

RESTORING THE PUBLIC SERVICE IDEAL:  
CREATING A CLIMATE FOR  
PUBLIC SERVICE

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to explore whether public service motivation can be considered a work-unit or organizational-level construct. I posit that a climate of public service motivation can be created by: 1) leaders who model the ideals of public service, 2) agency employees seeing the meaningfulness of their work; and 3) when employees perceive that the agency has a good external reputation. Further, this study examines whether public service motivation, at either the group or individual level, will mediate meaningfulness and perceived external image to important outcomes that impact employee retention, namely organizational commitment and organizational identification. I will test this theory by sampling employees from a large state agency and nonprofit behavioral health organization.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*“ . . . ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country.”*

*John F. Kennedy*

#### **Public Image in Decline**

When President Kennedy spoke these words in 1961 during his inaugural address, he inspired a generation of Americans to enter public service. Public service was considered an essential element in our progression toward a more noble society. Public service was associated with prestige (Horton & Hondeghem, 2006; Kilpatrick, Cummings, & Jennings, 1964). Today, however, that ideal is rarely uttered. What happened to our optimism?

The public's image of government has steadily declined over the past several decades (Waeraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). Just 20 years after Kennedy's inauguration, President Ronald Reagan remarked, "Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." The public sector has since endured persistently negative stereotyping that portrays government workers as lazy, incompetent bureaucrats who offer little to no customer service (Frank & Lewis, 2004; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Baldwin, 1984). Likewise, public agencies are often described as too big, wasteful, slow, unreliable, and inefficient, resulting in many proclaiming that the current model of public administration is outdated and in need of drastic reform (Goodsell, 2003; du Gay, 2000).



In the U.S., Americans' trust in their government is lower than it has been in several decades. In 1964, over 75% of Americans believed they could count on the government to do the right thing (Nye, Zelikow, & King, 1997). However, in a recent poll taken by the Pew Research Center in October of 2013, only 19% now say they trust the government to do what is right. Today, the public's image of government is often characterized by distrust, cynicism, and contempt (Farnsworth, 2003), which has led to the reduction of American's level of civic involvement (Brewer, 2003; Putnam, 1995). As recently reported, "the American public has become so cynical about government that many no longer think reform is possible" (Huffington Post, January 25, 2014). President Reagan famously expressed this attitude when he stated that "[t]he nine most terrifying words in the English language are: 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'"

Although many individuals concur with President Reagan's comment when government is considered in political terms, or viewed as one colossal entity, perceptions of needed governmental services generally are viewed more favorably – at least by the citizens needing the services. For instance, it is hard to imagine that when individuals seek assistance from fire or police departments, they have negative images of the men and women coming to their aid. This dual perception was highlighted following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In the aftermath, public servants were praised and recognized for their heroic efforts.

Now that the memory of 9/11 has faded, the amiable opinions towards public servants have diminished and there is once again declining trust of government (MacKenzie & Labiner, 2002). This decline in the public's trust and the negative view of government in general has led to fewer individuals wanting to make a career of public service (Lewis & Frank, 2002; Light, 2002). Further, public servants report lower morale, with many expressing concern about their ability to adequately perform their jobs due to insufficient resources or inadequate management (Light, 2002).

The key to creating lasting reform in the public sector is motivating government employees to enthusiastically embrace public service and getting them committed to their organizations and to achieving their organizations' goals. Creating a strong organizational climate of public service should

help employees identify with their organizations and their missions, and further align the employees with their organizations' values as well as enhance employees' commitment to stay.

Research in public administration concentrates primarily on how to improve public-sector performance by using successful practices in the private sector that are focused on individual behavior (e.g., Klein, Mahoney, McGahan, & Pitelis, 2010; Gruening, 2001; Box, 1999; Hood, 1995). However, these attempts largely fail. I believe that theories relating to the development and strengthening of organizational climates can help inform best practices for improving performance in the public sector (Brewer, 2004). Specifically, I posit that a strong climate of public service will lead to enhanced organizational identification and organizational commitment and help answer one of the big questions facing public managers – how to motivate citizens and employees so they will enthusiastically embrace public service (Behn, 1995). The goal of the present research is to address this gap in the literature by determining whether a climate of public service can exist and, if so, what factors are responsible for the development of such a climate.

### **Differences Between Public and Private Sectors**

There is a widely held perception that there are significant differences between workers in the private sector and workers in public agencies (e.g., Park & Rainey, 2011; Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010; Bright, 2009). Expanding upon the belief that the public and private sectors are “fundamentally alike in all unimportant respects” (Sayre, 1953: 102), research in the field of public administration suggests that public employees differ from those in the private sector in terms of individual characteristics (Brewer, Selden & Facer, 2000; Perry, 1997; Wittmer, 1991; Rainey, 1982).

Despite these perceived differences, several initiatives have been implemented in hopes of improving the image of government services; they call for public administrators to improve practices by learning from private-sector management. Examples of strategies include: “public choice,” (Dunleavy, 1986), “performance-based budgeting” (Melkers & Willoughby, 1998), “reinventing government” (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992), “public value” (Moore, 1995), “new public management”

(Kaboolian, 1998), and “public entrepreneurship” (Klein et al., 2010). These initiatives were often accompanied with buzzwords such as “zero-based budgeting,” “total performance management,” and “doing more with less” (Perry & Porter, 1982). However, despite their well-intended goals, these approaches met with limited success in reversing the decline in the public’s image of the public sector. This is due in large part because there are fundamental differences between the public and private sectors, which makes determining what constitutes “good” governmental performance difficult. The concept of good performance in the public sector is ambiguous and has been described as “an elusive concept that, like beauty, lies in the eyes of the beholder” (Brewer, 2004: 399). As a result, initiatives aimed at improving the government’s image that focus solely on performance are unlikely to succeed.

One reason the concept of public-sector performance is hard to define is that public agencies tend to focus more on accountability and achieving equity and fairness in service delivery rather than financial performance (Boyne, 2002). In addition, the public sector is more politicized than the private sector, and these political divisions result in supporters of those in office tending to view current government performance as good, whereas supporters of the political opposition perceive the performance as poor (Brewer, 2004). Moreover, public agencies have multiple constituencies who often disagree about which elements of performance are most important and who therefore demand different emphases of performance (Boschken, 1994). Further, many governmental services are preventative in nature, such as averting health hazards and alleviating human suffering (Brewer et al., 2000). The tendency, then, is to focus on these governmental agencies only when they are perceived to have failed at their mission and when disaster strikes.

Another possible reason for the lack of success for many of the aforementioned public-sector improvement initiatives may be their over reliance on emulating practices from the private sector instead of focusing on what motivates public employees (Frederickson & Hart, 1985). There appears to be evidence that public-sector employees have a separate and distinct set of work-related motives, values, and needs than those who work in the private sector (Wright; 2007; Crewson, 1997; Perry

1997; Wittmer, 1991). For instance, research indicates that many employees in the public sector place greater value on intrinsic rewards such as doing important work and the opportunity to serve others, whereas private-sector employees place more value on extrinsic rewards such as money (Taylor & Taylor, 2011; Lyons, Duxbury & Higgins, 2006; Wright, 2004; Houston, 2000). Numerous studies also find that public-sector employees are motivated more by job content, self-development, and interesting work than those in the private sector (e.g., Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007; Leete, 2000; Houston 2000; Jurkiewicz, Massey, & Brown, 1998). Using merit-based reward systems is also difficult in the public sector.

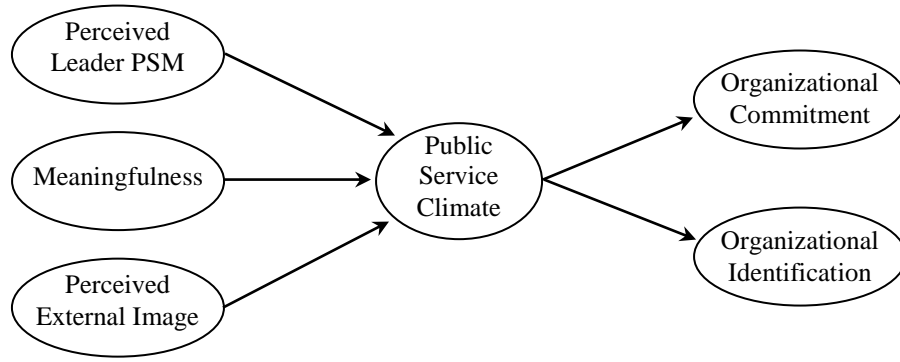
Public managers are limited in the methods by which they may try to motivate employees because civil service/merit rules as well as standardized pay grades limit their ability to recognize and reward individuals through monetary pay increases, promotions, or performance-based bonuses (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007a). Therefore, improving the public's image requires finding the right levers to motivate public employees to work hard and stay committed to the performance of public service.

