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Public service motivation and performance: The role of organizational identification

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ABSTRACT

Although the association between public service motivation (PSM) and job performance has received increased attention, there is limited knowledge of the mechanisms underlying its effects. Utilizing data from Chinese civil servants and their supervisors, the authors found that PSM results in higher levels of organizational identification and leads to higher levels of job performance because civil servants perceive the organization's fate and results as their own.

IMPACT

Our study demonstrates that organizational identification is a key mechanism that explains how public service motivation (PSM) leads to higher levels of performance. To improve performance, public agencies should create an environment that helps employees identify with the organization, for example by highlighting the distinct services that the organization provides for the public and by establishing socialization practices for newcomers.

Eminent political scientists and public administration scholars have long noted the significance of identification for the performance of public organizations. Lasswell defined identification as 'a process by which affections are guided by perceptions of similarity' and noted that identification may influence individuals to profoundly devote themselves to a collective endeavour (Lasswell, 1930, p. 487). Simon considered organizational identification an important motivation that induces employees to exert their efforts on behalf of the organization (Simon, 1947). Kaufman (1960, p. 176) stated that organizational identification 'injects into the very nervous systems of the organization members the criteria of decision that the organization wishes to employ'.

Despite these classic contributions, the public management literature has only recently rediscovered that organizational identification is important to understanding the motivational bases of public servants. For example, Liu and Perry (2016) examined the extent to which organizational identification mediated the relationship between public service motivation (PSM) and job satisfaction and community citizenship behaviours. Campbell (2015) examined performance management and organizational identification in the Korean public sector and argued that, because of the strong theoretical links between PSM and organizational identification, this relationship should be explored in greater detail. Our study extends this research by analysing the role of organizational identification as a mediator of the relationship between PSM and job performance.

PSM has been defined as 'the belief, values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate' (Vandenabeele, 2007, p. 547). Since Perry and Wise's (1990) seminal work on PSM, research on the effects of PSM on work attitudes and behaviours has continued to grow (Ritz, Brewer, & Neumann, 2016). One area of great interest concerns PSM's role in enhancing job performance (Brewer, 2008). Although the association between PSM and job performance has received increased attention in the past decade (for example Camilleri & Van der Heijden, 2007; Vandenabeele, 2009), there is limited knowledge regarding the mechanisms that underlie its effects (Perry, Hondeghem, & Wise, 2010). To unravel this relationship, we draw on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), which argues that employees with high levels of organizational identification place a high value on organizational membership and that the organization becomes a part of the employees' self-concept (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). We hypothesize that PSM results in higher levels of organizational identification amongst civil servants and, in turn, leads them to display higher levels of job performance because they view the organization's fate and results as their own.

Our study is innovative in terms of theory and results as it provides insight into how PSM increases job performance. In response to the inconsistent results of previous PSM-performance studies (for example Alonso & Lewis, 2001), there have been repeated calls to investigate this relationship. We respond to these calls and examine organizational identification as an underlying mechanism that explains the PSM-performance relationship. Our article is also innovative in terms of methodological rigour (Perry et al., 2010). Drawing on the recommendations of Moynihan, Vandenabeele, and Blom-Hansen (2014), our study used supervisor-rated performance data and employee-rated PSM and organizational identification at three different time points. Our multi-source, multi-time point survey design enables us to overcome the significant methodological shortcomings of previous research, such as the reliance on self-reported performance measures (Perry et al., 2010), allowing for public management scholars and practitioners to have greater confidence in the findings of this study.

Moreover, we extend the research and understanding of PSM by analysing the construct in a Chinese organizational setting. To date, PSM research has predominately been in a US or European context (Ritz et al., 2016), with Asia being generally under-researched (Van der Wal, 2015). Improving the performance of public sector employees is particularly important in China (Ma, 2016), where civil service reforms have attempted to establish a merit-based system with a 'performance culture' that deviates from traditional practices and imposes growing demands on public sector employees (Wang, 2012).

