At the front line: examining the effects of perceived job significance, employee commitment, and job involvement on public service motivation

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Abstract

Social welfare work has long been identified as a highly stressful occupation, and one in which considerations of motivating employees and encouraging increased responsibility and commitment are central to understanding individual and collective performance. In the face of organizational factors that negatively affect employees' motivation, including a lack of promotion opportunities, red tape, and expected emotional exhaustion, it becomes much more important for management to motivate employees in such a way that they can provide meaningful and satisfactory services to their clients. Extant research suggests that employees with higher levels of public service motivation (PSM) are motivated to engage in prosocial behaviors that benefit others. Using survey data gathered from social welfare workers in South Korea, this research examines the impact of a number of job-related factors on employee levels of PSM. The results indicate that job significance, professional job involvement, and affective commitment all impact the levels of PSM, suggesting that attention to job characteristics and the dynamic nature of PSM are important in particularly stressful front-line professions.

Points for practitioners

Given the organizational constraints on reward programs that exist in public agencies, it becomes increasingly important to consider other job-related factors that may improve motivation – especially related to public goals – among social welfare workers.

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The findings of this study suggest that increasing opportunities for social welfare workers to directly meet and interact with their service beneficiaries or enabling employees to gain access to citizens' feedback about their service quality or service impact (e.g. citizen satisfaction survey results), can play a major role in maintaining or improving employees' level of public service motivation. The results also underline the importance of managers' giving consideration to fostering employees' public service motivation.

Keywords
human resources management, public administration, public management, service delivery

Introduction

Social welfare work has long been identified as a highly stressful occupation, and one in which considerations of employee motivation are central to understanding individual and collective performance (Coffey et al., 2009; Dillon, 1990; Lloyd et al., 2002). Street-level social welfare workers – public servants charged with directly assessing clients' needs and determining how the organization can assist them – occupy positions governed by substantial rule sets and must provide services in an emotionally laden and strongly client-focused setting (Mastracci et al., 2011; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Riccucci, 2005).

The behavior of social welfare workers is tremendously important to clients. Individuals, groups, and communities depend on these workers' motivated efforts to attend to quality-of-life issues, and social workers thus have a potentially enormous impact on the lives of others (Grant, 2008). Given the occupational characteristics and societal importance of social workers, motivating employees and encouraging increased responsibility and commitment are significant continuing challenges to managers and leaders (Grant, 2008; Maslach et al., 2001), and raise a number of issues worthy of focused empirical research.

The efforts of social welfare workers to contribute to the well-being of others have been conceptualized as having a prosocial impact (Grant, 2007, 2008). The impetus to engage in behavior having a prosocial impact has been conceptualized as prosocial motivation, focusing on 'the extent to which individuals regard protecting and promoting the welfare of others as important guiding principles in their lives' (Grant, 2008: 111). Public service motivation (PSM), a specific variant of prosocial motivation (Georgellis et al., 2011; Perry, 1996), has received a substantial amount of attention as both a predictor of individual and group performance and as a dependent variable. Past research in this area suggests that one method of ensuring high-performing employees and groups would be to select, reward, and retain employees high in PSM (Paarlberg et al., 2008). PSM and prosocial motivation are not 'contingent on feelings of pleasure or enjoyment', instead emphasizing the 'meaning and purpose of the work' (Perry et al., 2010: 682). This implies that

employees with higher levels of PSM will be motivated to put more effort into engaging in prosocial behaviors that benefit others' well-being – the main purpose and objective behind the delivery of welfare services (Crewson, 1997; Perry, 1996; Wright, 2007).

Research on PSM has focused on its distinctive motivational nature as differentiated from an economic incentive, its prevalence in public organizations, its antecedents, and its efficacy in public service provision. It has been taken for granted that public employees joining the public sector with high PSM bring positive behavioral and organizational outcomes. However, it is possible that employees are attracted to public service professions with different motives, such as health benefits, pensions, and job security. Even when public servants join public organizations with already high levels of PSM, these levels may decrease if the motivational needs of the servants are not met. They may ultimately feel a need to revise their preferences and objectives or seek membership in organizations compatible with their interests (Perry and Wise, 1990: 370). Relatively few studies have examined how PSM can be fostered or strengthened. As Wright and Grant stated, 'researchers have rarely considered the possibility that PSM may be a consequence, not a cause, of performance' (2010: 695).