One way to change perceptions is by creating a working climate in which government employees adhere to the *public-service ideal*. The public-service ideal purports that public servants should serve out of a perceived duty to the community and that they should regard the interests of the whole society to guide decision making over their own personal interests (O'Toole, 1990). One way to motivate public workers to act according to the public-service ideal is through the creation of a climate of "public service motivation."

Although there is a significant body of research examining what draws individuals to public service, or public-service motivation, there is no research on a climate of public-service motivation. I plan to fill this gap by exploring the following research questions: 1) does a climate of public-service motivation predict organizational commitment and organizational identification for employees; 2) does having leaders with high levels of public-service motivation lead to a climate of public-service motivation within their organizations; 3) does an employee's perception of work meaningfulness impacts a climate of public-service motivation; and 4) what impact does an

organization's reputation as perceived by its employees have on a climate of public-service motivation. My proposed model is presented below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Model of Climate of Public Service Motivation**



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

My approach to these research questions is to expand upon the theory of public-service motivation from the public administration literature. I will examine whether a climate of public service can exist and, if so, the possible consequences for such a climate. And finally, I will examine possible antecedents for such a climate.

#### **Public Service Motivation**

*“As soon as public service ceases to be the chief business of the citizens, and they would rather serve with their money than with their persons, the State is not far from its fall.”*

*Jean-Jacques Rousseau*

One major distinction between the public and private sectors is with the individual differences that attract employees to them (Vandenabeele, 2011; Bright 2005; Wright, 2001; Francois, 2000; Brewer et al., 2000; Crewson 1997). Public-service motivation (PSM) theory assumes that some people are drawn towards civil service because they are predisposed to motives grounded either primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations (Perry & Wise, 1990). PSM is often described as the altruistic motivation to serve

for societal goals or to serve the public's interest (Vandenabeele, 2007). For the purposes of this paper, I will use PSM as defined by Brewer (2011, pg. 3), meaning the “motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful public, community, and social service.”

PSM is thought to originate from three separate and distinct motivations: 1) normative conformity; 2) affective bonding; and 3) rational choice theory (Perry, 2000). The normative conformity motive results from a person's need or desire to conform to certain norms or expectations. Essentially, people who seek conformity choose public service because they perceive that public service is expected of them, often learned from family or other institutions such as school, church, etc. (Perry, 1996; Perry & Wise, 1990). For example, a person whose parents were civil servants or served in the military might feel it is expected that he or she follow in their footsteps. In addition, this motivation, also called the “commitment to the public interest” or “civic duty” dimension of PSM (Kim & Vandenabeele, 2010), is generally manifested as the desire to serve the public out of a sense of duty or loyalty to the government (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008; Vandenabeele, 2007). Thus, normative conformity may also involve values such as *social equity*, *fairness*, and *accountability*, which result in the desire to be involved in activities intended to enhance the well-being of those who lack political and economic resources (Bright, 2005).

Affective bonding motives, or the “compassion dimension,” involve actions that are based in emotional responses to various social contexts (Perry, 2000; Perry & Wise, 1990). Affective motivation is described as “patriotism of benevolence” (Frederickson & Hart, 1985); is characterized by a desire to help others; and includes emotions such as altruism, empathy, moral conviction, and other pro-social desires (Brewer et al., 2000). Affective motivation generally arises from commitment due to the conviction that the individual is involved in an activity of significant social importance (Perry, 2000). An example of affective motivation is a person working for an agency that provides substance abuse treatment because he or she has family members who have suffered with addiction.

The rational choice theory, or “attraction to public policy” dimension, posits that individuals sometimes choose to work in civil service based upon the principle of individual utility maximization, or what gives a person the greatest sense of pleasure (Perry, 2000). In essence, under the rational choice theory, people with high levels of public service motivation choose to work in the public sector because it makes them feel good or furthers their self-interest (Naff & Crum, 1999). For instance, some individuals are attracted to work in public organizations to advocate for public policies that promote a particular self-interest (Bright, 2005). Others under the rational choice theory are drawn to public service to participate in forming public policy because it is exciting and makes them feel self-important (Perry, 1996). For example, in a survey of senior federal managers, approximately two-thirds responded that “the opportunity to have an impact on public policy” was a reason for remaining with their agencies (Kelman, 1987). Thus, while they are serving the public, they are also satisfying a personal need by reinforcing their own self-images (Jacobson, 2011). This motive is somewhat controversial as it contradicts the altruistic motives of serving others versus self-interest. Consequently, some researchers redefine it to reflect using policy making as a way of trying to do good for as many people as possible (Kim & Vandenabeele, 2010).

Perry was the first to design a tool to measure an individual’s public-service motivation (Perry, 1996). His tool included the three dimensions mentioned above (i.e., “commitment to the public interest,” “attraction to public policy,” and “compassion”) plus a fourth dimension of “self-sacrifice,” which he added because of its presence in public administration literature (Brewer et al., 2000; Perry, 1996). Self-sacrifice is the willingness to serve others for reasons other than tangible rewards (Perry, 1996). President Kennedy’s quote at the beginning of this paper provides an example of a call for individuals to express this self-sacrifice motive (Perry, 1996). Research subsequently confirmed this four-dimension factorial structure (e.g., Anderfuhren-Biget, Varone, Giauque, & Ritz, 2010; Clerkin, Paynter, & Taylor, 2009; Coursey, Perry, Brudney, & Littlepage, 2008; Vandenabeele, 2008a; Bright, 2007). Therefore, I will use the above four dimensions to explain PSM.



Because of its altruistic component, PSM is understood as a particular form of motivation (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008). PSM is explained as a part of the broad category of “needs theories” of motivation (Bandura, 1986), consisting of the fulfillment of higher-order needs and acting in congruence with public values (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010). Thus, public-sector employees with high levels of PSM are motivated towards the realization of the goals and values of public service (Vandenabeele, 2008b).

PSM leads to numerous desired organizational outcomes because employees feel that exhibiting certain positive behaviors leads to intrinsic rewards that they value (Park & Rainey, 2011). Moreover, the research indicates that PSM is positively related to person-organization fit, which in turn leads to positive organizational outcomes (Bright, 2008). For example, PSM is a significant predictor of: person-job fit (Christenson & Wright, 2011), whistle-blowing activities/ethical culture (Choi, 2004; Brewer & Selden, 1998), organizational citizenship behaviors (Pandey, Wright, & Moynihan, 2008; Kim, 2006), job satisfaction (Bright, 2008; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007a), turnover intent (Bright, 2007; Naff & Crum, 1999), greater ability to cope with bureaucratic red tape (Park & Rainey, 2011; Scott & Pandey, 2005), job involvement (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007a), individual performance (Houston, 2000; Naff & Crum, 1999; Brewer & Selden, 1998; Crewson, 1997), and organizational performance (Brewer et al., 2000; Kim, 2005). In essence, working in the public sector satisfies employees with high levels of PSM desire to perform meaningful public service (Wright & Grant, 2010; Perry & Wise, 1990).

PSM theory is robust in that it explains various outcomes important to organizations not only in the U.S., but also across cultures. For example, several studies find support for PSM existing in public employees in Italy (Cerase, 2009), France (Castaing, 2006), the Netherlands (Leisink & Steijin, 2009), Australia (Taylor, 2008), China (Cun, 2012; Bangcheng, 2009), South Korea (Kim, 2006), Malta (Camilleri, 2006), Switzerland (Ritz, 2009), the United Kingdom, and Germany (Vandenabeele, Scheepers, & Hondeghem, 2006).

Thus far, PSM research has focused on this form of motivation exclusively on an individual level, examining outcomes from individuals with high levels of PSM or exploring possible antecedents to individual PSM. I intend to examine whether this construct can operate collectively in the form of an organizational climate. I posit that there are differences among work groups in their collective attitudes towards public service as manifested in their practices and behaviors, and that these differences will explain variance in important organizational outcomes. In addition, I plan to explore the consequences and possible antecedent for such a climate.