In the following sections we review the literatures on organizational identification, PSM, and job performance and develop our hypotheses. Then, we describe the methods used in our study and present the results. After discussing the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, we conclude with suggestions for future research.

Organizational identification

Social identity theory maintains that an individual's self-concept consists of a personal and social component and that individuals order their social environment by categorizing people into groups (Tajfel, 1978). Individuals identify with social categories due to a desire for safety and uncertainty reduction and to enhance their self-esteem. This identification enables them to partake in the successes of a group whose accomplishments are beyond their individualistic powers (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Organizational identification is a particular form of social identification in which individuals categorize themselves as members of an organization (Schwarz,

2017). Organizational identification can be defined as the 'perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization' (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104). Individuals identify strongly with an organization if their organizational membership is more salient than alternative identities and if their self-concept features attributes that they ascribe to their organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Liu and Perry (2016, p. 5) described organizational identification as 'related to, but distinct from P-O fit (person–organization) fit' and argued that the P-O fit concept is broader than organizational identification. Pratt (1998, p. 179) stated that 'the biggest difference between the two concepts lies in the fact that identification is an identity-based theory of organizational attachment, whereas P-O fit is not'.

Strong organizational identification can translate into favourable outcomes, such as greater employee compliance and job satisfaction (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Pratt, 1998). However, strong identification can also lead to stress and depression when the employing organization is confronted with external criticism (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). While this research demonstrates that organizational identification is a powerful concept that facilitates the understanding of employee behaviours in the wider literature, Rho et al. (2015, p. 423) argued that 'the role of inside members' image and identification has been ignored in public and non-profit management research' and should be analysed in more detail. Civil servants may possess high levels of organizational identification if they believe that their public agency is similarly motivated to serve the public good. Therefore, organizational identification offers a unique perspective to examine the PSM–job performance relationship (Campbell, 2015).

Although organizational identification is a stream of literature in its own right, there are some similarities between organizational identification and organizational commitment, which has been studied more frequently in public sector research (for example Naff & Crum, 1999). Organizational commitment is formed through the relationship between the employee and the organization, in which an employee becomes committed to an organization when the organization provides positive treatment towards the employee (Miao et al., 2014). Analysing organizational identification and commitment, Stingelhamber et al. (2015, p. 2) noted that 'the distinction between these two constructs has been supported at both the theoretical (for example Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and the empirical level (for example Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006)'. Van Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006, p. 571) argued that 'the core difference between identification and commitment lies in the implied relationship between individual and organization: identification reflects psychological oneness,

commitment reflects a relationship between separate psychological entities'. Employees who have high levels of organizational commitment can still see themselves as separate from the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In a meta-analysis of organizational identification, organizational commitment, and organizational trust, Ng (2015) found that organizational identification had the greatest incremental validity and the strongest relationship with task performance. We chose to examine organizational identification over organizational commitment as we are interested in the self-concept of employees in the public sector rather than their attachment (Shim & Faerman, 2017).

Public service motivation

PSM theory proposes an alternative to rational choice theories that conceive individuals as purely self-interested maximizers of personal utility who do not pay attention to moral obligations or values, which does not reflect situations prevalent in public organizations in which goals are not fully specified and external rewards are not directly related to goal achievement (Neumann & Ritz, 2015; Shamir, 1991). Perry (2000) embedded motivation in organizations in a larger context and proposed a process theory of PSM in which individual behaviour is influenced by the sociohistorical and motivational context as well as by individual characteristics. This model acknowledges the importance of self and identity as 'linking-pins' between context and individual behaviour (Perry & Vandenabeele, 2008, p. 63). The self is conceived as incorporating a multiplicity of identities formed through interaction with others and is considered an overarching, reflective appraisal of oneself. Identities are the constituting elements of the self and refer to specific social interactions (Stryker, 1980). Vandenabeele (2007) distinguished between role, social, and personal identity, with most uses focusing on social identity (Perry & Vandenabeele, 2008).

