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Panel track: Public Service Motivation

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Title: The impact of socialisation on graduates’ public service motivation – a mixed method study

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Introduction

There is a renaissance of interest in public service motivation in public management research. Moynihan and Pandey (2007) assert that public service motivation (PSM) has significant practical relevance as it deals with the relationship between motivation and the public interest. There is a need to explore employee needs generated by public service motivation in order to attract and retain a high calibre cadre of public servants (Gabris & Simo, 1995). Such exploration is particularly important beyond the American context which has dominated the literature to date (Taylor, 2007; Vandenabeele, Scheepers, & Hondeghem, 2006; Vandenabeele & Van de Walle, 2008).

A recent theoretical focus within the PSM literature is how organisational socialisation impacts upon levels of PSM (Camilleri, 2007; Wright, 2007). In spite of its importance, the effects of socialisation have received limited empirical attention mostly because the majority of studies have been cross-sectional and have not measured changes over time. Given that personal characteristics and socio-historical and organisational factors are linked to PSM, the role that socialisation may play in promoting PSM raises a dilemma: do people enter organisations with PSM or do organisations create and foster PSM? Brewer, Seldon and Facer (2000: 261) question to what extent individuals are genetically predisposed to perform public service and how much is created by socialisation and culture. Houston (2000: 725) likewise asks whether motivational differences are a function of self-selection or organisational cultivation. In order to better understand the impact of socialisation, many authors have called for exploration into how organisational experiences affect PSM over time (e.g. Brewer et al., 2000; Houston, 2000; Perry, 1997).

This research explores the socialisation impacts on levels of public service motivation for graduates within the Queensland (Australia) public sector. The research employs a longitudinal mixed method design, using both surveys and individual interviews, to measure and understand graduates’ public service motivation trajectories. The quantitative results reveal that public service motivation does not vary greatly across the first year of public employment; however, in general, PSM levels began high, experienced a downward trend at the second data point (at 4-8 months) and almost returned to initial levels at the third data point (at 10-12 months). In discussing the downward trend, graduates revealed that a number of inhibiting factors negatively impacted their perceptions of their ability to contribute. Conversely, the then upward trend in public service motivation was explained largely through the securing of a permanent position but also because of an increasing sense of competence through managerial and collegiate support.
The findings suggest that public service motivation may be better harnessed and promoted in new public sector workforce entrants through more targeted and aware organisational and HR techniques.

Literature Review

Within the extant literature, the generally accepted definition of public service motivation comes from Perry and Wise’s (1990: 368) seminal work where such motivation is defined as ‘an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations’. Many authors purport the altruistic nature of PSM (e.g. Gabris & Simo, 1995; Wright, 2007) with a focus on characterising it as a ‘reliance on intrinsic rewards over extrinsic rewards’ (Houston, 2000: 714).

Individual characteristics, socio-historic factors and organisations are all argued to impact upon public service motivation. This paper focuses specifically on the organisational and socialisation impacts of public service motivation. Based on Perry’s (2000) notion that PSM is shaped by rational, normative and affective processes, Moynihan and Pandey (2007) argue that organisations have a normative effect on behaviour. The role of organisations in shaping PSM is further supported by Camilleri’s (2007: 373) study in which it was found that PSM is ‘mainly the result of the organisational environment’ surrounding public employees. The organisation’s role in shaping PSM is echoed by Wright (2007) who contends that the mission of the organisation is important when it comes to motivation and performance.

In keeping with the literature on PSM, the graduate literature also stresses the important role that socialisation plays in bonding employees with the organisation (Sheridan, 1992) and how critical this is in the early stages of employment (Ashforth & Saks, 1996) as it impacts upon self belief and construction (Fournier & Payne, 1994). In spite of its importance, the effects of socialisation have received limited attention within the PSM literature. This is largely because most studies have been cross-sectional and have not measured changes over time.

Given that personal characteristics and socio-historical and organisational factors are linked to PSM, the role that socialisation may play in promoting PSM raises a ‘chicken or the egg’
dilemma: do people enter organisations with PSM or do organisations create and foster PSM? Brewer et al., (2000: 261) question to what extent individuals are genetically predisposed to perform public service and how much is created by socialisation and culture. Houston (2000: 725) likewise asks whether motivational differences are a function of self-selection or organisational cultivation.

