitimized as the basis for motivation. More importantly, both Shamir's (1991) and Knoke and Wright-Isak's (1982) perspectives tie emotion or self-expression back to social context or social categories. Their frameworks accord with theories of symbolic interactionism (Stryker 1977 and 1980), which provide further support for the role of affect or self-expression.

The processes described above represent three conceptually distinct rationales for human motivation. But they are rarely incorporated into a single theory.² The premise that humans are

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motivated by pluralistic dispositions underlies the development of the public-service motivation (PSM) scale (Perry and Wise 1990; Perry 1996 and 1997). Initial efforts to validate the scale suggest the appropriateness of this pluralism premise. The PSM scale contains four subscales: attraction to public policy making; compassion; commitment to civic duty/public interest; and self-sacrifice. Three of the subscales map directly to the motivational foundations that have been identified. Attraction to public-policy making coincides with rational choice processes, commitment to civic duty/public interest with normative processes, and compassion with affective processes.

Premise 2. People are Motivated by Their Self-Concepts

March and Olsen (1989) identify two general models of motivation, one associated with a "logic of consequence," the other with a "logic of appropriateness." They suggest that motivational models built on a logic of appropriateness involve the following sequence of decisions: What kind of situation is this? Who am I? How appropriate are different actions for me in this situation? and Do what is most appropriate (p. 23). This sequence is indicative of behaviors we observe in public and nonprofit organizations that cannot be explained by a logic of consequence.

At the center of motivation based on a logic of appropriateness is an individual's self-concept. Although self-concept is used occasionally in the motivation literature, it is not featured prominently. Bandura (1977 and 1986), whose social cognitive theory of human motivation gives self-regulation a prominent role, does not endorse the utility of the self-concept construct. But his reason for rejecting the utility of self-concept is that it is typically defined as a composite view of oneself. Bandura (1986, 410) observes:

A composite self-image may yield some modest correlations, but it is not equal to the task of predicting with any accuracy the intraindividual variability in performance. Self theories have had difficulty explaining how the same self-concept can give rise to diverse types of behavior.

Shamir (1991) points to early theorizing by Katz and Kahn (1966) about motivational patterns and self-concept. Shamir (1991, 411) writes: "Katz and Kahn (1966) posited value-expression and self-idealization, which they defined as the motivation to establish and maintain a satisfactory self-concept, as an important motivational pattern in organizations." Colby and Damon (1992) demonstrate the importance of self-concept in the context of research about moral exemplars. They found that

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moral exemplars disregarded the costs and consequences of pursuing their moral goals. The exemplars instead were characterized by the moral certainty of their actions because they perceived only one morally right path of action. This led them to disavow their acts as courageous—they simply had no choice in the matter. In research contemporaneous with but completely independent from Colby and Damon (1992), Monroe (1996) identified virtually the same individual cognitive patterns in a study of ethical political behavior.

Premise 3: Preferences or Values Should be Endogenous to Any Theory of Motivation

Wildavsky (1987) challenged assumptions about the role of preferences in social and behavioral sciences. He noted that political scientists are likely to claim that preferences are the result of people's interests. But relying on interests to explain preferences begs the question, Where do preferences come from? Wildavsky rejected the use of interests as a proxy for preferences:

Yet, if preferences come from interests, how do people figure out what their interests are (presumably, these do not come with a birth certificate or social security card) so they will know what they prefer? For if interests and preferences are synonymous, we still are no wiser about how people come to have them (1987, 4).

Wildavsky found that the way economists treat preferences is equally unsatisfactory. For economists, preferences are exogenous, outside the system being studied (Lewin 1996).

Burt (1982) and, to a lesser extent, Lewin (1996) argue that the failure of economists to create a theory of preference development and formation, which is the natural extension of economists' assumption about the exogeneity of preferences, is an indictment of rational choice theory. Burt contends the weakness of rational choice is "the extent to which it relies on differences in tastes to 'explain' behavior when it can neither explain how tastes are formed nor predict their effects" (1982, 347-48).

Premise 4: Preferences are Learned in Social Processes

If preferences are to be endogenous to motivation theory, how, then, are preferences formed? Among the explanations are cultural identity theory (Wildavsky 1987) and social learning theory (Bandura 1977 and 1986; Grusec 1992), which directly link preference formation to social processes. Preferences or internal standards (i.e., the rules by which behavioral decisions

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are motivated), emanate from society. While a component of motivation certainly ties means to ends, there is also a component that is primarily concerned with what those ends ought to be (Wilson 1995).