### **Public Service Climate**

*“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

Organizational climate is generally defined as the employees’ shared perceptions of the organization in terms of policies, practices, expectations, and outcomes (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009; Hunter, Bell, & Mumford, 2007, Anderson & West, 1998; Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998). Climate reflects individual or group experiences and expresses “how things are done” within the organization (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009; Hunter et al., 2007; Schneider, Macey, & Young, 2006).

Research on organizational climate examines employee perceptions regarding their work environments and how these perceptions influence their attitudes and behaviors (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009). At the individual level, an employee’s perceptions of his or her work environment and the impact it has on his or her psychological well-being is referred to as a psychological climate (James & James, 1989). When perceptions of a work unit’s employees are aggregated, this represents the organizational climate (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009).

Although multiple climates often exist within an organization, climate research generally focuses on a specific climate facet (e.g., Schneider et al., 2006, Schneider et al., 1998). For example, there is research examining a climate for participation and involvement (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005; Tesluk, Vance, & Mathieu, 1999), justice (Yang, Mossholder, & Peng, 2007; Liao & Rupp, 2005;

Mossholder, Bennett, & Martin, 1998), empowerment (Maynard, Mathieu, Marsh, & Ruddy, 2007), initiative and psychological safety (Baer & Frese, 2003), creativity, (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002); innovation (Mumford & Licuanan, 2004; Anderson & West, 1998), safety (Wallace, Popp, & Mondore, 2006; Zohar, 2002), support (Gelade & Young, 2005), ethical behavior (Martin & Cullen, 2006), and service (Gelade & Young, 2005; Schneider & Bowen, 1985).

As previously mentioned, research on PSM thus far is limited to examining individual differences. Although some argue that an organizations' culture may affect its level of public service motivation (Brewer et al., 2000), to date no research has studied a PSM climate and its possible consequences and antecedents. My research will explore how an organization's climate of public service and the shared values of providing public service can impact important outcomes related to employee retention and the organization's reputation.

A climate for public service will help create a desired set of organizational values. Organizational values are the principles that guide behavior within the organization (Liedtka, 1989). Shared organizational values help establish and frame employee relationships and also determine behavior by establishing set expectations in the workplace (Agle & Caldwell, 1999). An organizational climate that emphasizes shared values for public service, or the *public service ideal*, should lead to an enhanced person-organization fit by matching people who are predisposed to working in the public sector to the agency's mission (Paarlberg & Perry, 2007). This should create a stronger attachment between the employee and the organization, resulting in a reduction in employee turnover.

In addition, a climate for public service can also improve how the public views the agency. Public service is essentially a service industry with a multitude of constituencies or customers. Service marketing research suggests that the right organizational climate can affect public perceptions. Specifically, there is ample evidence that links employees' perceptions that their organization is customer focused and has a strong customer-oriented climate with high levels of customer satisfaction (e.g., He, Li, & Lai, 2010; Schneider, Macey, Lee, & Young, 2009; Dean, 2004). Moreover, a strong customer-oriented climate has been linked to customer perceptions of service quality (Schneider &

Bowen, 1985; Schneider, Parkington, & Buxton, 1980). Further, research suggests that employee perceptions of a customer-oriented climate enhances how employees feel about their organizations (Donavan, Brown, & Mowen, 2004).

I posit that a climate for public service can exist because, as discussed previously, PSM is described as a part of the “needs theories” of motivation (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010). According to McClelland’s trichotomy of needs theory, work behavior is primarily motivated by three needs: 1) affiliation, 2) power, and 3) achievement (Harrell & Stahl, 1984). Unlike Maslow’s theory (Maslow, 1954), which has been heavily criticized (Hofstede, 1984; Wahba & Bridwell, 1976), McClelland’s theory is not hierarchal, but maintains that while employees are generally influenced by all three of these needs, they are usually more strongly motivated by one of the three (Fisher, 2009). In the context of this study, I will focus on the need for affiliation.

Individuals with affiliation needs are motivated to establish and maintain warm, friendly relationships with their colleagues and associates (Harrell & Stahl, 1983). Such individuals will frequently sacrifice other opportunities and rewards to establish and maintain such relationships (Harrell & Stahl, 1983).

Research found that public employees in general value having good interpersonal relationships with their co-workers - more so than employees in the private sector (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010; Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007; Posner & Schmidt, 1982). In addition, positive associations with colleagues is considered an important factor in the motivation of public employees (Bright, 2008; Posner & Schmidt, 1982). For instance, a study involving 9,852 civil servants found that favorable relationships with team members has a positive impact on work motivation in the public sector (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010).

As such, socialization with coworkers, developing trust, and shared values seems essential to the development of climate of public service. Therefore, to fulfill their need for affiliation, I expect that under the right circumstances public employees will develop shared values for public

service. I hope to therefore expand PSM theory by examining it at a collective level to see whether a climate of public service can exist and, if so, exploring the consequences of such a climate.

## **Consequences of a Climate of Public Service**

### Organizational Commitment

*“Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.”*

*Vince Lombardi*

The public sector is said to be experiencing a “human capital crisis” (Jacobson, 2011) as fewer individuals want to make a career of public service (Lewis & Frank, 2002). A primary factor attributed to the public sector’s difficulty in recruiting and retaining quality individuals is the public’s poor image of civil service (Lewis & Frank, 2002; Lewis, 1991). As a result, public managers are searching for ways to improve recruitment and retention in the public sector (Perry & Wise, 1990).

Organizational commitment is a primary focus in the study of work attitudes and behavior (e.g., Allen & Meyer, 1996; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Reichers, 1985; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1982). Organizational commitment is generally defined as a psychological link between an employee and his or her organization that makes it less likely the employee will voluntarily leave the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1996). In addition, organizational commitment helps to motivate individuals to pursue collective goals rather than individual outcomes (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007b). This is because employees with high levels of organizational commitment identify with the organization’s values and strongly believe in the organization’s goals, which results in their desire to maintain membership in the organization (Emery & Barker, 2007; Finegan, 2000; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974).

Research also shows that organizational commitment is related to several other important organizational outcomes, such as low tardiness and absenteeism (Camillieri, 2006; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002), discretionary effort (Brown & Korczynski, 2010), job satisfaction (Meyer et al., 2002; Hackett, Bycio, & Hausdorf, 1994), acceptance of change

(Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Iverson, 1996), and organizational citizenship behavior (Organ & Ryan, 1995; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Further, some studies indicate that high levels of organizational commitment can impact job performance (Lapointe, Vandenberghe, & Panaccio, 2011; Keller, 1997; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989).

Organizational commitment is generally broken down into a three-component model to explain different types of commitment an employee may have towards his or her organization: continuance commitment, normative commitment, and affective commitment. (e.g., Meyer & Allen, 1991; Dunn, Dastoor, & Sims, 2012). Continuance commitment is described as a situation in which the employee commits to the organization because he or she “has to” (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). This form of commitment results from the employee’s belief that leaving the organization is too costly, such as the fear of losing or greatly reducing retirement/pension funds or due to the lack of viable alternatives for employment (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

Normative commitment is where an individual remains with an organization because of feelings of obligation – he or she “ought to” (Allen & Meyer, 1996). This may arise out of a legal or moral obligation because the organization provided a sign-on bonus, repaid student loans, or invested resources in training for the employee (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Affective commitment results from an individual’s positive emotional attachment to the organization (Dunn et al., 2012). An employee who is affectively committed strongly identifies with the values and goals of the organization. The employee therefore stays with the organization because he or she “wants to” (Noordin, Omar, Sehan, & Idrus, 2010). Organizational affective commitment is the strongest and most desired form of commitment under this model (Meyer & Allen, 1991). It is characterized by a willingness to exert substantial effort for the organization due to a strong belief in the organization’s values (Finegan, 2000; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). More importantly, while continuance, normative, and affective commitment are all positively related to job satisfaction (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), only affective commitment is linked to employee job performance (Lee,

Tan, & Javalgi, 2010). Therefore, for the purposes of this research, I will focus on organizational affective commitment.

A primary reason organizational commitment draws the interest of researchers and practitioners is because of its demonstrable link to two desirable outcomes – turnover intent (Vandenberghe & Bentein, 2009; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) and actual employee turnover (Griffith, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Whitener & Walz, 1993). In fact, in a meta-analysis of employee turnover, organizational commitment was determined to be a stronger predictor of actual employee turnover than job satisfaction (Griffith et al., 2000).