No longitudinal PSM studies have been undertaken to research such a phenomenon. Thus, many authors have called for exploration into how organisational experiences affect PSM over time (e.g. Brewer et al., 2000; Houston, 2000; Perry, 1997) which is seen to be best understood by studying new entrants into the workforce (Houston, 2000). This approach is taken within this study which occurs within the Queensland (Australia) public sector context.

The majority of PSM studies have been conducted within the United States and the United Kingdom although research is being extended to other areas (Vandenabeele & Van de Walle, 2008). With colleagues Scheepers and Hondeghem (2006), Vandenabeele outlines that differences in terminology and content complicate research on PSM and make it difficult to conduct macro-level comparative studies. However, the authors conclude that, to a certain extent, comparisons demonstrate that PSM is a universal concept but that different countries place greater or lesser emphasis on different aspects of PSM. Policy processes and expectations of government are seen to play a role in the differing foci of motivation across nations. Subsequently, there is a call for research to be conducted within different contexts in order to test the applicability of Perry’s PSM dimensions to other geographical contexts (e.g. Vandenabeele & Van de Walle, 2007; Vandenabeele, Scheepers & Hondeghem, 2006; Taylor, 2007).

Taylor (2007) has conducted one of the few Australian based research projects on public service motivation. The author argued that some public service motives may play a more important role than others in influencing work outcomes. Taylor’s (2007) study occurred within three public sector human service organisations in two Australian states and Territories. A total of 203 participants completed the survey representing a response rate of 43%. The survey linked Perry’s four PSM dimensions (self-sacrifice, compassion, attraction to policy making and public interest) with organisational commitment, job satisfaction and job motivation. The research showed that respondents with higher levels of the PSM dimensions
were more likely to show significantly higher levels of organisational commitment, job satisfaction and job motivation. There was no significant link, however, between compassion and job motivation.

Based on the socialisation gap in the PSM literature, this research addresses the question, ‘What are the organisational socialisation impacts on graduates’ public service motivation during their first year in the Queensland public sector? This research contributes to the literature by departing from conventional practice within the field of public service motivation which has primarily focused on cross-sectional quantitative work. Taking a longitudinal perspective allows the exploration of whether people enter the public sector with public service motivation or, if indeed, organisations foster levels of public sector motivation. In addition, this research contributes to the internationalisation of PSM studies through its focus within the Australian context.

**Methodology**

There is increasing focus within the management literature on enhancing collaboration between researchers and practitioners. As advocated by Rynes (2007), this research is premised on the importance of practitioner involvement in all stages of research. Like the academic community, government has also recently focused on encouraging network arrangements and collaborations (Adams & Hess, 2001; Alford, 2004; Brown & Keast, 2003; Keast, Brown, & Mandell, 2007). An example of such collaborative efforts is the Graduate Coordinators’ Network which has been established to address employee attraction and retention issues across the Queensland state public service. The Network consists of graduate program coordinators who design and oversee all aspects of organisational graduate programs including recruitment, induction, training and development. The graduate programs are designed to effectively transition graduates from the study environment to the work environment and have become important in organisational and sectoral succession management strategies. Network members focus on knowledge sharing and problem solving in order to better recruit and retain graduate talent within their own organisation and across the sector. The Network began in 2005 and now includes all Queensland state government agencies with a graduate program.
Before commencing the study, the researcher approached the Network with a proposal for this research. A process of collaboration was agreed upon and the Network was involved in all stages of the research: problem identification, research question formulation, sampling, surveys and findings application. Such collaboration allowed the researcher to have a common understanding of the problem domain which Amabile et al. (2001) highlight as an important contributor towards collaboration success. Specifically, 10 Queensland state government graduate programs participated in the study representing approximately 216 graduates.