Research by Youniss and his colleagues (Yates and Youniss 1996; Youniss and McLellan 1997; Youniss, McLellan, Su, and Yates 1999) illustrates the social influence on identity formation. Drawing upon Erikson's concept of identity, Yates and Youniss (1996, 273-74) argue that youths look to society "to find a transcendent ideology with sociohistorical validity with which to identify." Institutions such as churches, schools, and charities give youth clear value alternatives that help them sort among identities in relation to society (Yates and Youniss 1996). The research of Colby and Damon (1992), Monroe (1996), and others (Hirschman 1982; Knack 1992) reinforces the findings of Youniss and his colleagues.

Ostrom (1998) argues that individuals learn norms that influence behavior. She defines norms as "an internal valuation—positive or negative—to taking particular types of action." Norms, like preferences, have social roots: "Many norms are learned from interactions with others in diverse communities about the behavior that is expected in particular types of situations" (p. 9). Ostrom's formulation is consistent with Wildavsky's (1987) conception of cultural identity theory and Fukuyama's (1999) analysis of forces behind the decline of social capital.

Despite the individual bias of extant motivation theories, the view that government and, more broadly, the public domain are major sources of value has a long intellectual history. Hughes (1939), Selznick (1957), Scott (1987), and Friedland and Alford (1987), among others, point to the centrality of institutions in defining social values. Scott (p. 499) defines social institutions as ". . . relatively enduring systems of social beliefs and socially organized practices associated with varying functional arenas within social systems. . . ." Friedland and Alford contend that institutional spheres are differentiated and are associated with different belief systems. These spheres and belief systems, what Scott refers to as institutional logics, are key to defining values and a repertoire of behaviors available to individuals.

A PROCESS THEORY OF PUBLIC-SERVICE MOTIVATION

The four premises help frame the possibilities for a theory of work motivation that better explains behavior in many public

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and nonprofit organizations. The premises suggest that work behavior has many origins, among them rational choice, but also normative conformity and affective bonding. In addition, an individual's self-concept (i.e., his or her identity and values) is a significant filter through which these motivational processes operate. The individual's self-concept, however, does not rise fully formed in a vacuum. Individuals are social creations who come by their values and identities in a variety of ways, including exposure to institutions and mechanisms of social development.

A process theory of public-service motivation is presented in the exhibit. Embedded in the logic of the exhibit is Bandura's conception of reciprocal causal relationships among three factors—environmental influences, cognitive and other personal factors, and behavior—that he calls triadic reciprocal determinism (1986, 23). The exhibit actually divides critical variables into four domains: sociohistorical context, motivational context, individual characteristics, and behavior. I will discuss each of these in turn.

