

EXPLORING POSSIBLE ANTECEDENTS OF PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION IN MALAYSIAN PRIVATE ORGANIZATION

Shahrizul Amizan Sahari¹, Kuldip Singh^{2*}, Noni Harianti Junaidi^{3*}

¹ Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Email: 2021346711@student.uitm.edu.my

² Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Email: kuldip@uitm.edu.my

³ Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Email: nonihj@uitm.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

Public Service Motivation refers to "the individual predisposition to respond to motives primarily or uniquely found in public institutions" and is characterized by a commitment to serving the greater societal good. Traditionally viewed as an intrinsic motivation specific to the public sector, recent research suggests that Public Service Motivation can also emerge in private organizations, highlighting its relevance across diverse institutional contexts. This conceptual paper investigates how Public Service Motivation can be fostered within Malaysian private organizations by examining three key antecedents: Religiosity, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Organizational Ethical Climate. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior, this paper analyzes how these factors influence attitudes and subjective norms, which collectively drive public service-oriented intentions and behaviors. By integrating these elements, the study offers a theoretical lens to understand the mechanisms through which private organizations can cultivate PSM, thus contributing to the broader discourse on motivation and ethical behavior across sectors.

Keywords:

Public Service Motivation, Religiosity, Corporate Social Responsibility, Organizational Ethical Climate, Theory of Planned Behavior

Introduction

In 1990, Perry and Wise had conceptualized Public Service Motivation (PSM), an intrinsic motivation that are uniquely available in public sector. They define it as "An individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations". Since then, numerous studies have examined the antecedents, correlates, and

outcomes of PSM. Researchers have found that PSM is positively associated with various work attitudes and behaviors. PSM has also been linked to individual characteristics, such as gender, age, and education level.

However, research has shown that PSM can also be found in private sector, especially in roles or organizations where the work has a clear social impact or where the company's mission aligns with public service values. Furthermore, the concept of PSM has been adapted to study motivations in non-profit organizations and hybrid organizations that operate in both public and private sectors. Therefore, it is crucial for us to analyse studies that focus into the antecedents of PSM in private sectors and investigate whether such variable is applicable in Malaysian private sector.

Literature Review

This section will discuss on Public Service Motivation and how Religiosity, Corporate Social Responsibility and Organizational Ethical Climate could influence Public Service Motivation.

Public Service Motivation

Public Service Motivation (PSM) refers to an individual's predisposition to serve the public interest and contribute to society through public sector employment. It is a key concept in public administration that has been studied extensively since the 1980s.

The origins of PSM can be traced back to the work of Rainey (1982), who proposed that public sector employees are motivated by a desire to serve the public interest and contribute to society. Perry and Wise (1990) later developed a more comprehensive theory of PSM, defining it as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions or organizations".

Since then, numerous studies have examined the antecedents, correlates, and outcomes of PSM. Researchers have found that PSM is positively associated with various work attitudes and behaviors, such as job satisfaction (Zhang, 2023), work engagement (Ding & Wang, 2023), attraction and retention (Zhang et al., 2022), prosocial behavior and organizational citizenship, affective commitment to change (Sun, 2021), ethical behavior and fairness (Wang, Van & Heine, 2020).

Recently, research has shown that PSM can also be found in private sector, especially in roles or organizations where the work has a clear social impact or where the company's mission aligns with public service values (Wranik et al., 2024). This can include private companies engaged in social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility initiatives, or sectors like healthcare and education, where the services provided directly benefit society (O'Riordan, 2013).

Furthermore, the concept of PSM has been adapted to study motivations in non-profit organizations and hybrid organizations that operate in both public and private sectors. These studies suggest that while the primary locus of PSM is in public organizations, its principles can apply to any organizational context where the work contributes to the public good or where employees are driven by altruistic motives (Jacobsen, 2021).

In addition, Jacobsen (2021) also claim that no specific type of motivation is exclusive to the public sector. When studying different types of motivation, he discovered that managers across different sector (public sector, hybrid, and private sector) express astonishingly similar views. They all assign very high importance to intrinsic motivation, slightly less so for prosocial motivation, and much less to extrinsic motivation. Thus, as PSM are both heavily influenced by intrinsic motivation (Ramirez, 2019) and prosocial motivation (Ritz, Schott, Nitzl & Alfes, 2020), PSM are not only found in public sector, but also could be found in hybrid and private sector as well.