PSM has been linked to primarily positive outcomes, for example organizational commitment (Naff & Crum, 1999), organizational citizenship behaviours (Koumenta, 2015), and job satisfaction (Steijn, 2008). However, the relationship between PSM and performance remains inconclusive (Brewer, 2008).

PSM and job performance

The nature of what constitutes performance within the public sector is complex as it may refer to private sector type efficiency and effectiveness or more public sector specific objectives such as public access, transparency, or freedom from corruption (Pollitt, 2018). Regardless of the definition, public management scholars have shown a continued interest in job performance, seeking to understand the mechanisms that enhance it. Scholars have identified wide-ranging antecedents of job performance such as employee attitudes (for example Potipiroon & Faerman, 2016), workplace policies and procedures (for example Anand et al., 2012), and leadership (for example Schwarz et al., 2016). A meta-analysis by Cerasoli, Nicklin, and Ford (2014) showed that intrinsic motivations are more likely to result in higher-quality performance than extrinsic motivators. In line with these findings, our study examined the effects of arguably the most relevant intrinsic motivator in the public sector literature—PSM—on job performance.

In their seminal article about the motivational bases for public service, Perry and Wise (1990, p. 370) posited that 'in public sector organizations, PSM is positively related to individual performance'. Conceptually, it was argued that this relationship occurred because highly public service motivated employees exert more effort because they embrace public work with high task significance (Perry et al., 2010). In carrying out meaningful work, individuals are able to live their values and convictions, which should positively influence their individual performance (Schott, Van Kleef, & Steen, 2015).

Empirical studies examining the relationship between PSM and job performance have indicated that this relationship is more nuanced than expected. The positive relationship between PSM and job performance was confirmed across large samples of federal employees (for example Naff & Crum, 1999) and smaller samples of specific types of public servants, for example nurses (Bellé, 2013), and school teachers (Andersen, Heinesen, & Pedersen, 2014). Camilleri and Van der Heijden (2007), Leisink and Steijn (2009) and Vandenabeele (2009) also found evidence of a positive relationship in their studies of Maltese, Dutch and Belgian government employees.

However, Alonso and Lewis (2001) found a non-significant relationship between PSM and job performance. Schott et al. (2015) analysed the relationship between PSM and job performance through an identity perspective and argued that the inconsistent results regarding PSM and job performance in prior studies may be partially explained by role-based differences in individual interpretations of what serving the public interest implies.

While the literature has provided mixed findings in relation to the PSM–job performance relationship, in accordance with Perry and Wise's (1990) original theorizing and the results of most of the literature (Brewer, 2008), we hypothesize that there is a positive relationship between PSM and job performance. Hence:

Hypothesis 1: PSM is positively related to job performance.

PSM and organizational identification

To understand how organizational identification is developed within the public sector, scholars have turned to social identity theory (Liu & Perry, 2016). Social identity theory posits that if individuals feel that they belong to a particular social group, they will base their self-definition on that group (Ashforth et al., 2008). Hence, a public sector employee who highly identifies with his or her organization is more likely to link his or her group membership with his or her own self-concept (Shim & Faerman, 2017). This linkage may be cognitive (i.e. the goals and values of the organization become their own), emotional (i.e. they will express pride in being a member of the organization), or both (Riketta, 2005; Tajfel, 1978). Furthermore, a 'psychological merging of self and organization' (Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006, p. 572) occurs such that individuals perceive themselves to be intertwined with the fate of their organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Pratt (1998) argued that, for organizational identification to emerge, the individuals must self-categorize themselves in terms of the organizational identity and must perceive the organizational identity to be important. In the context of the public sector, previous research has found that those who seek positions in the civil service are more likely to identify with the beliefs and values of public sector organizations and believe that this identity is important to their own self-concept (Liu & Perry, 2016; Perry & Wise, 1990).