Interestingly, the level of organizational commitment may be generally lower in the public sector (Nawab, Ahmad, & Shafi, 2011; Lyons et al., 2006; Moon, 2000) due to the lack of flexibility of personnel procedures as well as the weak link between performance and rewards (Boyne, 2002; Perry & Porter, 1982). In addition, public employees may be less committed because they rarely are able to witness the connection between their work and the ultimate organizational outcome or success due to the enormous size of many government agencies (Perry & Porter, 1982). Nonetheless, PSM may remedy this problem.

Research finds that individuals with high levels of PSM have higher levels of organizational commitment (Kim, 2006; Pandey et al., 2008). The direction of this correlation, however, is still the subject of some debate. Some studies indicate that organizational commitment is an antecedent of PSM (Camilleri, 2006). Other research indicates that organizational commitment is a consequence of PSM (Castaing, 2006; Crewson, 1997; Brewer & Selden, 1998; Naff & Crum, 1999; Perry & Wise, 1990). The directionality of causation may be a “chicken or the egg” dilemma, because organizational commitment seems to be both an antecedent and a consequence of PSM, and both strengthen each other (Horton & Hondeghem, 2006). Given this causality dilemma, I choose to use commitment as a consequence because I have not found any research showing commitment creating an organizational climate. Conversely, there is much theory and numerous studies showing how certain climates impact

organizational commitment (e.g., O'Neill, Harrison, Cleveland, Almeida, Stawski, & Crouter, 2009; Cullen, Parboteeah, & Victor, 2003; Welsch & LaVan, 1981).

One of the strongest drivers for the development of organizational commitment is value congruency between the organization and the individual (Finegan, 2000). Research shows that organizations can increase commitment through socialization efforts that emphasize person-job fit and value alignment (Filstad, 2011). An organizational climate that establishes value congruence between the values of the organization and that of the employee will increase the employee's level of commitment (Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010; Noordin et al., 2010), strengthen the employee's identification with the organization (Paarlberg & Perry, 2007), and improve employee job satisfaction and work involvement (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). Thus, a climate of PSM will help public employees associate public service values with their agencies' missions and goals and therefore should have a positive effect on individual organizational commitment.

*H<sub>1</sub>: A climate of public-service motivation will be positively related to organizational commitment.*

#### Organizational Identification

*"A leader must identify with the group."*

*Vince Lombardi*

A climate of public-service motivation where employees share the values and characteristics of the organization and its mission will lead individual members to identifying with the organization. The collective focus of providing public service should lead to a sense of organizational identification or the "perception of oneness with or belongingness to" the organization (Ashford & Mael, 1989: 34). This should increase the employees desire to remain with the organization and reduce turnover (Van Dick, Christ, Stellmacher, Wagner, Ahlswede, Grubba, Hauptmeir, Höhfeld, Moltzen & Tissington, 2004; Mael & Ashford, 1995).



Organizational identification is considered an important workplace variable; research shows that it has a positive relationship to desired work attitudes and behaviors such as motivation (Mael & Ashford, 1992), decision-making, employee interaction, job satisfaction, employee retention, perceptions of meaning at work, and performance (Edwards, 2005; Van Dick, 2001; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Ashford & Mael, 1989). Organizational identification is defined as employee identification with the organization because values of the employee and the organization are in alignment (Riketta, 2005; Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000). Although organizational identification and organizational commitment appear similar in nature, research indicates that they are separate and distinct constructs (Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). One difference is that organizational commitment is founded in social exchange theory and reflects an attitude toward the organization and its members (Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). Thus, organizational commitment focuses on factors that make the job enjoyable, which may result in a positive attitude towards the organization.

Conversely, organizational identification is based upon social identity theory, or the perception of oneness with a group (Ashford, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Ashford & Mael, 1989). Thus, the individual focuses on the perceived similarity he or she has with the organization (Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). People tend to identify with organizations to enhance self-esteem (Dutton et al., 1994; Ashford & Mael, 1989). It is one way in which people define themselves and make sense of their places in the world (Ashforth et al., 2008). Moreover, identifying oneself with an organization helps fulfill an essential human need to identify with and feel part of a larger group (Ashford et al., 2008) and to obtaining approval from individuals whose opinions matter (Dutton et al., 1994).

An organization's climate provides a psychological identity that is shared by its employees (Schneider et al., 2006). Organizational values and member attitudes are considered important connections in an employee's identification with the organization (Cheney, 1983). Shared organizational values provide employees with direction and an appreciation of what is unique or distinctive about the organization and ultimately helps strengthen employees' identification with the organization (Paarlberg & Perry, 2007; Dobni, Ritchie, & Zerbe, 2000). A climate that promotes

public service will promote positive values and help align members' attitudes to the fulfillment of the agency's mission. Therefore, I predict that a climate of PSM will positively impact organizational identification.

*H<sub>2</sub>: A climate of public-service motivation will be positively related to organizational identification.*

### **Antecedents for a Climate of Public Service**

It is important to understand how a climate for PSM develops. Based on prior work on organizational climate development, I posit that at least three factors will lead to its development: 1) perceived levels of PSM of the organization's leaders, 2) the perceived external image or reputation of the organization, and 3) the meaningfulness the employees perceive of the work or mission of the organization.

#### Perceived Levels of PSM of Organizational Leaders

*"Example is not the main thing in influencing others, it is the only thing."*

*Albert Schweitzer*

Research on organizational climate shows that it is learned through interaction among group members (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009). An organization's climate refers to the meanings employees attach to the actions of those around them (Schneider et al., 2006). In particular, an organization's leaders are some of the strongest drivers of climate (Koene, Vogelaar, & Soeters, 2002). Leaders contribute to common opinions of shared values by providing interpretations and meanings of organizational processes and practices, which help create climate perceptions (Paarlberg & Perry, 2007; Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). For example, in a study consisting of 3,445 employees of a grocery store chain, leader personality traits (e.g., conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism) were found to be directly related to various justice climates (Mayer, Nishii, Schneider, & Goldstein, 2007). Other examples of how leaders impact an organization's climate include: leadership behavior predicts a climate for creativity (Mumford et al. 2002), transformational leadership positively relates

to support for innovation (Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2003), a shared leadership style positively relates to a procedural justice climate (Ehrhart, 2004), charismatic leadership positively relates to an organizational climate promoting financial performance (Koene et al., 2002), transactional leadership positively relates to a procedural justice climate (Walumbwa, Wu, & Orwa, 2008), and transformational leadership positively relates to a safety climate (Zohar & Luria, 2004).

Leadership implies influencing others (Yukl, 2002). Leaders can impact an organization's climate by promoting certain values (Grojean, Resick, Dickson, & Smith, 2004). A significant body of research supports a positive relationship between value-based leadership and employee behavior (e.g., Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010; Park & Rainey, 2008; Trottier, Van Wart, & Wang, 2008). Value-based leadership establishes a shared vision and generates awareness of organizational ideals. It encourages followers to rise above their own self-interest to achieve the organization's goals and fulfill its mission (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993).

In addition, social learning theory explains that people often learn by observing the behavior of others (Grusec, 1992; Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1977). Employees can learn what behavior is expected via role modeling (Bandura, 1986). Leaders are role models of appropriate behavior and values within an organization (Grojean et al., 2004). This is due to their status in the organization and their ability to affect behavior and outcomes through the administration of rewards and punishment (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005). Moreover, *sensemaking* and *sensegiving* is another social learning process where employees learn what the organization considers appropriate behaviors (Press & Arnould, 2011). *Sensemaking* is the process by which the organization's members gain an understanding of their work environment by observing the behavior of those around them (Ashford et al., 2008; Maitlis, 2005; Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005). *Sensegiving* refers to how the organization influences its employees' interpretation of their environment (Press & Arnould, 2011). Leaders can influence the employees' sensemaking by modeling certain desired behaviors that will create expected norms and attitudes (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005).

Further, leaders who are pro-social models and who exhibit sincere commitment to the values and success of the organization will influence their followers to behave in a similar fashion (Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Thus, I believe that leaders who are perceived to have high levels of PSM will promote public service by their example and influence followers to do the same. Therefore, I predict that leaders who are perceived to possess high levels of PSM will create a climate of public-service motivation.