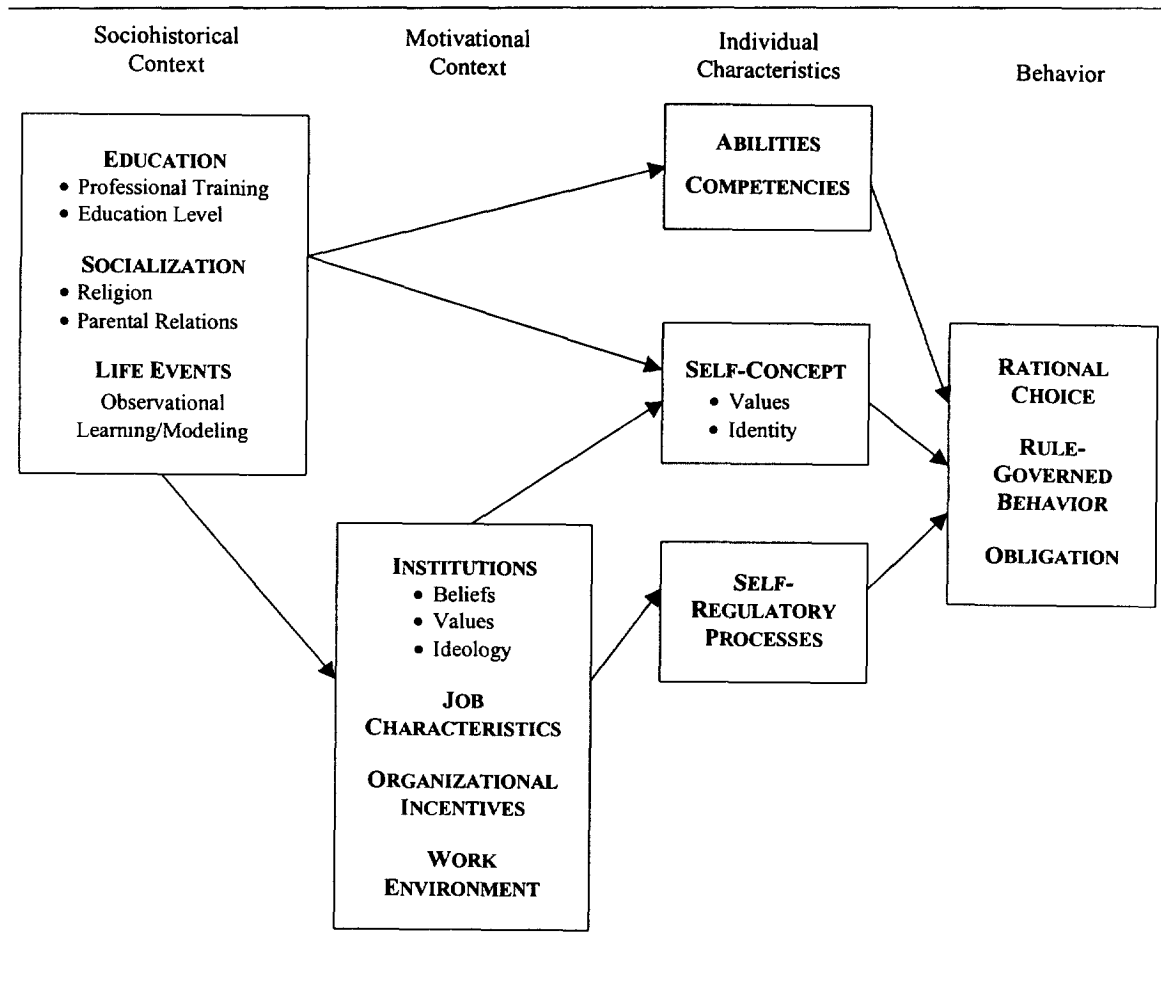
Sociohistorical Context

A key to formalizing a theory of public-service motivation is an understanding of the environmental variables that shape individual preferences and motives. David C. McClelland (1985) argues that in addition to the basic needs that all humans inherit, people acquire needs according to individual life events and experiences. A critical step in developing a theory of public-service motivation, as the theoretical premises emphasize, is to identify the sources and nature of the influences that motivate individuals. The first places to look include socialization from various institutions such as the family, churches, and schools (Wilson 1995; Bandura 1977 and 1986; Colby and Damon 1992; Monroe 1996). Indeed, several of these social influences have been found to correlate with public-service motivation (Perry 1997).

Another facet of individuals' sociohistorical context is the nature of their life events in prework and nonwork settings. Observational learning and modeling (Bandura 1986) are processes through which values and patterns of behavior are transmitted. They are part of a range of social learning that influences individual behavior in organizations. As Bandura explains, "By observing others, one forms rules of behavior, and on future occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (1986, p. 47).

Exhibit

A Process Theory of Public Service Motivation



Motivational Context

The second block of variables in the exhibit involves situational factors that influence behavior in organizations. The organizational incentives, job characteristics, and work environment variables are consistent with formulations in existing models of motivation (Porter and Miles 1974; Perry and Porter 1982). At the same time, the depiction of relationships departs from conventional theory in several regards. First, the model shows direct links between an individual's makeup (i.e., identity and values), the environment, and the institution in which the individual is embedded.