Based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), we posit that PSM influences organizational identification. From a conceptual perspective, PSM focuses on the public good in general (Perry & Wise, 1990) whereas organizational identification refers to a specific entity such as the organization that an employee works for (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Perry and Wise (1990) noted that high levels of PSM drive individuals to apply for roles in public service. Once they work for a public sector organization, their identification with that specific organization develops due to a congruence between their own values and beliefs and that of the organization's (Shim & Faerman, 2017) or through emulation overtime (Pratt, 1998). Examples of the emulation process have been demonstrated in the PSM literature through socialization and social learning in which individuals acquire a new social identity by working alongside employees who share their public service orientation and who they feel they belong with (for example Brewer, 2008; Vandenabeele, 2007). These interactions should develop or strengthen employees' organizational identification because previous studies observed that relationships between like-minded employees positively influence organizational

identification (Sluss et al., 2012). This led to the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 2: PSM is positively related to organizational identification.

PSM, organizational identification, and job performance

Simon (1947) was one of the first scholars to acknowledge the impact of organizational identification on employees' effort levels. The higher the levels of organizational identification are, the more likely employees are to make greater personal investments in the organization and engage in positive behaviours that benefit the organization. Employees with high levels of organizational identification focus their attention on activities that are relevant to the attainment of these objectives, which reduces complexity to a level commensurate with their ability to cope with it (March & Simon, 1958).

A criticism of prior studies regarding PSM is their limited examination of mediators of the PSM/job performance relationship (Perry et al., 2010). To examine potential mediators, scholars have focused on previously defined outcomes of PSM. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment, both of which have been linked to PSM in previous studies (for example Naff & Crum, 1999; Steijn, 2008), were found to mediate the relationship (Vandenabeele, 2009). Using an experimental design, Bellé (2013) determined that among employees with high levels of PSM, contact with programme beneficiaries and self-persuasion interventions engendered higher levels of job performance. We expected that PSM will also have a positive effect on job performance through the mediating effects of organizational identification. This expectation is in accordance with social identity theory as it suggests that organizational identification should occur if the values and beliefs of an individual are the same as those of an organization (Pratt, 1998). Furthermore, individuals who identify with an organization are more likely to work more diligently as organizational and individual goals become congruent and the successes and failures of the organization become their own (Campbell, 2015). In his classic case study of the forest service, Kaufman observed that the performance of forest rangers closely mirrored the goals set by top management (Kaufman, 1960). Kaufman attributed the 'voluntary conformity' by which the distant forest rangers acted in the best interest of headquarters to a 'set of conditions promoting identification' (Kaufman, 1960, p. 175) that led them to internalize organizational values. Previous research has demonstrated that organizational identification is a psychological linkage between an individual and an organization that significantly

affects work behaviours such as job performance (Riketta, 2005) and that organizational identification showed incremental validity in predicting job performance over and above other constructs (Ng, 2015). Therefore, we argue that organizational identification is positively related to job performance and mediates the relationship between PSM and job performance:

> Hypothesis 3: Organizational identification is positively related to job performance.

> Hypothesis 4: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between PSM and job performance.

Sample and data collection

Data were obtained from Chinese civil servants working in government bureaus in Shanghai and two adjacent provinces: Zhejiang and Jiangsu.

One of the authors taught a leadership development programme for 156 bureau directors who were invited to participate in this study upon completing the programme. A total of 135 bureau directors indicated that they were interested in participating in the study and provided their contact information to the research team. At the beginning of the project, we randomly selected 14 bureau directors from the contact list. Each bureau director provided us with a list of department heads under their leadership. All the departments were responsible for a public service at the city level (for example water protection department or air protection department).

Initially, the surveys were distributed to all 344 civil servants supervised by the 59 department heads. These employees had daily contact with members of the public. The participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were asked to directly return the completed surveys in a sealed envelope to members of the research team. At time 1, the employees were requested to provide their demographics and rate their PSM. At time 2, two weeks later, employees who responded to the first survey were asked to rate their organizational identification. A total of 281 employees responded to both surveys, resulting in a response rate of approximately 82%. Finally, at time 3, two weeks later, the 59 department heads were requested to rate the job performance of their subordinates. All questionnaires were distributed in printed format and coded to ensure that the responses of the subordinates and their supervisors could be matched.