In order to measure and understand changes to graduates’ public service motivation over time, this research employed a mixed method, longitudinal design. The research employed the qualitative method of individual interviews and the quantitative method of surveys. The combination of the two paradigms, and their associated methods, facilitated triangulation through the comparison of quantitative and qualitative data as is strongly advocated within the literature (e.g. Scandura & Williams, 2000). In particular, this duality added rigour as it assisted in overcoming the inherent flaws of any single method (Scandura & Williams, 2000). The mixed method approach was used in alignment with King’s (1998) suggestion such that the qualitative data was used to compare and clarify quantitative results.

Perry’s (1996) public service motivation scale was used within this research. The scale is a 24 item inventory which asks respondents to rate items in relation to their perspective both as an individual and as part of a broader community. The scale contains four factors – self-sacrifice, compassion, attraction to policy making and public interest. A five-point likert scale was used which ranged from 1 (‘strongly disagree’) to 5 (‘strongly agree’). An example item from the self sacrifice sub-scale is ‘much of what I do is for a bigger cause than myself’.

In measuring change, Willett, Singer and Martin (1998: 397) contend that ‘individual change takes place continuously over time’ and that traditional ‘before’ and ‘after’ measures are inadequate. The authors argue that to track change trajectories well, multiple waves of participant data need to be collected at ‘sensibly spaced’ intervals (1998: 397). This research adopted this approach through three rounds of data collection over time as follows:

1. A baseline measure between commencement and three months of the graduate program (although mostly around graduate induction)
2. A mid-point measure taken between four and eight months of the graduate program
3. A final measure taken between 10 and 12 months of the graduate program.

The research participants were the (approximately 216) graduates from the 10 Queensland state government programs participating in the study. The small number of potential participants necessitated a high response rate in order to be able to draw statistically significant conclusions. A high response rate was achieved through personal distribution of the surveys which were accompanied by information about the research and findings from previous data collection (member checks) in order to show an immediate response and a return on investment for their time. On occasion, it was not possible to personally distribute the survey in which cases it was distributed by email.

The data for each round of the survey was entered into Excel and checked for outliers. There was limited missing data and it was treated as a blank in the spreadsheet. In order to group individual’s surveys across the three data collection rounds, participants were given the option of using an anonymous identifier or their name. Participants were given information that the provision of their name may result in a request for an interview. Individual’s data across the rounds was also grouped together. The Excel information was subsequently transported into SPSS. Some variables were re-coded and new variables created based on theoretical constructs. A number of analyses were undertaken – confirmatory factor analysis, descriptive statistics and repeated measures ANOVAs.

The confirmatory factor analysis showed that the PSM scale did not demonstrate good fit. This result is most likely to have occurred because of the small sample size (N=163) and the fact that the data came from one specific segment of the employee population - graduates - as opposed to a wider cross-section of the employee community. The scale has not been rigorously tested in different environments and on many occasions has been used only in an abbreviated form. An exploratory factor analysis of the public service motivation items indicated that all the self sacrifice and public interest items loaded onto one factor with a greater than 0.5 outcome. As such, within this study, public service motivation was treated as an holistic concept using the aggregation of the self sacrifice and public interest sub-scales. Such an approach is consistent with the PSM literature as a number of other
researchers use only a single or some of Perry’s dimensions (e.g. Castaing, 2006) or a limited set of items (e.g. Brewer et al., 2000; Lewis & Frank, 2002).

Response rates for the survey rounds were 75.5%, 72% and 51% across the three survey rounds respectively. Respondents were approximately 60% female and 80% Generation Y (defined as born in or after 1979) which is reflective of the group as a whole. It is noted that a limitation of this research is that not all graduates responded to all three rounds of the survey.

The interview process was based on Dick’s (1990) Convergent Interviewing (CI) technique. Dick (1990) developed the CI technique to collect, analyse and interpret qualitative data about people’s experiences, opinions, attitudes, beliefs and knowledge. As per Dick’s (1990) suggested procedure, the graduate coordinators undertook the interview sampling process as they knew their graduate cohorts best. Also, following Dick’s direction, the graduate coordinators nominated two graduates such that the first nominee was representative of the graduate group and the second nominee was still representative whilst being as different to the first nominee as possible. The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face; however, some were conducted by phone because of geographical constraints.

