MEASUREMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION: NEW INSIGHTS, OLD QUESTIONS

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MEASUREMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION: NEW INSIGHTS, OLD QUESTIONS

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ABSTRACT: *This paper reviews some recent research from political science that speaks to the public service motivation (PSM) literature. Specifically, it discusses research that describes new measures of bureaucratic ideology and agency performance. These new measures might usefully be employed in the PSM literature and a discussion of them highlights some potential pitfalls in PSM research more generally.*

An important literature in public administration and management concerns public service motivation (PSM) (see Brewer 2008; Perry and Hondeghem 2008; Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2009). According to Perry and Wise (1990), PSM is "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions." Other definitions of PSM emphasize some form of "other-regarding" orientation but they differ in the importance they attach to public institutions (Perry and Hondeghem 2008, 4). A significant literature has emerged to explain the measurement, causes, prevalence, and impact of PSM, and justifiably so (for reviews see Brewer 2008; Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2009). If PSM is a key component of public sector performance, it is an incredibly important research program. Up to this point the bulk of the literature on PSM has developed within the fields of public administration and public management with important contributions from economics and political science (see, e.g., Francois 2000; Francois and Vlassopoulos 2008). I was asked as an outsider to this literature to contribute to this symposium. In that spirit, this paper reviews some recent work from political science that speaks to the PSM literature. Specifically, it discusses recent developments in political science that include new measures of bureaucratic ideology and performance. These new measures might usefully be employed in PSM research and a discussion of them highlights some potential obstacles to PSM research.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the relationship between PSM and ideology. It reviews new developments in the measurement of

bureaucratic ideology and proposes that these new measures could be used to help 35
parse out the unique effects of PSM on different aspects of agency behavior. The
second section describes the difficulties in measuring agency performance and
reviews two new measures that could be used to help evaluate whether PSM influ-
ences outcomes. The final section concludes and suggests that more interaction
between the fields of public administration, management, and political science can 40
help move PSM research in new and productive directions.

DISENTANGLING PSM AND IDEOLOGY

Trying to connect PSM to outcomes raises a host of challenges (Brewer 2008).
These challenges include disentangling whether PSM causes good performance or
good performance causes PSM, and nailing down the precise definition of PSM. 45
How scholars define PSM has important implications for the conclusions scholars
draw about its antecedents and effects (Brewer 2008; Francois and Vlassopoulos
2008). For example, if college graduates with the highest levels of PSM are now more
likely to identify a job in the not-for-profit sector as the natural response to their
PSM, then what exactly is PSM (Light 2008)? How does the not-for-profit sector 50
qualify as a "uniquely public institution," a key component of one influential
PSM definition? How PSM is defined influences how it is measured, and how it is
measured has a direct bearing on scholarly inference.

Another key challenge is how to disentangle PSM both conceptually and
empirically from ideology. PSM, under some common formulations, is plausibly 55
correlated, arguably causally so, with ideology and this makes it difficult to evaluate
the consequences of PSM for performance. For example, key parts of the definition
presented by Perry and Wise (1990) are normative in nature and include a concern
for social equity which "involves activities intended to enhance the well-being of
minorities who lack political and economic resources." A concern for social equity 60
relative to other concerns in society is one component of a liberal-conservative
ideology. Normative concerns with ideological content are included in the measure
of PSM proposed by Perry (1996). Perry's measures, for example, force respondents
to rate the importance of social equity relative to other concerns such as liberty. The
extent of PSM is also evaluated based upon respondent views about the importance 65
of social programs, views about the underprivileged, and the importance of
government intervention in society. Respondents who answer these questions in a
way that results in a high score on a PSM index would also be liberal by most
common definitions. These same questions could be used to develop a measure of
liberalism-conservatism. There is not a perfect overlap between PSM and 70
liberalism-conservatism but a noticeable overlap. As a result, work that evaluates
the antecedents of PSM and finds a correlation between ideology and PSM may
not have found a correlation because of a causal relationship but because measures
of ideology and PSM are measuring the same thing.

More generally, empirical work that employs similar definitions or measures of 75
PSM is possibly analyzing liberalism-conservatism. This is problematic since many
of the surveys commonly used to evaluate the causes and consequences of PSM

do not include items directly dealing measuring ideology or partisanship because they are government surveys and cannot ask about political views. Estimating models without appropriate controls for ideology can generate biased estimates and lead to flawed inferences about the influence of PSM on performance.