This study contributes to PSM broadly, and to the process theory of PSM (Perry, 2000), by providing empirical evidence that service performance can foster and strengthen employees' PSM by increasing self-efficacy or matching agency activities with PSM values. In addition to addressing the possibility of reverse causality, this article empirically demonstrates that conscientiousness reflected by professional job involvement and affective commitment can be causes of PSM manifesting in public employees (Wright and Grant, 2010).

Although a substantial body of research has examined PSM within an American context, this study is meaningful in that it examines levels of public service motivation among social workers from South Korea (Kim, 2009). While much of the research conducted in an American context indicates that individuals self-select into government jobs due to their interest in public service, most previous studies in the Korean context show that a majority of public employees choose government jobs instead because of the promised high level of job security (Hwang and Ham, 2001; Hwang et al., 2004). The case of public employees in South Korea is relevant when examining factors contributing to heightened levels of PSM among social welfare workers, given that most enter government organizations without a distinct inclination toward public service.

The next section discusses the relevant literature on public service motivation, street-level bureaucracy, followed by research methods, data and findings. The article will conclude with a discussion of its contributions to theory and practice.

Street-level public service

Social welfare workers, charged with providing services directly to citizens, occupy a unique position at the boundary of public organizations. These street-level

bureaucrats must implement myriad rule sets and exercise discretion within complex and potentially variable situations (Lipsky, 1980). The environment of front-line workers constitutes an interesting focal point for studying motivation given their proximity to clients, their ability to assess client satisfaction with the services provided, their perceived degree of control over their actions through discretion, and the volume of their client interactions.

Understanding the specific variant of PSM that exists among social welfare workers is particularly important, especially its antecedents and correlates. According to Perry and Wise (1990), commitment to public programs or organizations may emanate from a mix of rational, norm-based, or affective motives. Front-line social welfare workers may be motivated to work in this type of position due to the belief that their work serves the interests of special groups, a rational motive. These individuals may also be motivated by the belief that their activities contribute to social equity by improving the well-being of disadvantaged groups, locating their work within norm-based motives. Finally, they may find importance in their belief about the social importance of their tasks, an affective motive. A closer look at PSM among social welfare workers is necessary to understand more fully the concept as it relates to this study.

Fostering and strengthening public service motivation

Public service motivation (Perry and Wise, 1990) has received much attention among practitioners and academics. The definition proffered by Perry and Wise establishes the concept as an 'individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations' (1990: 368). Perry et al. (2010) emphasized that PSM is a particular form of altruism or prosocial motivation because it emphasizes the meaning and purpose of the work. They also emphasize that PSM is grounded in the tasks of public service provision and is more prevalent in the public sector. A number of studies support the existence of PSM in public organizations and the potential positive outcomes of hiring and retaining employees high in PSM (Brewer and Selden, 1998; Crewson, 1997; Gould-Williams et al., 2013; Kim, 2005; Naff and Crum, 1999; Wright, 2003). Though a handful of studies have provided mixed support for the relationship between PSM and performance (Alonso and Lewis, 2001; Bright, 2007, 2008; Wright and Pandey, 2008), others suggest that other organizational factors may moderate or mitigate the effect of PSM, such as person–organization (P–O) fit, transformational leadership, job satisfaction, commitment, contact with program beneficiaries, and self-persuasion interventions (Bellé, 2013; Bright, 2007, 2008; Gould-Williams et al., 2013; Paarlberg and Lavigna, 2010; Vandenabeele, 2009; Wright and Pandey, 2008).

Despite this substantial body of research, a number of important questions remain. In particular, it remains to be explored how managers can foster PSM among their employees in such a manner that they 'behave in a way that is consistent with how the organization defines or provides public services' and improves

performance (Wright and Grant, 2010: 692). Though the antecedents of PSM are important, it is equally important to explore the factors that contribute to strengthening employees' levels of PSM after joining an organization (Perry, 1997).

The process theory of PSM suggested by Perry (2000) emphasizes that PSM can be learned or fostered via institutions, and that different job characteristics, incentive systems, and work environments shape different bases of motivation. With the exception of Moynihan and Pandey (2008), few studies have purposefully targeted this relationship. Moynihan and Pandey (2008) found that the existence of red tape is negatively related to PSM, whereas employees' perceptions of employee-friendly reform efforts are positively related to PSM. However, compared to organizational policies or work process over which employees have little control, the cultivation of PSM may depend more on the outcomes of services or products they provide, the congruence between their job and their own values, and their degree of involvement.