Of the employees, 45.6% were male and 67% were between 21 and 30 years old. On average, the survey respondents had worked for their organizations for 4.80 years (SD = 2.58) and for their current supervisor for over three years (M = 3.24; SD = 1.87).

Measures

This study utilized pre-validated multi-item scales. The variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. PSM was measured using the five-item Merit Systems Protection Board scale that has been extensively used in prior research. Investigating the psychometric properties of this scale, Wright, Christensen, and Pandey (2013) found strong evidence for its validity. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.78.

Organizational identification was measured using Mael and Ashforth's (1992) six-item scale. This scale has been used in recent public sector research (for example Liu & Perry, 2016; Shim & Faerman, 2017). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.87.

Following previous Chinese public sector studies (Schwarz et al., 2016), job performance was measured using Lam et al.'s (2002) three-item scale. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.87.

Gender (coded 1 = male and 0 = female), age, organizational tenure, and tenure under the leader were included as controls in accordance with previous research (Miao et al., 2014). Age was measured using a categorical variable and tenure under the leader and organizational tenure were measured as continuous variables (number of years). We controlled for whether individuals had independence and freedom in determining what they could do in their job using an item from Spreitzer's (1995) self-determination scale: 'I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job'.

Results

Validity and reliability

To address concerns over common method variance, we collected data at three time points from multiple sources, and ensured confidentiality by using sealed envelopes to return the surveys (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Second, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using Mplus to establish the discriminant validity between study variables (see table 1). The hypothesized three-factor model (i.e. PSM, organizational identification and job performance) yielded an excellent fit to the data. As argued by Hair et al. (2010), RMSEA values of 0.03 to 0.08 and TLI and CFI values greater than 0.90 indicate a good fit to the model. The three-factor model was a better fit than the various two-factor models and a one-factor model (a variation of the Harman's one-factor test) for which all the study items were loaded onto a single construct. These results provide evidence for the distinctiveness of the measures and show that common method bias was not a significant issue in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Table 1. Results of confirmatory factor analysis.

Model	χ^2	Df	RMSEA	90% CI RMESA	CFI	TLI	WRMR
Hypothesized three-factor model	118.788	74	0.046	0.030–0.061	0.991	0.989	0.744
Two-factor model: PSM and organizational identification combined	594.287	76	0.156	0.144–0.168	0.893	0.871	2.183
Two-factor model: PSM and performance combined	564.382	76	0.151	0.140–0.163	0.899	0.879	2.196
Two-factor model: organizational identification and performance combined	780.941	76	0.182	0.170–9.193	0.854	0.825	2.529
One-factor model	1253.503	77	0.233	0.222–0.245	0.756	0.712	3.373

Notes: RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; WRMR = weighted root mean square residual.

Hypothesis testing

The means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables are presented in table 2. As predicted, the correlations between PSM and organizational identification and organizational identification and job performance were positive.

Hypothesis testing was conducted with regression analysis in Mplus using the maximum likelihood estimator. To reduce issues associated with multicollinearity, all variables were z-standardized prior to the analysis (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, as the employees were nested in teams and the same supervisor provided multiple ratings of employees' performance, we controlled for the unique effects of each supervisor. In Mplus, we created 59 dummy variables, where each supervisor was given a value of 1 for their team members, and a value of 0 for non-team members. These values were entered in the regression equation as controls. The results with and without the supervisor controls did not change in significance and there was only a negligible change in magnitude.