*H<sub>3</sub>: Perceptions that the organization's leaders have high levels of PSM will be positively correlated to a PSM climate.*

### Meaningfulness

*"Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose."*

*Victor Frankl*

Perceived meaningfulness of one's work is important to employee attitudes and behavior; individuals generally seek out meaning and fulfillment in their work (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Frankl, 1959). Those who find meaning at work often experience enhanced personal growth and motivation (Spreitzer, Kiziler, & Nason, (1997). Conversely, those that do not find meaningfulness often feel alienated and become disengaged from their work (Aktouf, 1992; Kahn, 1990). For example, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) found experienced meaningfulness on the job to be an important component to job satisfaction and a strong predictor of employee engagement at work.

Research concerning government employees finds that they are less likely to be committed to organizational goals absent evidence that their work makes a meaningful contribution to the organization and stakeholders (Wright, 2007; Vinzant, 1998). Rainey and Steinbauer (1999), drawing upon expectancy theory, proposed that *mission valence*, or the attractiveness of an agency's mission, would have a positive impact on the organization's workforce. Subsequent research showed that the more attractive the agency mission (i.e., higher mission valence), the more likely an employee wanted to be associated with the organization and worked to help it succeed (Wright, 2007). Meaningful

missions have the ability to strengthen employee relationships and to motivate employees to fulfill their organizational goals (Wright & Pandey, 2011; Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). Viewing an organization's mission as important and one's job as meaningful should encourage public-sector employees to incorporate organizational goals into their own sense of identity and lead to a collective sense of belonging (Wright & Pandey, 2011; Weiss & Piderit, 1999). Therefore, I predict that perceived meaningfulness at work will be positively associated with a climate of PSM.

*H<sub>4</sub>: Perceptions of meaningfulness at work will be positively correlated to a PSM climate.*

### Perceived External Image

*“Character is like a tree and reputation its shadow. The shadow is what we think it is; the tree is the real thing.”*

*Abraham Lincoln*

Perceived external image, also known as construed image (e.g., Brown, Dacin, Pratt & Whetten, 2006), is employees' beliefs regarding how others outside the organization view them through their affiliation with the organization (Dutton et al., 1994). Perceived external image is based upon social identity theory, which predicts certain behaviors or consequences, such as organizational identification, based upon perceived group status (Fuller, Marler, Hester, Frey, & Relya, 2006).

How workers believe their organization is perceived by others is important to their sense of self and can significantly impact employees' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance (Ciftoglu, 2010). Individuals tend to feel proud if they belong to an organization believed by others to have socially valued characteristics (Dutton et al., 1994). More importantly, perceptions of organizational image can influence employee actions (Dutton et al., 1994). Individuals feel attracted to an organization when they perceive that it has an image they view positively (Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998). For example, if employees believe outsiders view their organization in a positive light, they will “bask in the reflected glory of the organization” (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976: 367). Conversely, perceptions of a poor image can lead to negative consequences (Dutton et al., 1994; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991).

Research shows a clear link between perceived external prestige and the level to which employees identify themselves with their organization (e.g., Riketta, 2005). This in turn will improve socialization within the organization through better work group outcomes such as cooperation, effort, participation, and communication (Ashford et al., 2008). Further, employees who feel their organization has a good reputation or image with the public will be more likely to find their jobs meaningful and experience increased pride in their work. This will increase the likelihood that they identify with the values associated with performing public service. Therefore, I predict that the better public employees perceive their agency's reputation to be with the general public, the stronger the relationship with a climate of PSM.

*H<sub>5</sub>: Perceived external image will be positively related a PSM climate.*

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Participants and Procedures**

Because the focal context for this study is for a climate of public service, I surveyed public-sector workers from a large state agency that provides behavioral health services. In addition, because PSM is not considered exclusive to the public sector (e.g., Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010; Clerkin et al., 2009), I also surveyed a nonprofit behavioral health organization and the behavioral health division of a for-profit hospital. The separate samples allowed me to compare the results across state-operated, nonprofit, and for-profit agencies in order to provide additional context for the validity of the hypothesized model.

All employees from the three entities were invited via email to participate. Participation was strictly voluntary. Invitations to participate were sent to 1,196 employees of the state agency, 214 employees of the nonprofit agency, and 307 employees of the for-profit agency. I received completed responses from 440 (37%) of the state employees invited to participate, 73 (34%) of the employees from the nonprofit behavioral health organization, and 24 (8%) of the employees from the for-profit hospital. The respondents from the state agency were 73.2% female, 75.2% Caucasian, 7.2% Native American, 5.2% African American, 4.8% Asian American, 2.4% Hispanic; 5.2% identified their ethnicity as “other.” The average age of the state employee respondents was 41.34 years ( $SD = 11.47$ ).

The respondents for the nonprofit agency were 50% were female, 83.8% Caucasian, 6.8% African American, 2.7% Hispanic, 1.3% Native American, 1.3% Asian American, and 4.1% “other.” The average age of the non-profit respondents was 39.0 years ( $SD = 12.52$ ). The respondents for the for-profit agency were 79% were female, 100% Caucasian, and the average age was 49.0 years ( $SD = 12.80$ ).

All items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree). Respondents were asked to select information from a dropdown menu that identified their supervisor, department, and division. From this information, I aggregated the responses to the three different groups (work unit, department, and division) to determine whether a climate of public service exists. Theoretically, I expected the climate, if it exists, to form around the supervisor who was the head of the work unit. However, it was also prudent to determine whether a climate might instead form within divisions or departments. Therefore, I tested within-group agreement in all three defined groups.

The hypothesized relationships were at both the group level – to explore possible climate relationships – and also at the individual level – to examine the relationships between the variables. Because I conducted multi-level research on work climate, I had to choose between designing my survey using a direct consensus model (e.g., “I believe . . .”) or a referent-shift consensus (e.g., “My team believes . . .”). My review of the literature revealed that both methods have been utilized in organizational climate research (cf. Ambrose, Arnaud, & Schminke, 2008; Wallace et al., 2006). Recent research indicates that the decision of whether to use direct consensus or referent-shift depends upon the focus of the study (Wallace, Edwards, Paul, Burke, Christian, & Eissam, in press). Specifically, using a referent-shift consensus was found to be a stronger predictor than direct consensus when examining cognitively-laden climate unit-level constructs such as job performance and customer service performance. However, direct consensus was found to be a stronger predictor of affectively-laden unit-level constructs such as



job attitudes and employees' evaluations of their immediate work environment relative to themselves. In the present study, the variables I examined are affect-laden constructs because they deal with employee attitudes (e.g., "I consider public service my civic duty," "Meaningful public service is very important to me," etc.). Therefore, I chose to use direct consensus questions.

## Measures

### Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment was measured using eight items from Allen and Meyer (1990). Example items included: "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization" and "I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization." Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) estimates for scores on organizational commitment are presented in the diagonal of Table 1 for each of the three samples.

**Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>State agency (N = 440)</i>							
<b>Commitment</b>	3.21	0.98	.93				
<b>Identification</b>	3.46	0.85	.76	.89			
<b>PSM</b>	3.79	0.58	.38	.42	.88		
<b>Image</b>	3.19	0.91	.69	.58	.27	.86	
<b>Meaningfulness</b>	4.14	0.74	.52	.55	.28	.40	.95
<i>Nonprofit (N = 73)</i>							
<b>Commitment</b>	3.56	0.93	.94				
<b>Identification</b>	3.72	0.74	.78	.85			
<b>PSM</b>	3.82	0.46	.23	.34	.81		
<b>Image</b>	3.94	0.66	.68	.65	.19	.82	
<b>Meaningfulness</b>	4.33	0.56	.56	.71	.23	.56	.95
<i>For-profit (N = 24)</i>							
<b>Commitment</b>	3.83	0.82	.89				
<b>Identification</b>	3.93	0.94	.84	.72			
<b>PSM</b>	3.94	0.50	.53	.72	.89		
<b>Image</b>	4.31	0.52	.76	.76	.41	.90	
<b>Meaningfulness</b>	4.34	0.70	.84	.84	.58	.76	.91

### Organizational Identification

To measure organizational identification, I used six items from Mael and Ashford (1992). Sample questions included: “When someone criticizes this organization, it feels like a personal insult” and “This organization’s successes are my successes.” Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) estimates for scores on organizational identification are presented in the diagonal of Table 1 for each of the three samples.