This had raised a question. Could PSM be found in Malaysian private sector? Since Tun Mahathir Mohamad Privatization Policy in 1983, a lot of public organization had been integrated into private sector entities. This includes Malaysia Airlines (MAS), the RMAF Airplane Restoration Depot (AIROD), Klang Port Container Terminal, International Shipping Corporation of Malaysia (MISC), and Telekom Malaysia (Mamat, Saat, Husin & Sulaiman, 2021). Although these organizations have been privatized, their services are still crucial in serving public interest and needs. These organizations could also be considered as hybrid organizations, i.e. organizations that find themselves somewhere between the public and the private (Johanson and Vakkuri, 2018; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017; Emery and Giauque, 2005).

Organizational hybridity can take on many forms, but in general it refers to organizations that combine two or more institutional logics, or as quoted by Battilana and Dorado, 2010 “taken-for-granted social prescriptions that represent shared understandings of what constitutes legitimate goals and how they may be pursued”. Examples may include combinations of non-profit with for-profit organizations (Doherty et al. 2014), public organizations and voluntary sector (Edelenbos et al. 2013), or a mix of public and private sector logics (Bruton et al. 2015).

Although few in numbers, studies done by Western counterpart such as O’Riordan (2013) and Jacobsen (2021) had shown that indeed, PSM exist in private sector, when certain conditions are met. As such, there is a high possibility that PSM could also exist in Malaysian private organization. Thus, there is a need to investigate on the antecedent that affect Public Service Motivation in private sector.

Religiosity

This variable is perhaps the least studied antecedent of Public Service Motivation in recent Western literature, as many Western demographic had fully embraced secularism i.e. principle of separating religion from the political, social, and educational institutions of the state. For instance, in Western Europe, secularism has become more prominent, with religion being relegated to the private sphere (Zubairi, Badi, & Ruhullah, 2024), while the US, Constitution establishes a separation of church and state (Musa, 2023).

Welch and Leegee (1988) explain the concept of religion with closeness to God, including the involvement in spiritual and social activities. Religion or beliefs contain certain values and ideologies that can influence every aspect of a person's life, including in terms of public service motivation (Houston et al., 2008; Houston & Cartwright, 2007; Houston, 2000; Perry, 2000; Perry, 1997).

According to Perry (1997), basic religious beliefs are directly related to several aspects of public service motivation, specifically commitment to public interests, civic duty and

compassion. A positive relationship with God is expected through public service motivation. Houston & Cartwright (2007) and Houston et al. (2008), clearly in their findings, inform that individual in public service work, especially those related to government, are more spiritual in their attitudes than others.

In the context of Malaysia, one could say that Malaysian society are quite religious. Islam is the official religion of the federation in the Constitution. However, the Constitution also provides for freedom of religion, allowing other religions to be practiced peacefully. For instance, Malaysian government has gazetted various religious public holidays which includes Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Hari Raya Haji, Maulidur Rasul, Israk and Mikraj, and Awal Muharram for Muslims, Thaipusam and Deepavali for Hindus, and Wesak Day for Buddhist (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia).

As Muslim majority country, the Malaysian government has significant influence over Islamic religious institutions and practices through bodies like the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM). JAKIM plays a crucial role in the development and dissemination of religious education programs, which emphasize ethical and moral values. These programs are implemented in schools, mosques, and through various media channels, reaching a wide audience (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia).

For non-muslims, the Majlis Perundangan Malaysia Agama Buddha, Kristian, Hindu, Sikh, dan Tao (MCCBCHST) serves as a consultative council that represents the interests of the major non-Muslim religious communities in Malaysia. One of their crucial roles is to serve as an advocate for the rights and interests of non-Muslim religious communities in Malaysia. It represents these communities in discussions with the government and other stakeholders on matters affecting their religious rights and freedoms (Yusuff, 2015).

In Malaysia, it is customary for most public offices and amenities to provide dedicated prayer rooms for Muslims to perform their salat, equipped with necessary facilities like ablution areas and prayer mats. Similarly, in the private sector, many employers accommodate their Muslim employees by providing designated prayer rooms or special spaces for salat. These provisions ensure that Muslims can fulfil their religious obligations conveniently and without interruption.