Table 3 presents the results from the regression analysis for the hypothesized relationships. In accordance with hypothesis 1, a significant relationship between PSM and job performance ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$) was found. Similarly, in line with hypothesis 2, there was a significant positive relationship between PSM and organizational identification ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$) (see Model 1). In relation to hypothesis 3, a significant relationship was found between organizational identification and job performance ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) (see Model 2). Notably, the control variable for self-determination positively predicted organizational identification ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$) and job performance ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$), even when PSM (and organizational identification) were included in the model. This result

was not surprising considering that previous studies demonstrated that the levels of independence and freedom that employees have in determining what they do in their job is related to higher levels of organizational identification (Zhang & Chen, 2013) and performance (Siegall & Gardner, 2000). By controlling for self-determination in our model, we were able to ascertain the unique predictive power of PSM and organizational identification on job performance over the motivating power of an individual's autonomy in their role.

A mediated regression analysis with bias-corrected bootstrapping of the indirect (mediated) effect was used to test hypothesis 4. A bias-corrected bootstrap using 20,000 re-samples showed that the indirect effect of PSM on job performance through organizational identification was 0.04 (95% CI = 0.01 to 0.10). Because zero was not contained in the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect, the indirect effect through organizational identification was significant. The direct effect of PSM on job performance was not significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = 0.23$), which suggests that organizational identification fully mediated the relationship between PSM and job performance, providing support for hypothesis 4.

Discussion and conclusion

Our study examined the role of organizational identification on the relationship between PSM and job performance. Based on the results of a three-wave multi-source study, organizational identification was found to explain the relationship between PSM and job performance.

This study contributes to the existing literature by confirming Perry and Wise's (1990) proposition that PSM is positively related to job performance and

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Age[a]	2.33	0.81	–							
2 Gender[b]	0.46	0.50	0.15*	–						
3 Tenure with the organization	4.80	2.58	0.31**	0.02	–					
4 Tenure under leader	3.24	1.87	0.17**	0.07	0.47**	–				
5 Self-determination	3.90	1.06	0.14*	0.05	0.07	0.03	–			
6 Public service motivation	3.94	0.64	0.08	0.07	−0.06	0.02	0.06	–		
7 Organizational identification	3.95	0.77	0.10	0.02	−0.06	−0.04	0.21**	0.26**	–	
8 Job performance	3.66	0.76	0.08	0.14*	0.06	−0.01	0.23**	0.17**	0.29**	–

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.
[a]Age coded 1 = 21–25; 2 = 26–30; through to 8 = 56+.
[b]Gender coded 0 = female; 1 = male.

Table 3. Results of mediated regression analyses.

	Model 1 Organizational identification	Model 2 Step 1	Job performance Step 2
Age	0.02	0.03	0.03
Gender	0.01	0.17**	0.17**
Tenure with the organization	−0.03	0.08	0.09
Tenure under leader	−.004	−0.07	−0.06
Self-determination	0.22**	0.25**	0.19**
Public service motivation	0.18**	0.12*	0.07
Organizational identification		–	0.28**
R^2	0.11	0.10	0.14

Note: Standardized regression coefficients reported, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

elucidates the relationship between PSM and job performance. Although previous research has analysed the relationship between PSM and job performance, there is a significant lack of understanding regarding the mechanisms that underlie its effects. By examining organizational identification as a mediator of this relationship, we provide a deeper understanding of how PSM influences performance. According to social identity theory, when employees identify strongly with an organization, they are more motivated to work more diligently and ensure the organization's success (Riketta, 2005). Our study reveals that organizational identification is a key mechanism that explains why employees with high levels of PSM perform at higher levels in their role, as the more an individual identifies with the public sector organization they are working for, the more they incorporate the organization's beliefs and values into their own self-concept. This leads the individual to have a greater buy-in to the organization's goals and be more motivated to work hard to achieve these goals, increasing their job performance (Liu & Perry, 2016).

In addition, our results increase the confidence in prior findings regarding the PSM-performance relationship by offering a more robust methodological design. Measuring the independent, mediating, and dependent variables across three waves provides greater confidence regarding the relationship between PSM and job performance than studies that measured the variables at the same time point. In addition, measuring job performance using a supervisor rating allows us to limit the potential of common method bias that exists in prior empirical work that relied on self-report measures. These methodological advancements allow us to address the significant shortcomings of PSM research, as identified by Moynihan et al. (2014).