### Perceived Leader PSM

To measure perceived leader PSM, I used Kim’s (2010) scale, which contains the same four subsets of Perry’s original scale but reduces the number of questions asked because previous research found that some of the questions in Perry’s original scale were redundant (Coursey & Pandey, 2007). I modified the questions so that they were about employees’ leaders instead of the employees themselves. Example items for this scale included: “I believe that the leaders in my organization consider public service their civic duty” and “I believe that meaningful public service is very important to the leaders in my organization.” Unfortunately, due to a scrivener’s error, the perceived leader PSM measure was omitted from the online survey.

### Meaningfulness

To measure meaningfulness, I used the six items from May et al. (2004). Sample questions included: “My job activities are personally meaningful to me” and “The work I do on this job is worthwhile.” Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) estimates for scores on meaningfulness are presented in the diagonal of Table 1 for each of the three samples.

### Perceived External Image

To measure perceived external image, I used four modified items from Mael and Ashford (1992). Sample questions from this scale included: “People in my community think highly of my organization” and “My organization has a good reputation in the community.” Internal

consistency (coefficient alpha) estimates for scores on perceived external image are presented in the diagonal of Table 1 for each of the three samples.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

I sent surveys via Qualtrics to the employees of one state behavioral health agency, one nonprofit behavioral health agency, and the behavioral health division of a for-profit hospital that agreed to participate. The survey tool included questions for other constructs (i.e., job preferences), which I did not use in the present study. Because the sample size of the for-profit organization was so small ( $N = 24$ ), I did not test the hypotheses using this sample. However, I did present the descriptive statistics in Table 1.

During the cleaning of the data, I discovered that a scrivener's error occurred in the preparation of the survey; consequently the questions for PSM Leadership were not included. Thus, this portion of the model was not tested. However, as discussed in more detail below, because I did not find evidence of a PSM climate, the lack of this variable in the model is insignificant. The means, standard deviations, and correlations for all three organizations are presented in Table 1.

#### **Aggregation Issues**

Because I wanted to conduct a multi-level analysis of the data, I first explored whether aggregation was viable (i.e., whether sufficient within- and between-groups homogeneity and the unit of analysis naturally occurred) at the division, department, and work-unit levels. The division-level represented the largest work groups as defined by the two organizations. Divisions

are classified by geographical location (e.g., central office, forensic hospital, etc.). The state agency was comprised by 11 divisions, and the nonprofit agency had 7 divisions. The departments are subunits of each division and are categorized based upon what function they perform (e.g., clinical inpatient, operations, maintenance, etc.). The state agency was comprised of 74 departments, and the nonprofit agency had 19 departments. The work units are the smaller teams that make up each group and are sorted by their respective supervisors. The state agency had 149 work units, and the nonprofit agency had 33 work units.

To determine whether aggregation was viable, I first assessed the intraclass correlations (ICCs) for the state agency, by examining the ICCs for each variable among its 11 divisions. Between the divisions, only image appeared to have a significant intraclass correlation (.19). The remaining variables' ICCs were all below .10, indicating little variance attributed to division (commitment = .06, identification = .04, PSM = .00, and meaningfulness = .00). I next examined the ICCs for each variable for the state agency's 74 groups. Again, only image's ICC was sufficiently high to justify aggregation (.20). The remaining variables' ICCs were all insignificant (commitment = .08, identification = .06, PSM = .01, and meaningfulness = .01).

I subsequently measured the ICCs among the variables between work units operationalized as the state agency's 149 supervisors. Here I found two intraclass correlations that supported aggregation to the group level: commitment (.12) and image (.23). The ICCs for other variables, including PSM, were still not significant (identification = .09, PSM = .01, and meaningfulness = .08). Although some of the variables demonstrated between-group variance, my primary research question was whether PSM operated as a climate. It is clear that based on each operationalization (division ICC = .00; department ICC = .01; supervisor ICC = .01), there was no variance between

groups to justify aggregating PSM scores to the group level or to support the conclusion that PSM operates as a climate. Therefore, I decided to analyze the hypotheses at the individual level.

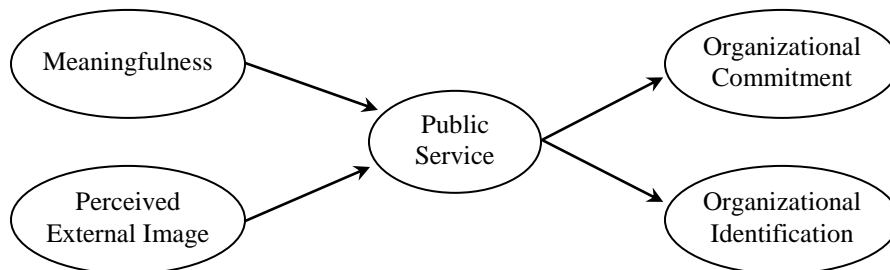
To verify that the lack of between-group variance did not support a PSM climate, I estimated the hypothesized multi-level model; the fit was quite poor:  $\chi^2(4269.758) = 1,100, p < .001$ , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.08, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .40. In fact, there were convergence problems because of the lack of variance at the between level (i.e., negative variances were estimated that are logically implausible but mathematically plausible in cases with zero variance). Because not enough variance between the variables was explained by group membership, it does not appear that a climate of PSM exists in the state agency.

Next, I examined the interclass correlations of the different variables among the division, department, and work units at the nonprofit agency. No interclass correlations were significant at either the division or department levels. However, unlike the state agency, the interclass correlation between the 33 nonprofit agency work units (operationalized as supervisor) was above 10 for PSM (.26), commitment (.30), and identification (.12). Image (.03) and meaningfulness (.02), however, were not significant. Although I obtained between-group variance on PSM in the nonprofit organization, the sample size was only  $N = 73$  and I put more weight on the larger sample size of the state agency. Specifically, because my results did not replicate across samples, I did not feel confident in concluding that there was a PSM climate in the small sample but none in the larger sample. Furthermore, for the sake of consistency, I assessed the hypotheses at the individual level for both samples.

### **Individual-Level Analysis**

Because I was unable to test the original model based upon a climate of PSM, I revised the analyses to reflect a relationship of meaningfulness and perceived external image mediated through PSM to organizational commitment and identification at the individual level. The revised model is presented below in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Revised Model of Climate of Public Service Motivation**



Prior to analyzing the data at the individual level, I group-mean centered the mean of the variables to remove the between-group variances. There are two primary methods for mean centering: grand mean centering (where each score is centered on the grand mean of all the responses for each variable) and group mean centering (where the each score is centered on the mean of the group to which the individual belongs) (Kreft, DeLeeuw, & Aiken, 1995). Both methods are considered statistically appropriate, and therefore the choice of which method to use should be based upon theory (Hoffman & Gavin, 1998; Kreft et al., 1995). Because I wanted to remove between work-unit variance (regardless of how small it was) from the responses, I group mean centered the variables to remove any between-group variances from the data (Hoffman & Gavin, 1998). This was accomplished by subtracting the group mean from each response.

Research suggests that the best way to test mediation is by focusing directly on testing the indirect effect and the model pathways that are involved in transmitting that effect (e.g., Hayes,

2009; MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Therefore, I examined the statistical significance of the paths from meaningfulness and perceived external image to public service motivation as well as the paths from public service motivation to organizational commitment and organizational identification.

I ran the latent variable analyses in the state sample, but the sample size for the nonprofit sample was too small to analyze using the measurement model. (The ratio of parameters to participants was too small.) Consequently, in the nonprofit sample, I ran only the path analysis. To improve overall fit of the state sample, I created parcels for each variable versus treating all items as individual indicators (Landis, Beal, & Tesluk, 2000).

There are multiple methods for creating multi-item composites (e.g., Mossholder, Settoon, Harris, & Armenakis, 1995; Cramer, 1996; Williams & Anderson, 1994); however, the random method is considered one of the most appealing because of its ease to implement and its positive resulting impact on model fit (Landis et al., 2000). Consequently, I randomly assigned the six meaningfulness items into parcels using the centered mean from two items to create one parcel, for a total of three parcels for meaningfulness. Similarly, I created three parcels for identification from its six items, and four parcels for commitment from its eight items. Because PSM is composed of 12 questions from four content-based subsets, i.e., “commitment to the public interest,” “attraction to public policy,” “compassion,” and “self-sacrifice” (Brewer et al., 2000; Perry, 1996), the appropriate approach to parceling these items is based upon content (Landis et al. 2000). Therefore, I created four parcels composed of three questions from each subset. Finally, because image is only composed of four items, I did not create parcels for this variable. The specific direct and indirect effects for both the state and nonprofit samples are presented in Table 2.