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A second and perhaps more important departure from traditional motivation theory concerns the role of institutions in determining the immediate influences on individuals. Rainey (1979 and 1983) and Perry and Porter (1982), among others, develop extended arguments that support the relationships in the exhibit in the context of government institutions and immediate motivational factors such as organizational incentives, job characteristics, and work environment. Knoke and Wright-Izak (1982) identify eight types of organizational incentive systems that mirror and extend the logic of the institutions-organizational incentives relationship depicted in the exhibit. They suggest that organizational incentives are a mix of utilitarian, normative, and affectual incentives and that individuals tend to select incentive systems toward which they are predisposed. The type of organizational incentive systems they identify (e.g., pure utilitarian, pure normative, service) follows closely the institutional logics of major social institutions such as the corporation, government, labor unions, and voluntary associations. Thus both empirical and theoretical support exist for this portion of the model.

Individual Characteristics

The third major category of variables in the exhibit involves individual characteristics. The theory suggests that individual characteristics can be conceived as several conceptually distinct components. Among these components is an individual's abilities and self-concept, through which proximate and distal cues are processed.

Self-regulation (Bandura 1986, 335-89)—an individual's self-directive capabilities—affects how an individual's self-concept influences subsequent courses of action. Bandura's model of self-regulation provides insight into how self-regulation can influence cognitions that, in turn, influence behavior.³ He suggests that self-regulation is a function of three subfunctions: self-observation, judgmental processes, and self-reaction. Some form of self-monitoring is obviously necessary if individuals are to influence their own behavior. But self-monitoring is not likely to influence motivation unless the individual is judging his or her self-observed behavior against a set of internal standards. These standards could originate from social and cultural cues, including evaluative standards modeled by others. The third subfunction in Bandura's framework is self-reaction, which entails creating incentives to respond to one's behavior.

³I do not view Bandura's formulation as definitive. It is cognitive and excludes the expressive foundations of motivation. The value of Bandura's formulation is its explicit recognition of the individual's independent role in the motivation process.

A recent study (Brewer, Selden, and Facer forthcoming) suggests the plausibility of the self-concept component of the model. The authors found that responses to forty items associated

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with public-service motivation clustered around four types of individual orientations or identities. They labeled the types samaritans, communitarians, patriots, and humanitarians. Samaritans empathize with the indigent and underprivileged, but they expect recipients of their help to exert effort on their own behalf. Samaritans feel good as a result of the service they perform. Civic duty and public service are central to the identities of communitarians. Unlike samaritans, however, communitarians have no special connections with the disadvantaged. To give back to the community and society is central to their orientation. Patriots are prepared to risk significant personal loss in the name of duty and the public good. Humanitarians have a strong sense of social justice and are disinterested in self-gratification. Based upon their study, Brewer, Selden, and Facer (forthcoming, p. 15) conclude:

The desire for economic rewards is not the defining feature of any of the four conceptions of PSM. However, economic incentives play a role in defining the perspectives of samaritans and communitarians.... Communitarians report that "doing good deeds" is more important than "doing well financially." Moreover, both samaritans and communitarians would elect to serve citizens, *even if they were not paid to do so* [emphasis in original].

The results of the study suggest that self-concept varies according to an individual's values and identity. More importantly, it suggests the variations in self-concept have motivational consequences.

Behavior

Depending on the nature of the self-regulatory effect, an individual's behavior could flow either from a logic of consequence or from a logic of appropriateness. Consistent with a logic of consequence, the individual could weigh costs and benefits and seek to maximize utility in the traditional ways we think about rational choice.

The broader view of the motivational process developed here brings other, nonconsequentialist options into play. One option involves identifying or recognizing patterns (either consciously or subconsciously) that invoke the pursuit of appropriate or rule-governed courses of action. For example, Bandura (1977 and 1986) argued that instead of assessing different actions according to the ensuing consequences, people determine attractiveness of different actions according to how consistent they are to their internal standards. As Grusec (1992, 782) put it: "People do not behave like weather vanes, constantly shifting their behavior in accord with momentary influences; rather they hold to ideological positions in spite of a changing situation. They can

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do this because they bring judgmental self-reactions into play whenever they perform an action."

The primary motivators for public-sector employees are the interests that attract them to public service. These interests are likely different from those of people who self-select into the private sector. Despite the rhetoric and disdain for the impersonal bureaucracy, a respect for rules might be closely associated with the desire to help obtain the common good. March and Olsen (1989) suggest that political communities, or governments, are "based on a shared history and valued way of life, a shared definition of the common good" (p. 161). It follows that those who seek to manage the affairs of government have a primary interest in helping to realize this common good. Such persons are likely to be motivated by fulfilling obligations, maintaining trust, and obeying rules.