For non-Muslims, employers usually provide flexibility to employees to practice their faith. For example, employers in states such as Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Johor, which start their work week on Sunday, may allow Christian employees to take short leave or breaks during church service times. Additionally, employers often grant longer leave for employees to celebrate their religious festivals, such as Christmas, Deepavali, and Wesak Day.

To sum up, the initiative by governing bodies and employers has made religion a crucial part of Malaysian society, both for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Therefore, as religion heavily influences Malaysian society and given that Public Service Motivation (PSM) can be shaped by religiosity, it is reasonable to believe that PSM may also be present in the Malaysian private sector, influenced by religious values.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a fundamental aspect of business ethics where a company's responsibilities extend beyond mere economic obligations to its shareholders. It

encompasses a broader spectrum of accountability, including ethical duties toward all stakeholders who are directly or indirectly impacted by the company's operations (Arfiansyah, 2020). The practice of conducting CSR activities represents a critical component of a company's commitment to addressing societal disparities and mitigating environmental degradation that might result from its business activities (Sumilat & Destriana, 2017).

By actively engaging in social responsibility initiatives, companies not only demonstrate their awareness and concern for the well-being of the communities in which they operate but also strategically work to enhance their reputation and public image. This proactive approach to social responsibility helps to foster goodwill, build trust, and ultimately strengthen the company's standing within society (Parinduri, et al., 2019).

How does employee CSR affect their PSM? Moynihan and Pandey (2007) stated that "PSM could be formed by sociohistorical factors before employees enter the organization, but it will also be influenced by the work environment in which employees find themselves". In other words, the environment within an organization plays a crucial role in shaping PSM. As such, organization that promotes CSR will enhance employees' motivation to serve the public interest.

According to study conducted by Abdelmotaleb & Saha, (2018), an employee positive perception of CSR evokes employee motives to serve the public, which in turn lead to greater level of PSM. This finding provides support to the process theory of PSM, which propose that organizational culture (CSR practices) will shape employees' desire to serve the public.

However, there is a lack of studies that investigate the CSR-PSM relationship. Most existing research on CSR in Malaysia tends to focus on its financial implications or general organizational behavior, rather than specifically exploring how CSR influences PSM among employees (Awalluddin, Ramlan, & Maznorbal, 2019). For instance, studies done by Yusoff & Adamu, (2016) have assessed the level of CSR among public listed companies and its impact on financial performance but do not delve into employee motivation related to public service.

Moreover, there is a call for more individual-level analysis regarding CSR's effects on employee motivation and behavior. While studies such as Abdelmotaleb & Saha, (2018), have examined CSR's impact on organizational citizenship behavior, the specific mediating role of PSM in this context has not been thoroughly explored within the Malaysian setting.

In a nutshell, the relationship between CSR and PSM is an emerging area of interest globally, but it appears to be under-researched in Malaysia. This gap presents an opportunity for future research to investigate how CSR initiatives can enhance PSM among employees in the private sector, which could lead to improved organizational commitment and community engagement.

Organizational Ethical Climate

According to Litwin and Stringer (1968), organizational climate is a form of quantifiable characteristics of the work setting, recognized openly or obliquely by the workforce. Schneider (2000) defined it as a practically grounded depiction of the working setting, and more explicitly, the viewpoints of employees of the policies both formal and informal, procedures and practices in the organization.

Building on various organizational climate definitions (e.g. Momeni, 2009; Sowpow, 2006; Reichers and Schneider, 1990; Schneider, 1975; Litwin and Stringer, 1968), Victor and Cullen (1988) define organizational ethical climate as “the shared perception of what is correct behavior and how ethical situations should be handled in an organization”. More explicitly, organizational ethical climate addresses employees’ shared insights about company policies, practices such as actions, methods, routines, and traditions, and procedures”.

The ethical climate of an organization is crucial for influencing work attitudes, as it provides a framework for employees to understand the ethical expectations and norms within the workplace. A strong ethical climate fosters a culture where ethical behavior is prioritized and supported, leading to improved job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Mayasari, 2008).

The ethical climate affects various organizational outcomes such as organizational commitment (Cullen, Parboteeah and Victor, 2003), the satisfaction of employees on their jobs, and turnover intention (Schwepker, 2001), leadership (Ötken and Cenkci, 2012), and organizational citizenship behaviors (Williams and Anderson, 1991).