Wright and Grant (2010) suggested that high performance by employees builds their self-efficacy, which in turn may strengthen their PSM. When employees feel that their services actually contribute to the well-being of the public, they become more convinced about their ability to contribute to society. Bellé (2013) argued that PSM is dynamic, and that contact with program beneficiaries is positively and significantly related to increases in PSM. Employees who observe their actions positively affecting beneficiaries are more likely to perceive their work as worthwhile (Grant, 2007, 2008; Grant and Dutton, 2012; Paarlberg et al., 2008). In other words, strong performance can signal to public employees that their services are significant, positively influencing their PSM. Thus, we hypothesize that:

> Hypothesis 1: Employee perception of job significance, as reflected by citizen satisfaction with services, will increase employee PSM.

Perceived job involvement and public service motivation

Another relevant factor is the extent to which employees make extra efforts to behave in a service recipient-oriented manner. This can be viewed from the perspective of job involvement, defined as the degree to which one is 'actively participating in his or her job' (Blau and Boal, 1987: 290). Job involvement is a construct distinguished from commitment; while the focus of commitment is on the organization as a whole, the focus of job involvement is on the specific job itself (Mowday et al., 1982).

The degree of job involvement ('professional job involvement' in this article) can be reflected by the extent to which they make extra efforts to identify their service beneficiaries, interact with them, and serve their needs. Studies emphasizing the role of customer orientation have posited a similar notion; employees with higher levels of customer orientation and more contact with customers respond more favorably to their jobs and have higher levels of work motivation (Hackman and

Oldham, 1980; Paarlberg, 2007). Furthermore, in the process of interacting with recipients, they may develop a better understanding of the importance of their job (Paarlberg, 2007). Recent studies of the relationship between conscientiousness and PSM suggest that individuals willing to exert more effort to achieve goals and who have a sense of duty and responsibility are more likely to commit to public interests and display self-sacrificing traits (Liu et al., 2015; Wright and Grant, 2010). Therefore, it is plausible to hypothesize that:

> Hypothesis 2: When employees' job involvement is high, the level of PSM will increase.

## Affective commitment and public service motivation

Employees' job-related psychological states also matter in fostering PSM. Commitment is defined as 'the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in an organization' (Mowday et al., 1979: 226), and can be divided into three components: affective, continuance, and normative commitments (Kim, 2005; Meyer and Allen, 1991). Previous studies show that, among those three components, affective commitment is dominant and has an important effect on performance and organizational outcomes (Kim, 2005; Nyhan, 1999). Affective commitment reflects 'the degree to which the individual internalizes or adopts the characteristics or perspectives of the organization' (Kim, 2005; 493; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Nyhan, 1999; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) found that when employees feel that their own values are congruent with the values of their organization, prosocial behaviors are more frequently induced. On the other hand, when employees perceive that their values are in conflict with those of the organization, they may feel alienated.

Perry and Wise (1990) also suggested that affective commitment is positively associated with PSM. Lee and Olshfski (2002), for example, found that firefighters' level of commitment reinforced the value they perceived in their roles, serving as a source of motivation for any extra-role behaviors. In other words, public employees' affective commitment to their jobs reinforces positive work values and gives them motivation to serve and contribute to the public. Thus, the following hypothesis is devised:

> Hypothesis 3: When employees' affective commitment is high in a context where their values are consistent with their organization's goals or missions, their level of PSM will increase.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this study.