The first interview round was conducted with 22 graduates and occurred either just prior or just post graduates’ organisational entry. The purpose was to gain a qualitative perspective on public service motivation. The second round of interviews was held with 13 graduates between 10 and 16 months after graduate program commencement and focused on understanding the ‘why’ behind the changes to graduates’ PSM trajectories. The participants for the second round of interviews were chosen based on three criteria. First, they had to have completed all three rounds of the survey (N = 55) and disclosed their name (optional on survey). Second, there was an emphasis on interviewing participants with diverse trajectories. Third, participation in the first round of interviews was also taken into consideration as this facilitated a qualitative discussion of changes over time to compare and complement the quantitative results.

The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis as a consequence of which over half the interviews from the first round were fully transcribed and, as no new themes were emerging, the remainder were summarised. Although analysis had also taken place during
the data collection process as per CI, the final analysis process for the first round of interviews began with each transcript read (or played, if not transcribed) several times in its entirety (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001; King, 1998). The analysis process was based on Miller and Crabtree’s (in King, 1998: 27) ‘immersion/crystallization’ approach which consists of immersion in the data over a prolonged period of time followed by the production of an account of these findings through analytical reflection and intuitive crystallisation of meaning. In theming the data, constant comparative analysis was used to ensure separateness of themes (external heterogeneity) while maintaining cohesiveness of data within themes (internal homogeneity) (Cavana et al., 2001). Such a process fits well with CI as there is continual interview refinement (Driedger et al., 2006) even during the interview data collection process.

**Results**

The following section outlines the results of the quantitative and qualitative findings respectively. The tables below highlight the means and standard deviations for average PSM, self sacrifice and public interest.

**Survey round one (N=163)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>4.92</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self sacrifice</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public interest</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1.40</td>
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**Survey round two (N=148)**

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<th>Scales</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<th>Maximum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self sacrifice</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public interest</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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**Survey round three (N=101)**

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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self sacrifice</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public interest</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>4.80</td>
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</table>
The graph indicates that public service motivation decreased over time. Self sacrifice and public interest followed the same pattern of decrease between the first and second rounds with a rise between the second and third periods, however neither variable climbed back to its starting point. Levels of public interest were higher than self sacrifice and also contained more movement. No repeated measures ANOVA results were significant for public service motivation changes over time.

These quantitative results were discussed during the interview process. Most interviewees displayed a sense of public service motivation, although only in some cases was this a primary driver. The member checks consistently confirmed that graduates’ focus during the transition to work was on ‘just finding a job’ and it was simply a ‘perk’ that they may have the opportunity to do meaningful work. Once inside the sector, and in permanent employment, graduates’ focus quickly shifted towards undertaking meaningful work. According to the survey results, a number of interviewees had very high levels of initial public service motivation. For this sub-set of graduates, the strength of the desire to work directly with the community and to do something meaningful frequently overshadowed other factors including money, level and status.
“I didn’t want to get to the end of my life and realise that all I did was help somebody else get rich. And that’s when I started becoming interested in coming to the public sector... You know, it’s different. ...And I think that a lot of people do that, they have a defining moment where they decide they want to do something better, feel that they make a difference or that they have helped someone along the way.”

The most common trajectory for graduates was a slight decrease in overall public service motivation between times one and two and a trend upwards between times two and three. Graduates attributed the downward trend to four sectoral-based reasons. First, graduates had some desire to make a difference and believed that they would be able to do so within the public sector. Such a perception was based upon societal stereotypes of what the sector does along with university promotions of graduate achievements in the workplace. Upon entry, many graduates felt disheartened by the structural and procedural constraints of the bureaucracy and felt powerless to do work which they considered meaningful.

“I don’t know. I realised that I’m in this big beast of a thing that I’m not going to be able to make a difference. It’s that realisation - you may come in a bit green at the start as a grad then you get in and realise you can’t really do much so you just go along, toe the line, get the best of it and then leave.”