Thus, how does organizational ethical climate affect PSM? An ethical climate’s positive effect on PSM is explained by the logic of appropriateness. Perry (2000) maintained that public employees are motivated to pursue a morally right path, and this motivation is cultivated in their working environment. As agents of the principal (citizen), public employees internalize normative beliefs and appropriate behaviour in pursuing the public interest. This claim was later supported by Vandenabeele (2008) Shim & Park (2019) Lee, Oh & Park (2020).

A recent article published by Lee, Min, Kim & Park, (2022) had found out that organizational ethical climate could affect PSM differently. In their study, the impact of ethical climate on policymaking oriented PSM attitudes is statistically significant in the Korean public sector, whereas the impact on societally driven PSM values is statistically significant in the Chinese public sector.

Amid this finding, they commented that “In Korea, we can speculate that moral standards are more required in policy and political decision-making processes. In China, public officials are more willing to engage in voluntary behaviors and community-based activities when the moral hazard problems or corruption and accountability issues are no longer in effect.”

Due to this intriguing development, further research should be conducted, particularly in the Malaysian context. While the ethical dimensions of leadership have been frequently examined in studies such as those by Aluwi, Omar, and Johari (2020) and Loke, Ismail, and Fatima (2022), discussions in Malaysia tend to emphasize leadership roles rather than the broader organizational culture.

For instance, while a recent study by Loke, Ismail, and Fatima (2022) examines how the organizational ethical climate (OEC) shapes ethical conduct within the public sector, it does not specifically address how OEC impacts public service motivation (PSM). This highlights that the potential influence of OEC on PSM remains less explored.

Therefore, further studies should focus on the OEC-PSM relationship, particularly in the Malaysian private sector, as this could provide valuable insights into improving organizational efficiency and employee satisfaction. Additionally, comparing organizations with different ethical cultures, as done by Lee, Min, Kim, and Park (2022), could help clarify how organizational ethical climate (OEC) influences public service motivation (PSM).

Suggested Framework

We recommend Theory of Planned Behavior as underlying theory for this research framework. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), developed in 1985, and updated in 2020, explains that human behaviour is influenced by three factors: behavioural beliefs (consequences of the behaviour), normative beliefs (expectations of others), and control beliefs (factors that may facilitate or hinder behaviour).