This article tests these hypotheses using a sample of street-level social welfare workers in South Korea as they enact complex public programs and interact with clients. A discussion of the context of these employees follows.
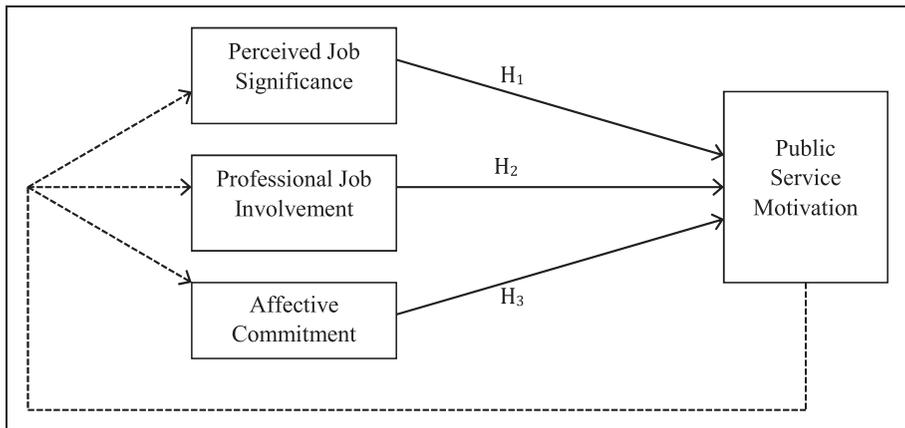
Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Social welfare workers in South Korea

South Korea's social assistance program is the National Basic Livelihood Security scheme (NBLS), created by the National Basic Livelihood Security Act of 1999.[1] The NBLS is managed by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and services are delivered by local government agencies. Social welfare officials in this system work at the front line of service delivery, performing duties that include finding service recipients, determining eligibility, consulting with potential service recipients, assisting with applications, helping clients find employment, and other functions (Kim, 2013; Kim and So, 2011; Ok and Kim, 2001). This study's focus on social welfare workers is useful in that these individuals often see and experience the impact of their actions as they fulfill their primary occupational responsibilities. The next section discusses the data and methods used in this investigation.

Data and methods

This study investigates the impact of perceived job significance, employee commitment, and job involvement on social welfare workers' levels of public service motivation. The study uses data from an online survey administered with the help of the South Korean Ministry of Public Administration and Security (MOPAS) in 2009. This survey was embedded into the local government electronic administration system, where all employees were then invited to participate. In total, 11,716 local government employees of cities, counties, towns, and townships responded to this survey.[2]

Of the respondents, approximately 72 percent are professionally certified as social workers. About 43 percent have less than three years of work experience

in local government offices serving welfare recipients, while close to 22 percent had more than 10 years of work experience. Approximately 73 percent of the respondents were female, and most were between the ages of 30 and 40 years. Table 1 shows the demographic and job-related attributes of the survey respondents, while Table 2 presents correlations for study variables.

Variables and measurement

Dependent variable: public service motivation

The dependent variable for this research, an individual's level of public service motivation, is measured using six survey items adapted from Perry's (1996) PSM measurement scale. It includes three items measuring commitment to public interest (CPI), one item measuring compassion (COM), and two items measuring self-sacrifice (SS). The present article does not consider the item of attraction to policy making (APM), as studies of local and central governments in South Korea (Kim, 2009: 849) have indicated that APM is not an appropriate measure of the rational basis of motivation, considering the rather homogeneous and collectivistic culture of Korea. Using principal component analysis with varimax rotation, these items are factor-analyzed and loaded onto one factor, with an alpha score of 0.8588,

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Perceived Job Significance	3.60	1.48	1	7
PSM	4.50	1.18	1	7
Affective Commitment	3.91	1.34	1	7
Prof. Job Involvement	4.53	1.23	1	7
Gender	0.25	0.43	0	1
Age	2.00	0.81	1	4
Rank	3.18	0.92	1	6
Social Service Cert.	0.92	0.27	0	1
Yrs. in Soc. Service	2.40	1.14	1	4
Av. Weekly OT Hrs.	3.34	1.09	1	5
Role Clarity	4.98	1.29	1	7

Note: $n = 5012$ for all variables
1. The age variable was coded based on a 1-to-4 ordinal scale whereby 1 refers to 'employees in their 20s', 2 to 'employees in their 30s', 3 to 'employees' in their 40s', and 4 to 'employees aged 50 or older'.
2. Years in social service was coded based on a 1-to-4 ordinal scale, whereby 1 refers to '3 years or fewer', 2 to '4 to 6 years', 3 to '7 to 9 years', and 4 to '10 years or more'.
3. Rank was coded based on a 1-to-7 ordinal scale, whereby 1 refers to 'grade 5', 2 to 'grade 6', 3 to 'grade 7', 4 to 'grade 8', 5 to 'grade 9', and 6 to 'grade 10 or higher'.