Work on the antecedents of PSM may or may not find a relationship between ideology and PSM depending upon how PSM is defined and measured. For example, in Perry's (1997) careful work on the antecedents of PSM, he finds no correlation between ideology and PSM. He does, however, report correlations between self-reported ideology and the different components of PSM as measured in that work. For example, included in the PSM measure was a subscale called Attraction to Policy Making that included the following items:

- Politics is a dirty word [reversed].
- The give and take of public policymaking does not appeal to me [reversed].
- I don't care much for politics [reversed].

Conservative respondents were more likely to rate high on this subscale while liberals were low. Yet, on another subscale called Self-Sacrifice, liberals were more likely to score high. This subscale included the following items among a mix of less ideological questions:

- Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.
- I think people should give back to society more than they get from it.
- I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.
- I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else.

Both subscales were aggregated into one measure of PSM, which showed no relationship to ideology. One might reasonably contest the use of these questions to measure PSM or the decision to join these two subscales into one construct. The first set of questions appears to measure how much people like and are willing to engage in politics. The second set of questions measures the respondents' willingness to sacrifice for the good of the whole. Do these two subscales measure the same concept or discrete concepts? Perry (1997) reports that scores on these two subscales are moderately negatively correlated, implying that higher values on one subscale do not cluster with higher scores on the other subscale. To what extent, then, are the two subscales measuring the same underlying concept? The choice of questions and the definition of PSM determined if and how ideology and PSM were related as measured. This makes the use of good measures of ideology important in quantitative works exploring PSM.

Measuring Agency Ideology

The example above illustrates how proper conceptual and empirical accounting for the role of ideology is necessary to draw any firm conclusions about PSM. Important advances have been made in political science in developing measures of agency ideology but also conducting surveys that ask explicitly about respondent ideology. Surveys by Aberbach and Rockman (1976, 1990, 2000), Maranto and Hult

(2004), and Bertelli et al. (2008) include questions about ideology and partisanship. These surveys often do not ask questions about public service motivation, however.

Since some of the surveys used to analyze PSM do not include questions about ideology, some accounting for ideology at the agency or bureau level could help. While individual measures of ideology would be ideal, bureau- or agency-level measures are better than no measures at all. There have been two main approaches recently in political science to measuring the ideology of agencies, each advancing along different tracks. The first relies on expert judgments about agency ideology based upon objective information and subjective judgment. The second relies on observed behavior of agency employees to estimate the ideal points of agencies. At the simplest level agencies have been classified as liberal or conservative based upon their mission (e.g., regulation, defense) or politics at the time the agency was created (Gilmour and Lewis 2006a, 2006b). The difficulty with these approaches is that they are imprecise and often subjective. Clinton and Lewis (2008) systematize these subjective assessments of agency preferences. They conduct an expert survey on agency preferences as the basis for generating estimates of agency ideology.[1] One difficulty with this approach is that experts who make bad evaluations can lead to bad estimates. If experts are unfamiliar with lesser-known agencies or make consistent mistakes in categorizing agencies as liberal or conservative (e.g., Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board), this can be problematic.

Many works use the partisan identification of the president or presidential appointees to measure agency preferences (see, e.g., Cohen 1986; Epstein and O'Halloran 1999; Huber and Shipan 2002). Others use the votes or behavior that looks like "votes" to develop measures of ideology (Bertelli and Grose 2007, 2008; Moe 1985; Nixon 2004; Snyder and Weingast 2000). Recently, Bertelli et al. (2008) surveyed federal executives about their opinions on key votes in Congress. They use this information to generate ideal points on a liberal-conservative dimension for each executive. The ideal points of agency officials are then aggregated to get one estimate of agency policy views for agencies. Ideally, measures of ideology could be generated for civil servants themselves to go alongside measures of PSM. Short of that, however, controlling for differences in ideological orientation of the agencies that employ these civil servants is a first step.