Schwartz (1983) formalized the idea of obligation-based motivation in a theory of deontic work motivation. He borrows the term deontic from the Greek *deonta*, meaning duties. Schwartz turns to the psychoanalytic tradition to formulate a theoretical explanation for deontic motivation. His formulation explicitly contains concepts of the self that are consistent with the general parameters of self-concept and self-regulation in the exhibit.

Generalizability of the Theory

Shamir's (1991) suggestion that motivation theory be more explicit about the domain of its application poses an interesting challenge. To which behaviors or categories of behavior is the theory applicable? In what circumstances or situations is the theory most applicable? What determines whether individuals take essentially consequentialist or appropriateness courses of action?

Identifying a priori the domain of the theory is difficult. The specification exercise is difficult, in part, because the concept of *self-concept* needs further development, particularly in terms of its relationship to behavioral outcomes. Self-concept theory seems most appropriate for explaining general work and job motivation (Shamir 1991). If we categorize organizational behavior into membership, role performance, and episodic task performance (Katz 1964), the theory may better explain membership and role performance behaviors than it does specific task performance. The theory may also be more effective in explaining why certain dimensions of the self-concept—for example, the moral dimension—may more readily be explained by the theory.

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By inference, therefore, whistle blowing and the persistence of behaviors that seem economically irrational are strong candidates for explanation by this theory.

In his version of self-concept theory, Shamir (1991) suggests both contextual and individual moderators. With respect to the contextual variables, he argues that the theory will be useful for an explanation of behavior in weak situations, specifically when goals or means for achieving the goals are unclear, and external rewards are not related to goal achievement. With respect to individual moderators, Shamir (1991) suggests that the extent to which an individual has a crystallized self-concept, is instrumental or expressive, and is pragmatic or moral will influence the applicability of the theory.

Thus the influence of public-service motivation may be highly influential in situations where behavioral rules compete or are weak, or where one's self-concept is tested—just those situations where public administration scholars have long argued the public sector is different (Perry and Porter 1982; Allison 1983).

CONCLUSION

The twin developments of greater attention to prosocial behavior and more institutions-conscious motivation theory may be a prelude to a new paradigm of motivation, one with both fuzzier lines between organization and society and more heterogeneous assumptions about human behavior. Formalization of a theory of public-service motivation is of both practical and scholarly importance. It is of practical importance because it will help to identify those who are most capable and most suited for public-sector work, and it will help public- and nonprofit-sector managers better understand the bases of motivation for their employees. It is of scholarly importance because it will aid in the broader understanding of motivation and management differences between the private sector and the public and nonprofit sectors.

Public administration scholars do not need to choose the theory path I am advocating. There are clearly situations for which traditional rational choice models may explain and predict behavior quite successfully. On the other hand, if we are interested in advancing the field's images of organization (Morgan 1997), then we need to give more attention to testing theory that reflects our implicit claims. My hope is that when we acknowledge *J-PART*'s silver anniversary, we will be able to look back and celebrate the development of our distinctive perspective. At a minimum, it is my hope that the theory will change a stereotype of public employees. Thinking about motivation in more global

terms rather than in terms of discrete behaviors reframes the question from the classic, Are bureaucrats lazy? to potentially more favorable questions such as, How are bureaucrats able to persist in the face of low rewards and a hostile environment?

The theory of public-service motivation that has been presented here has significant research implications. It should be clear from the discussion that the public-private survey comparisons that have become commonplace (see, for example, Jurkiewicz, Massey, and Brown 1998) have very modest utility for unraveling PSM. The link the theory makes between sociohistorical phenomena and organizational behavior suggests that qualitative methods—observational, direct, ethnographic, and anthropological research—could contribute a great deal to uncovering how the variables that are identified in the exhibit come together. Colby and Damon (1992) and Cooper and Wright (1992) provide good models for future research about public-service motivation and organizational behavior. These studies used interviews and extensive life histories to identify patterns across moral exemplars. The strategy of searching out consistencies across life histories and in personal interviews needs to be applied to studying behaviors outside the realm of moral commitment. What would we find if we used the same research strategy to look at more routine choices in public organizations? To answer this and a host of other underinvestigated research questions is our challenge in the years ahead.

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