Table 2. Correlations

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. PSM	1.00										
2. Perceived Job Significance	0.51	1.00									
3. Affective Commitment	0.71	0.56	1.00								
4. Job Involvement	0.56	0.45	0.52	1.00							
5. Gender	0.12	0.09	0.12	0.08	1.00						
6. Age	0.28	0.21	0.25	0.28	0.26	1.00					
7. Rank	0.23	0.18	0.21	0.25	0.16	0.70	1.00				
8. Social Service Cert.	−0.10	−0.14	−0.13	−0.07	−0.20	−0.20	−0.19	1.00			
9. Yrs. in Social Service	0.15	0.08	0.10	0.19	0.01	0.56	0.61	0.31	1.00		
10. Overtime	−0.04	−0.07	−0.06	0.01	0.02	−0.03	−0.07	0.15	0.03	1.00	
11. Role Clarity	0.55	0.42	0.43	0.47	0.10	0.25	0.21	−0.02	0.19	−0.02	1.00

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for responses to public service motivation scale

Response Category	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements	5.99	7.31	12.23	36.91	16.82	13.45	7.29
My work related to the welfare services contributes to the well-being of the service recipients	4.15	5.21	8.29	27.14	23.7	20.19	11.32
Much of what I do is for a bigger cause than myself	4.2	4.91	8.68	31.86	22.34	17.69	10.31
Meaningful public service is very important to me	2.96	3.38	6.14	29.06	23.12	21.82	13.53
I consider public service as my civic duty	3.4	3.68	7.34	32.79	22.65	18.84	11.24
Most social programs are too vital to do without	2.82	3.9	6.78	24.25	21.53	23.39	17.33

indicating high reliability. This factor explained 64 percent of the total variance observed.[3]

Independent variables

Three main independent variables are included in the model. Employees' perception of their job significance, defined as 'the extent to which the job affects the well-being of others' (Hackman and Oldham, 1980; Paarlberg et al., 2008: 272–273), was measured using a single question that asked about social welfare workers' thoughts regarding citizen satisfaction with their social welfare services.

Employee commitment to the job was measured using four questions adapted from Meyer and Allen (1984) that examine attitudes and intentions about the nature of the job as it relates to personal fulfillment, as well as the importance of the service in a community context. Responses to the four questions are factor-analyzed and loaded onto one factor. Approximately 67 percent of variance is explained by this single factor, and its alpha score is 0.8341.

Professional job involvement was measured using three questions. These survey items evaluate employees' cognizance of programs and policies, the effort they make to identify the beneficiaries of their jobs, and efforts to establish opportunities for direct contact with these beneficiaries (Paarlberg et al., 2008: 274). All items were factor-analyzed and loaded onto one single factor that accounts for 63 percent of the variance with a Cronbach's α of 0.7092.

Control variables include certification as a social worker, gender, age, years in social service, average weekly overtime hours worked, rank, and role clarity. These include two dichotomous variables measuring whether employees have official certification for social service (0 = no; 1 = yes) and gender (0 = female; 1 = male). Experience, the amount of overtime worked on average, and rank were measured using grouped ordered variables.

To control for the effect of social workers' job conditions, perceived role clarity and workload are included as statistical controls. A lack of role clarity and a heavy workload are among the major factors that lead to depersonalization (Elloy et al., 2001). Role clarity refers to whether employees have a clear understanding of their tasks, and this affects their perceived self-efficacy regarding organizational goals (Moynihan and Pandey, 2007: 813). Role clarity was measured using three questions that examine how well employees feel they understand the principal aspects of their jobs. The Cronbach's α of this variable is 0.8385, and items loaded onto a single factor accounting for 75 percent of the variance. Workload was measured using reported average weekly overtime hours worked. A heavy workload is one of the major factors leading to emotional burnout and turnover intention (Bertelli, 2007; Janssen et al., 1999).[4]