Data from either individual or expert surveys could be used to help empirically distinguish the unique effects of PSM from ideology. This would partly help account for the overlap between measures of PSM and ideology until the concept of PSM itself can be clarified and measured with more precision. There are many distinct definitions of PSM employed in the existing literature whereas the understanding of liberal-conservative is relatively well established (for a discussion of different definitions see Brewer 2008; Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2009; Francois and **Q1** Vlassopolous 2007).[2]

MEASURING AGENCY PERFORMANCE

One of the key justifications for PSM research is the hypothesized influence that PSM has on organizational performance (Brewer 2008; Francois 2000; Perry,

Hondeghem, and Wise 2009). Perry and Wise (1990, 370) claim that "Public service motivation is positively related to individual performance," and a number of works have argued for a relationship between PSM and correlates of high agency performance such as organizational commitment (see, e.g., Crewson 1997). Yet, empirically demonstrating a connection between PSM and performance has been challenging, particularly at the organizational level (Brewer 2008; Crewson 1997, 506; Perry and Wise 1990). One difficulty is translating self-reported performance in surveys into conclusions about organizational performance. Another has been defining good organizational performance objectively. Some new developments in political science may provide new measures of organizational performance to test scholarly theories about PSM.

PSM and Self-Reported Performance

There have been a number of studies that connect PSM to self-reported performance or evaluations. The difficulty with self-reports, however, is that we do not know whether people reliably report their evaluations since respondents may inflate their own ratings (Brewer 2008). We also do not know whether positive evaluations of individuals actually aggregate into high organizational performance. Individuals can perform individual jobs well, but the organization can falter if the organization does not have the proper structure, rules, processes, or job definitions that connect good individual performance to organizational goals.

One common way of measuring performance in public administration as it relates to PSM is to use employee survey data. Surveys are used to measure the degree of individual PSM and to evaluate employee or agency performance (see, e.g., Crewson 1997). For example, questions dealing with attraction to policymaking, commitment to the public interest, social justice, and duty are used to measure the strength of PSM and questions dealing with work environment, job satisfaction, and cross-organization comparisons are used to measure performance. The approach of using survey data to measure both the independent and dependent variables has limitations. One difficulty is that employees may not be best able to determine how well their agencies are performing in the absence of objective measures. Are employees happy at work and proud of what is happening in their agency because the agency is *really* working well or because the agency generally shares their values and priorities and meets their needs? Indeed, if employees with high PSM are also liberal, they are likely to support the mission of their agency, particularly in social welfare and regulatory agencies. If this is the case, they are more likely to perceive work in these agencies as important and rewarding and believe these agencies are working well.

A second, perhaps more serious concern, is that employees who are having a good experience in their agency likely will report more public service motivation, not because it exists exogenously but because of their good experience in the agency. When people feel satisfied in their agency, their general level of contentment increases and this influences not only the way they answer questions about their work happiness but also their answers to questions about their interest in policymaking, their commitment to the public interest, and selflessness. Correlations between

PSM and measures of performance may exist not because of a causal relationship   205
but because they are measuring the same thing.

PSM and Definitions of Performance

A key difficulty in connecting PSM to performance is the difficulty of objectively
defining good performance. For example, if PSM motivates civil servants to hold
high professional standards, will civil servants resist political direction that tells them   210
to violate professional standards or training? More pointedly, if the president
directed the forest service to cut down the nation's forests would our expectation
be that high PSM would lead forest service employees to carry out the task with alac-
rity or resist those efforts strongly? Which of those behaviors would be considered
good performance? Would the professional foresters earn high or low evaluations   215
for trying to protect the nation's forests? What counts as good performance varies
in different contexts. For executive officials such as governors or the president, a
definition of good management must include responsiveness to the executive's policy
agenda. Legislators, clients of the agency, and other interested parties are likely to
have different definitions of good management, however. This makes finding an   220
agreed-upon measure of performance difficult.

To complicate matters, agencies operate in distinctly different environments to
produce outputs from social security checks to homeland security. Agencies have
different mandates, constraints, and resources that make comparisons perilous.
New measures of performance analyzed in political science, however, arguably over-   225
come the difficulties described above. They define good performance in a defensible,
transparent, and largely policy-neutral way and provide means of accounting for
variations in management environment.