**Table 2. Direct and Indirect Effects of Perceived External Image and Meaningfulness on Organizational Commitment and Identification through Public Service Motivation**

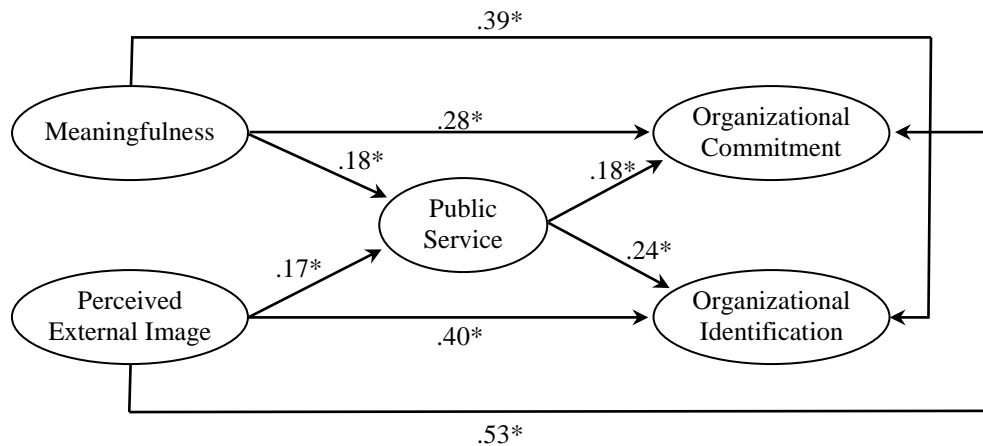
Mediation Models	Indirect Effect Point Estimate	90% CI	
		Lower	Upper
<i>State agency (N = 440)</i>			
<b>Image → PSM → Commitment</b>	.03	.00	.06
<b>Image → PSM → Identification</b>	.04	.00	.08
<b>Meaning → PSM → Commitment</b>	.03	.00	.06
<b>Meaning → PSM → Identification</b>	.04	.01	.08
<i>Nonprofit agency (N = 73)</i>			
<b>Image → PSM → Commitment</b>	-.06	-.36	.24
<b>Image → PSM → Identification</b>	-.06	-.37	.25
<b>Meaning → PSM → Commitment</b>	-.01	-.30	.28
<b>Meaning → PSM → Identification</b>	-.01	-.34	.32

Overall fit of the measurement model for state agency was moderate,  $\chi^2(550) = 1846.6$ ,  $p < .05$ , RMSEA = .07 (90% confidence interval (CI) = .07 to .08), comparative fit index (CFI) = .88, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .87. Further, all factor loadings were statistically significant and the average standardized loading was  $M = .82$  ( $SD = .11$ ). The latent variable correlations ranged from .30 between image and PSM to .82 between organizational identification and commitment.

After establishing the fit of the measurement model, I conducted a simultaneous test of the proposed relationships depicted in Figure 2 using structural equation modeling (SEM). The model predicts that PSM mediates the relationships between meaningfulness and organizational commitment, meaningfulness and organizational identification, perceived image and organizational commitment, and perceived image and organizational identification. I tested these hypotheses by obtaining point estimates of the indirect effects and the bias corrected and accelerated 90% confidence intervals around the effects using a bootstrapping method (cf. Preacher & Hayes, 2004; MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004; Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

The SEM depicting the standardized effects is shown in Figure 3 below. Statistical significance was determined using the unstandardized effects.

**Figure 3. Model Showing Indirect and Direct Effects**

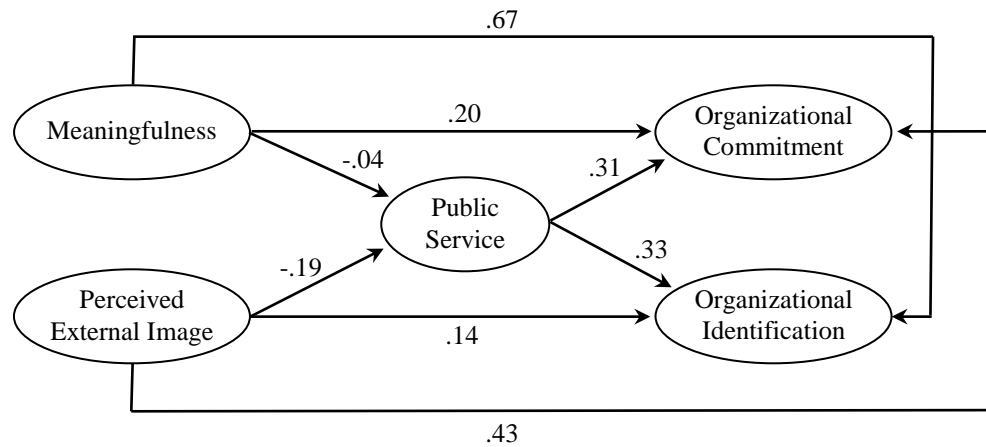


\*The coefficients are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . These values are the standardized structural coefficients for the revised hypothesized mediation model for the state agency.

The model accounted for 8% of the variance in PSM, 54% of the variance in organizational commitment, and 53% of the variance in organizational identification. All of the pathways in the hypothesized model were statistically significant. Although I interpreted the statistical significance from the unstandardized paths, the standardized effects are presented in Figure 2 for illustrative purposes. The direct and indirect estimates are presented in Table 2. The 90% bootstrapped CIs did not contain zero, providing additional support for my model. Therefore, the tests of mediation provided support for Hypotheses 1-5 at the individual level of analysis. Because of the small sample-size-to-parameter ratio, the full structural equation model for the nonprofit agency would not converge. Therefore, we tested the hypothesized model using only the structural model (i.e., path analysis). The model accounted for 5% of the variance in PSM,

37% of the variance in organizational commitment, and 61% of the variance in organizational identification. None of the pathways in the hypothesized model was statistically significant. This is likely due to the small sample size and unstable estimates. As a result, I do not have confidence in these results. Nonetheless, the path results are presented below in Figure 4 for illustrative purposes.

**Figure 4. Model Showing Indirect and Direct Effects for the Nonprofit Agency**



These values are the standardized structural coefficients for the revised hypothesized mediation model.

The tests of mediation of the larger state agency sample provided support for Hypotheses 1-5 at the individual level of analysis.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to determine whether a climate of PSM can exist, to assess how perceived external image and meaningfulness relate to organizational commitment and identification, and to explore whether these relationships are mediated through PSM. The data in the present study did not support a climate of PSM. However, I was able to address the other research questions at the individual level.

Although I was unable to find a climate of PSM at the state agency, this finding is not conclusive that such a climate cannot exist. The lack of a climate could be because the culture at the state agency is so strong that there is very little variance between different work groups. However, it could also be because PSM is an individual personality trait that does not aggregate to the group level. Given the fact that the interclass correlation for PSM among the nonprofit agency was sufficient to suggest between-group variance on this variable, further research into PSM climate may be appropriate.

The evidence in the current study does indicate that on the individual level PSM has a positive impact on both organizational commitment and identification. Further, this study shows that PSM mediates the effects of meaningfulness and perceived external image on both organizational commitment and identification. In addition, meaningfulness and perceived external

image also have a direct effect on organizational commitment and identification. These findings provide support for my theory regarding the importance of PSM, meaningfulness, and perceived external image in employee retention. All five hypotheses were supported in the state agency sample. However, the sample sizes for the nonprofit and for-profit samples were too small to replicate these results. Therefore, future research is needed to test this theoretical framework to determine whether it is applicable outside of the public sector.

The results of the present study have important theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the results contribute to the PSM literature by confirming and building upon the importance of PSM by showing that individuals with high levels of PSM are more likely to be committed to, and identify with, their organizations, thereby increasing the chance they will stay. Moreover, drawing upon expectancy theory, this study shows that the perceived meaningfulness of an organization's mission impacts a person's motivation to perform public service. Further, utilizing social identity theory, this study found that what employees believe others think of their organization can also impact their motivation to perform public service. Thus, PSM, which is a predictor of positive workplace outcomes, can be enhanced through perceived meaningfulness of the organization's mission and also the perceived positive image or reputation of the organization.