Analysis

This article uses a condensed version of a scale often used in empirical research to examine PSM (Alonso and Lewis, 2001; Brewer et al., 2000; Naff and Crum, 1999;). As the dependent variable is at the ordinal level of measurement, ordered logistic regression was the initial choice of estimator. However, because the sign and significance of each explanatory variable are identical to those in the linear regression results, we report the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model results in Table 4 (Appendix A contains the results of the ordered logit model). Robust estimations of the regression coefficients and the standard errors were employed to address the presence of heteroskedasticity as detected by the Breusch-Pagan test (Andrews et al., 1972). Although most correlation coefficients were moderate (ranging from 0.06 to 0.56), the correlation between rank and years in social service was 0.61. To address this, we added an interaction term after mean-centering these two variables as a means of mitigating the potential problems caused by this moderate correlation (Jaccard et al., 1990: 476). Multicollinearity was not found to be

Table 4. Robust Ordinary Least Squares Regression Model

Dependent Variable: Public Service Motivation

Variable	Coefficient^	St. Error	Beta (Standardized)
Perceived Job Significance	0.054***	(0.0105)	0.068
Affective Commitment	0.421***	(0.0134)	0.478
Prof. Job Involvement	0.152***	(0.0134)	0.16
Gender	0.0234	(0.0265)	0.009
Age	0.0551***	(0.0209)	0.038
Rank	−0.00541	(0.0183)	−0.004
Social Service Worker Cert.	−0.0578	(0.0514)	−0.013
Years in Social Service	0.00768	(0.0146)	0.007
Weekly Average OT Hours	−0.00269	(0.0101)	−0.002
Role Clarity	0.205***	(0.0124)	0.225
Rank * Years in Soc. Service	0.0338***	(0.0109)	0.029
Constant	0.866***	0.0851	
Observations	5,012		5,012
F-test (Prob > F)	618.47 (0.000)		618.47 (0.000)
R-squared	0.60		0.60

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; ^coefficients are unstandardized.
***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$.

problematic, with all variance inflation factor (VIF) scores and the mean VIF well below 3.

Results

The overall model fit for the OLS model (see Table 4) is relatively strong and significant at the .001 level, with an R-squared of 60 percent. The relationships between public service motivation (the dependent variable) and employees' perceptions of job significance, commitment, and professional job involvement are positive and statistically significant, providing support for all three hypotheses.

Perceived job significance has a positive and statistically significant impact on public service motivation levels, supporting the idea that such perceptions are critical to developing a prosocial orientation and public service motivation in public sector employees. This is especially the case when employees directly interact with service recipients. Interestingly, the other explanatory variables, professional job involvement and job commitment, have a greater effect than perceived job significance. Standardized coefficients for job involvement and job commitment indicate that they have a much greater impact on fostering employees' levels of public service motivation (0.421 and 0.152, respectively).

Turning to control variables, perceived role clarity was found to have a positive impact on employees' levels of public service motivation. This finding is similar to that of Moynihan and Pandey (2007), who showed that role clarity is positively associated with job motivation, and that of Jung and Rainey (2011), who found that goal ambiguity negatively affects PSM. This may be related to the idea that 'ambiguous goals can make it difficult to see the effects or results of their work efforts' (Jung and Rainey, 2011: 41) and that clearly defined goals contribute to employees' understanding of the positive outcomes of their work (Paarlberg et al., 2008).

With the exception of age, most of the demographic and work-related control variables were not significantly associated with PSM. The effects of individual demographic characteristics produced mixed results in an earlier examination of motivation (Camilleri, 2006), indicating that the linkage between age and PSM found here may not be stable and enduring. It may be possible that older employees who stay in the public sector longer have had more opportunities to interact with service recipients and thus to see the importance of their work, resulting in higher levels of PSM. Although not statistically significant, the years spent in social service showed the same trend. The interaction term between rank and years in social service was statistically significant and positive, indicating that when an employee's rank is high and when they work in social services for longer periods of time, their PSM will be high, although rank itself is insignificant and negative. Employees of higher ranks may not interact with service recipients as frequently as employees at lower levels. It is plausible, however, that working in social services for longer periods may lead employees to value their work, thus increasing their PSM. No significant relationship between workload and PSM was found, but the direction was negative, as expected.