Moreover, research on PSM and job performance has been primarily conducted in a Western context. Our research extends the cultural generalizability of the PSM–job performance relationship. In recent decades, significant reforms have occurred in the Chinese public

sector to establish a merit-based system (Ma, 2016); thus, understanding the roles of PSM and organizational identification in enhancing job performance is of great importance to public service managers and scholars. A primary motive of the Provisional Regulations on State Civil Servants and the new Civil Service Law was to increase the organizational capacity and productivity of civil servants. As demonstrated, organizational identification acts as a mediating mechanism between PSM and job performance. Therefore, public agencies that seek to improve their performance should ensure that they create an environment that helps employees identify with the organization.

To increase organizational identification, public agencies should highlight the 'distinctiveness' that differentiates them from other organizations (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) so that employees become aware of the distinguishing features of their organization. Previous research suggests the importance of establishing socialization practices for newcomers (Kaufman, 1960). To facilitate organizational identification, public agencies could highlight the services or activities that the organization provides to its employees and create 'unifying symbols' and logos that remind the employees of their membership (Cheney, 1983). The agencies may also disseminate testimonials from employees who comment on the positive elements of the organization and the praise and accolades that they have received from non-members (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999).

March and Simon (1958) argued that employees are more likely to identify with organizations that they perceive as prestigious, as identification is a means to gain personal status. Public service positions are considered highly prestigious in China because being appointed to a civil service role bestows honour onto oneself and one's family in the Confucian tradition (Ko & Han, 2013). The attractiveness of work in the Chinese public sector, which has been dubbed 'civil servant fever' (Sun & Guo, 2017), is evidenced by the fact that nearly 1.4 million applicants competed for 27,817 entry-level positions in the annual Chinese civil service examinations in 2015 (Schwarz et al., 2016). To perpetuate a culture of public sector values, public organizations may consider assessing the PSM levels of the applicants in public sector examinations and recruit more individuals with high levels of PSM, as such individuals are more likely to exhibit the organizational identification that leads to high job performance. Recruiting individuals with high levels of PSM is not sufficient, however. It is essential that the individuals can live their PSM. If this is not the case, they may become frustrated, which may have negative effects on their job performance (Bellé, 2013; Leisink & Steijn, 2009).

Because this study was conducted in southeast China, there are concerns regarding the

generalization of our study to broader settings. This study could be replicated in public sector organizations in different institutional environments. Although, in our study, employee performance was supervisor-rated in line with recent best practices (for example Lee et al., 2017); future research should collect data from other sources such as official appraisals, peer evaluations and self-reports to enable triangulation and assure that the performance assessment is as objective as possible. Another limitation of the study is that the analysis focused solely on one mediating factor between PSM and job performance. Because PSM is a complex phenomenon, future work should examine the relative effects of other potential mediators of this relationship such as social exchange-based mediators that have been the subject of prior studies (Vandenabeele, 2009).

Identity salience refers to the importance of an identity for self-definition relative to other identities (Shamir, 1991). Civil servants do not only identify with their public organization as a whole but also with their teams and departments. Future research could analyse how the salience of lower-order identities, such as team identity, influence the PSM–performance relationship. Future studies could also examine the impact of personal dispositions such as power and face on organizational identification and job performance. Researchers could also investigate the boundary conditions of our mediated PSM-job performance relationship by examining whether the situational context in which individuals with high levels of organizational identification operate influences the relationship (Van Loon, 2017). For example, future work may examine whether monotonous work, heavily bureaucratic structures, or significant red tape may weaken PSM's relationship with organizational identification and limit its influence on job performance. Future research could also control for the type of work completed (for example direct contact with citizens) to analyse its effect on organizational identification.

Acknowledgments

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