This study also makes contributions to the PSM literature by further expanding its application beyond the public sector. The composite PSM mean score for the nonprofit organization was higher than that for the public agency:  $t(df) = 5.11, p < .05, d = 0.59$ . This not surprising given that public service motivation has been attributed to individuals outside the public sector who are in occupations that "help others" (e.g., Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010; Clerkin et al., 2009; Perry & Hondeghem, 2008).

However, this fact does highlight the dual meaning of the term "public service," which can pose a definitional issue when discussing public-service motivation. Public service can mean the

act of doing something for the benefit of society or the community, and it can also mean working for the public sector. Moreover, PSM does not explain why every public servant enters the public sector. Although many individuals may enter government service for truly altruistic reasons, others may do so because they perceive it offers more job security, benefits, better hours, or they simply need a job (Gabris & Simo 1995). The distinction between public *service* motivation and public *sector* motivation is therefore important as the former describes the desired pro-social motivation to perform meaningful governmental, community, and social service while the latter perpetuates the negative stereo-type of the government worker.

A possible explanation for the nonprofit agency's a higher PSM mean than the state agency is found in the context of who was surveyed. Almost all of the nonprofit employees have direct contact with the individuals they served, such as doctors, social workers, case managers, etc. In contrast, the state agency employees surveyed included many individuals who have no direct contact with the organization's constituents, such as accountants, IT workers, maintenance workers, etc. The degree to which employees view their jobs as meaningful is often dependent upon the extent to which they are able to connect to the impact they are having on the beneficiaries of their work (Grant, 2007). Given the impact of meaningfulness on PSM found in this study, it is understandable that a group comprised almost entirely of individuals performing direct healthcare would score higher on PSM than a group containing individuals whose jobs do not directly impact the organization's mission. Thus, if PSM does not fully explain the attraction to working in the public service, nor does it accurately distinguish those working in the public sector from those in the private sector, then perhaps PSM should be renamed to "civic" or "community" service motivation to avoid any definitional confusion. Future research into this distinction is warranted to help public managers improve their workforces through an ability to distinguish between employees who truly want to work toward improving their communities and those who simply want the perceived security of a government job.

## **Practical Implications**

From a practical perspective, the research questions for this study were derived to help public agencies offset the public sector's difficulty in recruiting and retaining quality individuals (Lewis & Frank, 2002; Lewis, 1991). From my personal experience involving regular discussions with leaders of public agencies, there is significant concern over how the public sector can retain talented employees and prevent further "brain drain" of intelligent, experienced workers leaving government for the private sector. This study highlights three strategies that can increase employee commitment and reduce turnover.

The first step public managers should consider to improve retention is to measure PSM in their employee selection criteria. Selecting individuals who are already motivated to perform public service should make it easier for these agencies to promote public service values in their employees. Such a selection criteria should also enhance person-organizational fit, which is considered a strong predictor of organizational commitment (Kristoff-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Kristoff, 1996). Moreover, as this study suggests, individuals with high levels of PSM are more likely to identify with their organizations, making them more committed and less likely to leave.

The second strategy public managers should consider is linking their employees with the meaningfulness of the organization's mission. This study demonstrates not only the importance having a strong mission statement, but that organizations need to connect employees with meaningfulness of the organization's mission. This supports related research that suggests that employees are more likely to be engaged in their work if they find it meaningful (May et al., 2004), that people are less likely to accept assigned goals that they see as unimportant (Locke, Latham, & Erez, 1986), and that employees want to make a positive difference in people's lives (Grant, 2007). Demonstrating the meaningfulness of the organization's mission should begin with each employee's orientation to the organization and continue throughout the individual's employment. Further, introducing employees to the history, mission, and objectives of the

organization as well as demonstrating how the organization achieves public service goals will enhance employee perceptions of the meaningfulness of their jobs and should lead to greater organizational commitment (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2002; Klein & Weaver, 2000; Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). Communicating the pro-social impact the organization has on the community will further heighten employee perceptions of the meaning of their jobs, thereby increasing their desire to perform public service (Grant, 2008)

Finally, public agencies should look to utilizing social marketing, reputation management, and branding initiatives (Dacin & Brown, 2006). The idea of implementing these initiatives in the public sector is relatively new and comes with many obstacles (Whelan, Davies, Walsh, & Bourke, 2010), including the fact that they have multiple audiences and a lack of funding (Waeraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). Nonetheless, overcoming these obstacles and implementing these initiatives has the potential to improve agencies' political standing and image with constituencies (Carpenter & Krause, 2012). This study indicates that it can have a significant positive impact on the agency's employee retention.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Unfortunately, I did not get a sufficient response from the for-profit organization to analyze its data for my third sample. This would have provided additional context to test the generalizability of my theory. In addition, while the data from both a public agency and a nonprofit organization supported the mediation theory proposed, both organizations are in the health industry; as such, their employees may be more predisposed to altruistic tendencies. To further test this theory, surveying public agencies that are not associated with treating individuals and for-profit organizations may provide additional context to this theory.

In addition, the ratings in this study were all self-reports, which may create some concern as to the validity of the measures. However, research suggests that self-reports are appropriate measures of certain personal measures (Conway & Lance, 2010). Because my theory focuses on individuals' perceptions of meaningfulness, image, motivation to perform public service, and



commitment and identification to their organizations, self-report measures are the more accurate measurement method. In addition, I attempted to reduce any evaluation apprehension that potential participants may have by protecting their anonymity. This has been identified as an acceptable proactive strategy to reduce concerns regarding common method bias (Conway & Lance, 2010).

At the beginning of the paper I described the disparity between what public administration scholars claim PSM can produce and how public employees are perceived by others. As mentioned above, more research is warranted to the distinction between the idealism associated with public service motivation, and the careerism associated with those who work for the public sector for negative reasons.

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## APPENDICES

### **Organizational Commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997)**

1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
2. I really like discussing this organization with people outside it.
3. I really feel this organization's problems are my own.
4. I do not think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one/
5. I feel like "part of the family" at my organization.
6. I feel "emotionally attached" to my work organization.
7. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
8. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.

### **Organizational Identification (Mael & Ashford, 1992)**

1. When someone criticizes this organization, it feels like a personal insult.
2. I am very interested in what others think about my organization.
3. When I talk about this organization, I usually say "we" rather than "they."
4. This organization's successes are my successes.
5. When someone praises this organization, it feels like a personal compliment.
6. If a story in the media criticized this organization, I would feel embarrassed.

### **Public Service Motivation – Individual (Kim, 2010)**

#### *Attraction to Public Policy Making*

1. I am interested in making public programs that are beneficial for my country or the community I belong to.
2. Sharing my views on public policies with others is attractive to me.
3. Seeing people get benefits from the public program I have been deeply involved in brings me a great deal of satisfaction.

#### *Commitment to the public interest*

4. I consider public service my civic duty.
5. Meaningful public Service is very important to me.
6. I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community even if it harmed my interests.

*Compassion*

7. It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress.
8. I am often reminded by daily events how dependent we are on one another.
9. I feel sympathetic to the plight of the underprivileged.

*Self-Sacrifice*

10. Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.
11. I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.
12. I believe in putting duty before self.

**Public Service Motivation – Leader (Kim, 2010)**

*Attraction to Public Policy Making*

1. My leader is interested in making public programs that are beneficial for my country or the community I belong to.
2. Sharing my views on public policies with others is attractive to me.
3. Seeing people get benefits from the public program I have been deeply involved in brings me a great deal of satisfaction.

*Commitment to the public interest*

4. I consider public service my civic duty.
5. Meaningful public Service is very important to me.
6. I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community even if it harmed my interests.

*Compassion*

7. It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress.
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*Self-Sacrifice*

10. Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.
11. I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.
12. I believe in putting duty before self.

**Meaningfulness (May et al., 2004)**

1. The work I do on this job is very meaningful to me.
2. My job activities are personally meaningful to me.
3. The work I do on this job is worthwhile.
4. My job activities are significant to me.
5. The work I do on this job is meaningful to me.
6. I feel that the work I do is valuable.

**Perceived Organizational Prestige (Mael and Ashford, 1990)**

1. People in my community think highly of my organization.
2. It is considered prestigious to work in my organization.
3. My organization has a good reputation in the community.
4. Other organizations recruit employees from my organization.

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