Discussion

One contribution of this study is that it introduces the importance of perceived job significance in fostering public service motivation. Previous research has reported that social welfare workers suffer from stress, resulting in emotional burnout, absenteeism, lower morale, and increased turnover rates. The PSM literature suggests using public service motivation as a selection criterion by recruiting employees who hold higher levels of PSM and are therefore better suited for social work. Some research strongly suggests that employees with higher levels of PSM are more likely to engage in prosocial activities such as charitable giving with fewer monetary incentives (Houston, 2006). Moreover, Stalker et al. (2007), in a study of Canadian child welfare workers, found that the negative impact of a heavy workload and the resulting fatigue on employees' motivation and job performance is attenuated when they feel rewarded by helping others and making a change in others' lives. It is reasonable to expect this buffering impact of perceived or observed prosocial impact to be strengthened when workers in care-giving occupations have higher levels of public service motivation.

PSM is, however, a dynamic and malleable attribute. Based on this assumption, this article empirically and strongly supports the claim that employees' perceived job significance can play a positive role in fostering PSM. This is consistent with Grant's suggestion that, when jobs provide employees with opportunities to make a difference in the lives of service beneficiaries, 'they become aware of their impact on these beneficiaries and come to care about the welfare of beneficiaries' (2007: 407). Service outcome has been examined as one of the positive consequences of public service motivation in the literature. Inversely, when employees observe or perceive that their services have a real positive impact on the well-being of others or society in general, the fit between their personally motivating goals and organizational goals will improve. In turn, their level of public service motivation can be expected to increase. Thus, providing more opportunities for social welfare workers to meet and interact directly with service beneficiaries or to access citizens' feedback about their service quality or service impacts can play a major role in maintaining or improving employees' levels of public service motivation.

Moreover, this finding provides empirical support for self-regulation theory, which suggests that employees' perceived prosocial impact serves to buffer them from emotional exhaustion (Grant, 2007). It is plausible to assume that, even when employees in social welfare professions have or perceive higher workloads and resulting stress, the ability to observe the prosocial impact of their services may increase their ability to achieve personally valued outcomes, in turn increasing their PSM. This finding has important implications for public managers in caregiving occupations. In the face of organizational factors that negatively affect employee motivation, including a lack of promotion opportunities, red tape, and expected emotional exhaustion, management should make employees perceive their work as meaningful to their clients as well as to society in general.

In this regard, social welfare work constitutes an exemplary profession to study because it is based on direct relationships, involves vulnerable populations who are in

need, and directly and indirectly affects the well-being of others. Interactions with clients and challenges resulting from strict procedures, heavy workloads, or a lack of resources may create some degree of emotional exhaustion. As suggested in earlier work, if managers share stories of their positive service impacts on the lives of others (Grant, 2008) or if they develop performance appraisal indicators that reflect employees' prosocial behaviors, these acts will contribute to improving employees' perceived job significance and in turn heighten their public service motivation.

A second contribution of this study is the importance of understanding the impact of services provided. In a number of public occupations, bureaucrats may be distanced from the impact of their efforts. This creates an occasion for management to promote employees' PSM by measuring their service outcomes and enabling employees to access citizens' feedback. It may be difficult to do so directly in a number of public sector professions, especially those where there are fewer opportunities to interact with service recipients or where the service impact cannot easily be measured or observed. For these professions, providing employee training or workshops that highlight the importance of their services or sharing stories that show 'how other members of their occupations and organizations have helped others' (Wright and Grant, 2010: 696) may be feasible alternatives.

This study also finds that professional job involvement and affective commitment are positively related to PSM. Employees are likely to have a better understanding of their job significance when they are affectively committed to their job and their service beneficiaries and when they make substantive efforts to improve their interactions with service recipients and to provide solutions to the problems facing beneficiaries. Improved interactions with beneficiaries will, in turn, cultivate increased PSM. In addition, it is thought that when social welfare workers are affectively committed to their jobs, 'employees may perceive acting to improve beneficiaries' lives as more congruent with their core values and may persist in their efforts in order to have a positive impact on beneficiaries' (Grant, 2010; Grant et al., 2007: 61). This insight underlines the importance of management in fostering an organizational culture and socialization activities where employees' professional job involvement and affective commitment are encouraged and valued.

This study has a number of limitations that warrant discussion. First, it uses self-reported data, which may be subject to response distortions such as social desirability bias. In addition, perceived job significance was measured using a single survey item about the perceived level of citizens' satisfaction with their welfare services. The use of questions more directly assessing perceptions of job significance or prosocial impacts would have been appropriate.