Second, graduates felt further removed from front line service delivery than they had anticipated and many could not see how their work directly contributed to community outcomes. These realisations led some graduates to consider future work in community organisations. In spite of this shift, graduates still saw value in the more corporate and organisational functions of government – ‘it just wasn’t for them’.

“I just think perhaps it’s realising that it is the status quo. That perhaps all the passion you did have, you realise that in the government you aren’t working on the ground, you are more or less one step removed from a lot of things. Probably I would have preferred more front line work.”
Third, graduates found they were negatively impacted by the attitude and behaviour of some long term public servants; however, graduates commented that they were determined not to let such negativity affect them.

“It’s hard once you get in here and you are in here with the career public servants who try to pull you into line with them. And you do get into the institution and you see the politics that are going on and I guess you adopt the coping mechanisms of the people who are around you.”

“Graduates have a very idealistic view when they come in. Once they are here for a bit it is just a regular job basically, and there are a lot of people who have been here for a while who might be slightly bitter, perhaps... Well ‘bitter’ is probably a bit strong, but they have been here a while and perhaps are disillusioned with the processes.”

Fourth, graduates frequently could not see the outcomes of their work. This was due to graduate rotations, long term projects, the lag time between project approval and implementation and changed organisational and political processes.

“It happens a lot that we will one day be working on a project, the next day the project is wrapped up... You have no control over where you go...You are a piece worker – you do a little piece of this and a little piece of that... You want some evidence that you have existed.”

There were other individual and team issues which graduates identified as contributing to the general downward trend in public service motivation. Frequently, graduates discussed a manager or colleague who they found unsupportive and unhelpful; such challenges extended to frustration with office politics. Other graduates did not receive enough work, while some had a project stall because of a lack of feedback or direction. Many temporary graduate employees saw their focus shift to the more foundational needs of job security before re-considering how they could contribute more meaningfully.
“I guess, at that particular point I was re-centring myself after having been with a very difficult manager, and was in a position where I felt I wasn’t making a contribution, which is the most important thing to me.”

“I guess I really need to be doing something and feel like I’m achieving something and that was a big issue for me. Every day I’d come back exhausted but I hadn’t actually gotten that much work done. I’d feel like I’d done, say, two hours worth of work where the rest was just bullshit, like office politics.”

Many graduates maintained an upward trend in PSM from data point two to data point three. This was mostly due to advancement, securing a permanent position, or a sense of accepting the public system and learning to work within it. Other graduates peaked at time two and this was associated with undertaking meaningful work and having supportive supervision.

“Yes, my supervisor really did a good job of explaining why [the project] was needed and advocating for it before I started. She was always really passionate about that area, the early intervention and prevention. I think her passion inspired me.”

Interviewees perceived that a number of initiatives could improve public service motivation in graduates. These included better communication with graduates about the type of corporate (rather than front line) work that the sector does and the time that it could take for policy and project implementation. Additionally, graduates thought that it would be advantageous if they knew specifically how their work was contributing to community outcomes. Having positive and passionate colleagues was also seen as essential in enhancing PSM.

“I think [PSM could be improved] if we had some kind of sense of our place in the whole system. You are this little screw on the very bottom of the wheel, but that means that the wheel stays on and stays together. And because that wheel has stayed in place, we have gotten from A to B. Some kind of feedback on the contribution that is being made, and the impact.”
In discussions about how to enhance graduate PSM, many graduates suggested activity external to the organisation. Some graduates saw that it was not the sector’s responsibility to provide opportunity for meaningful contribution; rather, individuals who wished to contribute at a community level should seek to do this in their personal lives and this was seen to be how current colleagues fulfilled such a need.

“A lot of [colleagues] are there about making a difference and when they start talking about their personal life it flows through to that as well. Like, they might be actively involved in being in the union or they are planting trees on the weekend, or whatever. They are all kind of out there; a lot of them are that type of people.”

In light of their experiences within the sector with regard to PSM, interviewees provided a variety of views on the type of graduate the sector should attract. Some interviewees felt that graduates without PSM orientation would be preferable as they were less likely to be disillusioned by the type of work in the sector.

“Get the [graduates] that have no [public service] motivation [orientation] and just want to work hard.”