New Measures of Organizational Performance

Recent work in political science analyzes two notable new measures of govern-   230
ment performance that do not rely on employee survey data. They can be used to
evaluate the relationship between PSM and performance. The first new measure is
a program performance score developed by the Office of Management and Budget
in the George W. Bush administration. Since 2002 the Bush administration has used
a grading scheme based upon a survey instrument called the Program Assessment   235
Rating Tool (PART). The PART is used to numerically evaluate federal program
performance on four dimensions: program purpose and design, strategic planning,
program management, and program results. Federal programs earn grades from 0
to 100 based upon a series of 25–30 yes/no questions filled out jointly by agencies
and OMB examiners. These scores were used by the Bush administration when   240
making budget decisions (Gilmour and Lewis 2006a). The total scores vary quite a
bit. For the cohort graded in the FY 2006 budget, the average score is 62.78 and
the minimum and maximum are 13.82 and 96.7, respectively. If the scores meaning-
fully measure program performance, then measures of PSM in the agencies

implementing these programs could be compared to PART scores to determine   245
whether or not PSM influences program performance.

Whether or not the scores meaningfully measure program performance is an open
question. PART scores have been criticized on a number of fronts with critics citing
evidence of unequal standards for low or high grades across programs, variation in
OMB examiner expertise, poor or inconsistent program definition across programs,   250
and different amounts of managerial control in different types of programs (U.S.
Government Accountability Office 2004a, 2005a). Others, however, argue that this
does not diminish PART's usefulness for evaluating comparative management
quality or other PSM questions, provided one proceeds carefully (Gilmour and
Lewis 2006b). Jung and Rainey (2009), for example, use PART related information   255
to explore the relationship between PSM and agency goal characteristics.[3]

A second approach to measuring performance comparatively is to look at macro-
economic or budgetary forecasting by administrative agencies. Krause and his
colleagues use state general revenue forecasts or federal macroeconomic forecasts
as objective measures of agency performance for a variety of projects (Krause and   260
Corder 2007; Krause and Douglas 2005, 2006; Krause, Lewis, and Douglas 2006).
The nice feature about using forecasts is that scholars can observe what agency
officials thought would happen versus what actually happened and can assess the
quality of their performance easily. Forecasts can be accurate or inaccurate by
varying amounts. They can also exhibit bias, either conservative (underestimates)   265
or optimistic (overestimates). Krause, Lewis, and Douglas (2006), for example, use
state general revenue forecast data to evaluate how the different personnel systems
of state budget offices influence their performance. They find that state budget agen-
cies with either appointed directors and careerist employees or careerist directors and
at-will employees produce the most accurate forecasts. Krause and Corder (2007)   270
look at performance in federal macroeconomic forecasts and compare the optimism
of more and less politicized agencies. While forecasting data provide a clear and
informative measure of agency performance, it is unclear whether the findings
related to performance are generalizable to other types of agencies and other types
of activities.   275

These new measures provide an important new avenue for evaluating the influence
of PSM on agency performance. Specifically, do agencies filled with employees with
a high level of PSM get higher PART scores? Among the agencies that do macro-
economic forecasting (Social Security Administration, Federal Reserve, Office of
Management and Budget, Congressional Budget Office), does the one with the   280
highest levels of PSM produce more accurate forecasts?

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The literature on PSM continues to grow and develop. Scholars inside the field are
looking outward to similar research in other disciplines to inform and clarify key
definitions and measures. Indeed, Perry and Hondeghem (2008, 8) identify this   285
endeavor as one of the major tracks of emerging PSM research. While others have
focused on some of the theoretical aspects of PSM research from political science,

this paper has focused on the measurement of key concepts in the PSM literature. It has examined the overlap between measures of PSM and ideology and described new means of measuring bureaucratic ideology emerging in political science. It has also described new measures of agency performance that might usefully be employed in the PSM literature.

This paper is an example that hopefully illustrates how the interaction of different fields with an interest in PSM can be productive. Focusing on issues of how to get individuals with PSM into government and the consequences of that, good and bad, for management is a productive research program and one to which scholars in a variety of fields can contribute.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1. Their estimates incorporate information about agency mission and the politics at the time they were created into the estimates.

2. For example, Perry and Wise (1990) refer to "motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations." Brewer and Selden (1998) refer to "the motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful…public, community, and social service." Other work refers simply to altruistic or prosocial behavior (Brewer 2008).

3. Lewis, for example, cites evidence from interviews with OMB and agency officials and comparisons of PART scores to other measures of performance demonstrate that the scores, while not perfect, measure real differences in objective performance across federal programs (Gilmour 2006). He engages in a lengthy defense of the PART score for his purposes and uses PART scores to evaluate the management performance of political appointees versus career civil servants (Lewis 2008).

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Q3

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