An additional concern is that the study design does not allow us to rule out the possibility of reverse causality (whereby PSM produces the changes in the explanatory variables used here). However, the context in which this study was conducted may mitigate this causality problem. As stated previously, most studies examining Korean government employees indicate that they choose government jobs because of the promised job security rather than out of prosocial or public

service motivation (Hwang and Ham, 2001; Hwang et al., 2004). In addition, the relationship we suggest in this article is supported by previous theories and research. Finally, as this study used a survey of Korean social welfare workers, it may be difficult to generalize and apply its findings to other countries. Given the purpose of this research, however, these limitations are acceptable.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that, controlling for other demographic and work-related factors, enhancing employees' perceived job significance positively affects their public service motivation. Likewise, when professional job involvement and affective commitment are high, PSM is increased. This study reinforces the notion that PSM can be learned and fostered through the provision of public services and recognition of the impact of these services on others' well-being. This enhancement of PSM, in turn, can improve workers' self-efficacy and possibly buffer them from emotional burnout. This finding also implies that, even when employees join public professions without an inclination toward public service, interactions with service beneficiaries and observations of the positive impact of their work on the lives of others can foster and strengthen public service motivation. Given both the importance and demands of social welfare work, this is a crucial element of ensuring that public policies are efficiently and effectively implemented.

Notes

1. This program, which has been in place since 2000, aims to secure a minimum level of living for disadvantaged people whose income level is less than the minimum cost of living, an amount that is set annually by the Minister of Health and Welfare. The recipients of this program are provided with cash subsidies, maternity assistance, or self-support assistance including job training, job placement, business start-up training, and other forms of aid.
2. The total observations were reduced from 11,716 to 5012 because we only include responses from front-line employees of municipal administrative district units (Eup, Myeon, and Dong).
3. Four variables in this study – the dependent variable (PSM), two independent variables (employee affective commitment to the job and professional job involvement) and one control variable (role clarity) – are index variables constructed by means of a factor analysis of responses to the survey questions. Principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was used to determine whether the survey items used to construct each index variable measure share a single underlying dimension. If each variable represents a single latent construct, PCA will return one single factor with a high level of common variance. In order to test the reliability of the survey items used to create an index variable, Cronbach's alpha test was employed. If the result is greater than .70, it is acceptable (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).
4. The survey items used to measure each construct can be found in Appendix B.

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Appendix A. Ordered Logit Results

Dependent Variable: Public Service Motivation		
Variable	Coefficient^	
Perceived Job Significance	0.131***	(0.02)
Affective Commitment	1.045***	(0.03)
Prof. Job Involvement	0.383***	(0.03)
Gender	0.0757	(0.06)
Age	0.163***	(0.05)
Rank	−0.01	(0.04)
Social Service Worker Certificate	−0.129	(0.12)
Years in Social Service	0.002	(0.04)
Weekly Average Overtime Hours	0.003	(0.023)
Role Clarity	0.536***	(0.03)
Rank * Years in Social Service	0.0822***	(0.03)
Constant	2.665***	(0.23)
Pseudo R2	0.1531	
Log likelihood	4749.68***	
N	5012	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; ^coefficients are unstandardized; ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$.

Appendix B: Measurement of study variables

Public service motivation

Summative index (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.8588$) from Perry (1996), Kim (2009)

- Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements;
- My work related to the welfare services contributes to the well-being of the service recipients;
- Much of what I do is for a bigger cause than myself;
- Meaningful public service is very important to me;
- I consider public service as my civic duty;
- Most social programs are too vital to do without.

Perceived Job Significance

'Residents in our community are satisfied with our social welfare services'

Employees' Affective Commitment to Job

Summative index (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.8341$) adapted from Meyer and Allen (1984) Affective Commitment Scale and Allen and Meyer (1990).

- The current work I'm involved in gives meaning to my life;
- I perceive the welfare issues of my community to be as important as my personal issues;
- I am proud to be part of my section/department/service;
- I am willing to put in a great deal of extra effort to help this organization be successful.

Professional Job Involvement

Summative index (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.7092$)

- I try hard to identify recipients of the National Basic Livelihood Security system [which provides people in the low-income bracket with public assistance];
- I'm very well aware of national welfare-policies or its related programs;
- I try hard to provide solutions to any problems faced by families in crisis and in helping them attain self-reliance through effective consulting with the recipients or prospective recipients.