Other graduates felt that the right graduate was hard to define and that doors should be open to any graduates who were interested. Part of recruiting the right graduate was also seen to be in providing better education to university students about the public sector and the type of work that it undertakes. Towards this end, one interviewee thought that terminology used could be more reflective of the experience.

“I don’t think there’s a right grad to recruit. I think that you have to go and get whoever you can, because nobody is born to fit into the public sector. It’s incredibly cooperative but it is definitely a process, and there are boxes that everybody needs to fit into. I think it’s about throwing it open and letting whoever meets the criteria, has the qualification and eagerness to see what it is about. Just let them in and give it a go.”
“Don’t worry about building the [graduate] program; build the education so that the [university students] know what is going on and that way they will get the interest early. Whether you have no program or an average program, people will want to be there... For me, until I applied for this job, I never realised there was this whole public sector kind of thing.”

“Now the public service has changed... If we were asked what we do as a public servant, people would just relate it more to being a job than a calling. That’s the difference... I wanted it to be a calling... I don’t think I’m in my calling now, it’s just a job...Maybe it shouldn’t be ‘public servants’; maybe it should be ‘state government employees’. Maybe they need to change the terminology of it.”

Overall, the findings reflect a complex mix of various aspects of employment experience that altered both the level of PSM over time, but also developed in many graduates a certain level of pragmatism about the extent to which their public service ideals can be met within the realities of the public sector environment.

**Discussion**

Authors argue that people are particularly susceptible to organisational influence during role transition such as organisational entry (e.g. Ashforth and Saks, 1996). However, the graduate survey revealed only subtle change in the average levels of PSM with mean results of 3.36, 3.22 and 3.31 across the three survey rounds respectively. The standard deviation also remained consistent at 0.53, 0.54 and 0.54 respectively. The sub-scales revealed that there was more movement across the public interest sub-scale than the self-sacrifice sub-scale; however, both follow the trajectory of a slight decrease between times one and two and a slight rise between times two and three (although this is not back to original levels).

Whilst the survey data doesn’t demonstrate much movement across public service motivation the interviews reveal a different story. The member checks highlighted that the majority of graduates came into the sector for a job and it was considered a ‘perk’ that they might get to do more meaningful work. However, for a particular sub-set of graduates, the opportunity to do meaningful work was a very important attraction criterion which
overshadowed other factors like income and status. This graduate sub-set included mature-aged graduates who had transitioned to the sector in order to do something more meaningful, and this opportunity, along with the allure of job security was very attractive.

In discussing the downward trend in public service motivation, graduates revealed that a number of factors negatively impacted their perceptions of their ability to contribute. At a broader sectoral level, graduates described how they felt hampered by the bureaucracy, were further from front-line service delivery than expected, were impacted by ‘bitter’ long term public servants and frequently did not see the outcomes of their work. Graduates also described more team based issues where they felt unsupported by a manager or colleague. Many temporary graduates described a shift in their focus to finding a permanent position once the graduate program was drawing to a close, to the exclusion of other factors like PSM. In these interviews the sense of disappointment and frustration at not being able to contribute was, for some graduates, palpable.

Graduates outlined a number of reasons for the upward trend in public service motivation. For most graduates this was between times two and three, but for some, it was between times one and two. For many temporary graduates, securing a permanent position allowed them to focus on how they could contribute more holistically. Other graduates found themselves in a good team in which they felt competent and supported and were working on projects that ‘were going somewhere’ or about which the graduate was passionate. The upward trend was also associated with a sense of understanding of the government system and knowledge that being proactive is how to achieve personal and organisational outcomes.

Graduates described a number of ways that PSM could be improved within the Queensland public sector. Graduates commented that better communication about the type of corporate, rather than front-line, work which is undertaken would make a positive difference. Graduates also suggested that better management of expectations regarding the time that it could take to see projects approved and implemented would be advantageous. Additionally, graduates described that knowing their place in the overall system could help other graduates to better understand and appreciate their personal contribution towards
community outcomes. Having positive and passionate colleagues was also seen as critical in enhancing public service motivation.

Interestingly, over time, many graduates came to perceive that it was not government’s responsibility to provide opportunities for meaningful work. Some graduates suggested external activities to improve PSM such as allowing employees to undertake a number of paid volunteer days each year. Other graduates commented that individuals should seek to fulfil this need in their own personal lives as was demonstrated to them by their colleagues.

In light of the differences between public service expectations and public service opportunities, graduates had different perceptions on the type of graduates that the sector should recruit. Some graduates felt that the public sector would be well placed not to recruit graduates who had high levels of public service motivation as they were more likely to become disillusioned; rather, the sector should recruit graduates who ‘just want to work hard’ in any role. Other graduates felt that the ‘right’ graduate for the public sector was hard to define and that the door should be open to all applicants. Part of recruiting the right graduate, was seen to be in giving better information to university students about the sector and the type of work that it undertakes. This included a public sector section in courses that typically have a purely private sector focus, such as commerce, and better information about the sector itself in public policy courses.

**Conclusion**

Few previous longitudinal studies have been carried out in the public service motivation field and many authors have questioned the impact of socialisation (e.g. Brewer et al., 2000; Houston, 2000). Whilst the graduate literature outlines that expectations and motivations change considerably over the first years of employment (e.g. Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Fournier and Payne, 1994) this was not evidenced within the public service motivation trajectory which maintained only minor movement over time. The trajectory showed that graduates demonstrated mediocre levels of public service motivation at organisational entry with a slight decrease between times one and two and an increase between times two and three although this was not back to original levels. The decline was attributed to both broader sectoral issues and individual experiences whilst the incline was attributed to
permanent employment, feeling organisationally supported and learning how to be proactive within the system.

The public service motivation literature raised a ‘chicken or egg’ dilemma: do people come into the public sector with public service motivation or do organisations foster public service motivation? Graduates’ trajectories showed that levels of public service motivation did not shift significantly. This supports the notion that public service motivation is more intrinsically based and provides support for the argument that individuals enter the sector with public service motivation.

However, the ‘chicken or egg’ dilemma is based on an assumption that public organisations do, in fact, promote a public service motivation orientation which graduates in this study suggested did not occur. Graduates commented that only very limited discussion around public contribution occurred at either the organisational, team or individual levels. Resultantly, graduates suggested a variety of ways that public service motivation could be improved; these suggestions frequently related to enhancing their understanding of how their work fitted in with the overall system and contributed to society. Such a finding may make the ‘chicken or egg’ dilemma redundant.

The practical implication of this finding is that this study highlights a missed opportunity for public organisations to discuss and encourage public service motivation at the organisational, team and individual level. Theoretically, further research needs to be conducted to determine whether public organisations do promote public service motivation; if so, further research should also be conducted which reviews the inception of individual’s public service motivation and the impact of socialisation.

Findings also relate to methodology and the transferability of the four factor motivation scale to a context outside the United States. There was a low loading of ‘compassion’ and ‘attraction to policy making’ within the public service motivation scale which bear further investigation. The compassion items have a distinctly American flavour which focuses on factors such as patriotism which may not fit an Australian context. This is consistent with the findings of Vandenabeele and colleagues (Vandenabeele et al., 2006; Vandenabeele & Van de Walle, 2008) across a number of European studies. In addition, the attraction to policy making sub-scale does not seem to measure what it is intended to measure; rather, it
focuses on politics, politicians and the ‘give and take’ of public policy which Brewer et al. (2000) found to be consistently viewed as unfavourable by participants within their empirical work and which appears to be supported in this study.

As with any research, this study has limitations which restrict the generalisability of the findings. First, the study had a narrow geographic focus as it was held within a Queensland public sector context and a small sample was used in both the qualitative and quantitative studies. Second, although attempts were made to avoid both interviewee and interviewer biases, these may have arisen due to the nature of the qualitative process and the decision to pursue intense interaction. Third, not all graduates completed the survey thrice and there was a gender bias towards females. Finally, the factor structure was less than ideal. Areas for future research therefore lie in extending this study to a larger sample within Australia and also to an international context to determine the extent to which the findings are generalisable in other contexts.

References
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