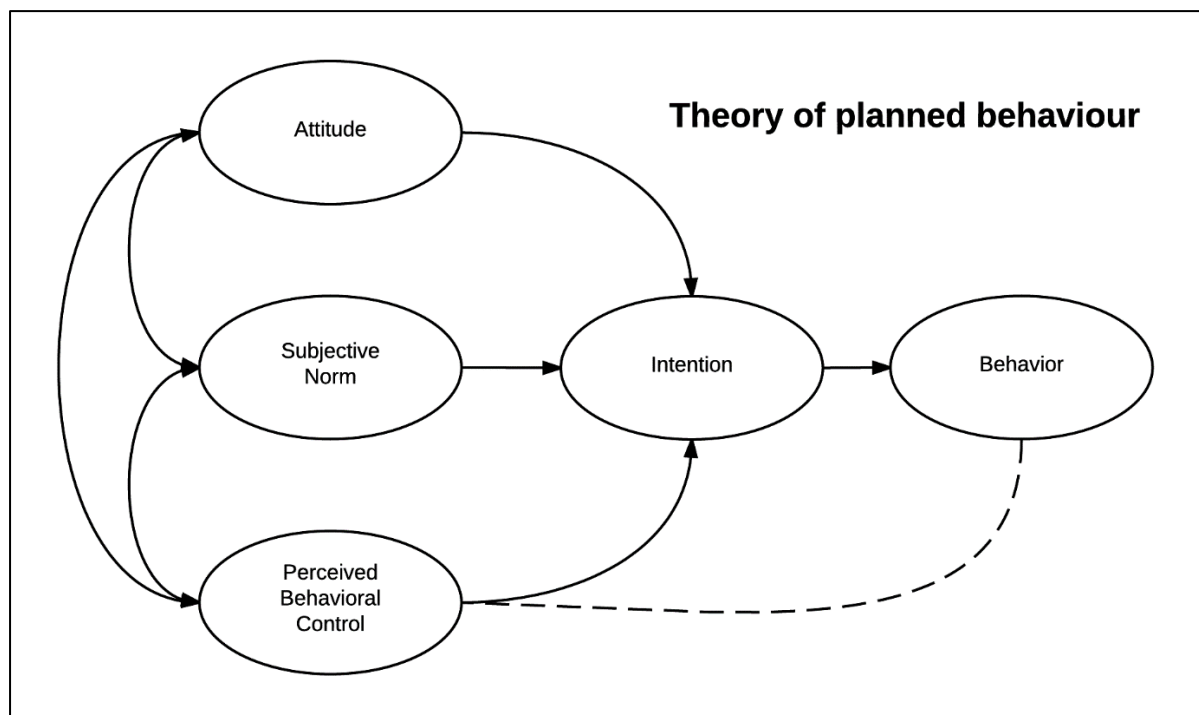


Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior

These beliefs shape attitude, perceived social pressure (subjective norm), and perceived behavioural control (self-efficacy). The impact of attitude and subjective norm on intention is moderated by perceived control. Stronger intentions, driven by favourable attitudes, norms, and perceived control, lead to behaviour, provided there is actual control. Perceived control can predict behaviour if accurate (Bosnjak, Ajzen & Schmidt, 2020).

Religiosity plays a significant role in shaping individuals' attitudes toward ethical behavior and social responsibility. Those with strong religious beliefs may perceive CSR and ethical practices as moral obligations, thereby influencing their intention to engage in behaviors aligned with Public Service Motivation (PSM).

In their study, Vitell and Paolillo (2004) found that individuals with higher levels of religiosity tend to demonstrate stronger ethical beliefs and behaviors. They emphasized that religious values substantially influence attitudes toward ethical decision-making in business, which

aligns with the principles of CSR. In addition, Fry and Cohen (2009) revealed that leaders with strong religious beliefs are more likely to advocate for CSR initiatives and uphold ethical practices within their organizations.

CSR initiatives and a robust organizational ethical climate (OEC) foster a normative environment that encourages employees to align with ethical standards. This environment creates social pressure to conform, which can strengthen employees' intentions to engage in behaviors reflective of Public Service Motivation (PSM).

In their study, García-Sánchez and Nunez-Nickel (2013) argued that a strong OEC motivates employees to adhere to ethical standards, thereby enhancing their drive to engage in PSM-related behaviors. López-Cabarcos and González-López (2018) further highlighted the link between CSR practices and employee behavior, emphasizing that a strong ethical culture amplifies social pressure to uphold ethical standards, ultimately fostering greater alignment with PSM.

Finally, in the context of Theory of Planned Behavior, we believe that both CSR and OEC can serve as mediators between religiosity and PSM. Religiosity could shape an individual's perception of CSR as a moral imperative, thereby strengthening the effect of CSR on their intention to engage in PSM-related behaviors.

In their study, Brammer & Millington (2006) indicates that personal values and beliefs significantly influence attitudes toward CSR initiatives. They suggest that religiosity can enhance the perception of CSR as a moral imperative, leading to increased engagement in behaviors consistent with PSM. Furthermore, Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque (2015) had explored the relationship between religiosity and ethical consumption behavior. They found that individuals with strong religious convictions often perceive ethical consumption (including CSR) as a moral obligation, which aligns with intentions to engage in PSM-related behaviors.

In regards of OEC, religiosity can enhance the perception of Organizational Ethical Culture (OEC) as a reflection of shared moral and ethical values, reinforcing the normative pressure that drives behaviors aligned with Public Service Motivation (PSM).

Aqli, Ujianto, & Syafi'I (2019) analyzes how ethical leadership and work culture influence public employees' risk aversion and organizational citizenship behavior. It indicates that a positive work culture, shaped by shared values including religiosity, reinforces normative pressures that align with PSM. Similarly, Iswanti, Ujianto, & Riyadi (2023) had examine the effects of ethical leadership and work culture on organizational citizenship behavior among civil servants. It suggests that a strong ethical culture, influenced by shared moral values, such as religiosity, can enhance public service motivation.

As such, we have developed conceptual framework based on Theory of Planned Behavior, and have made minor adjustment based on the suitability of our study:

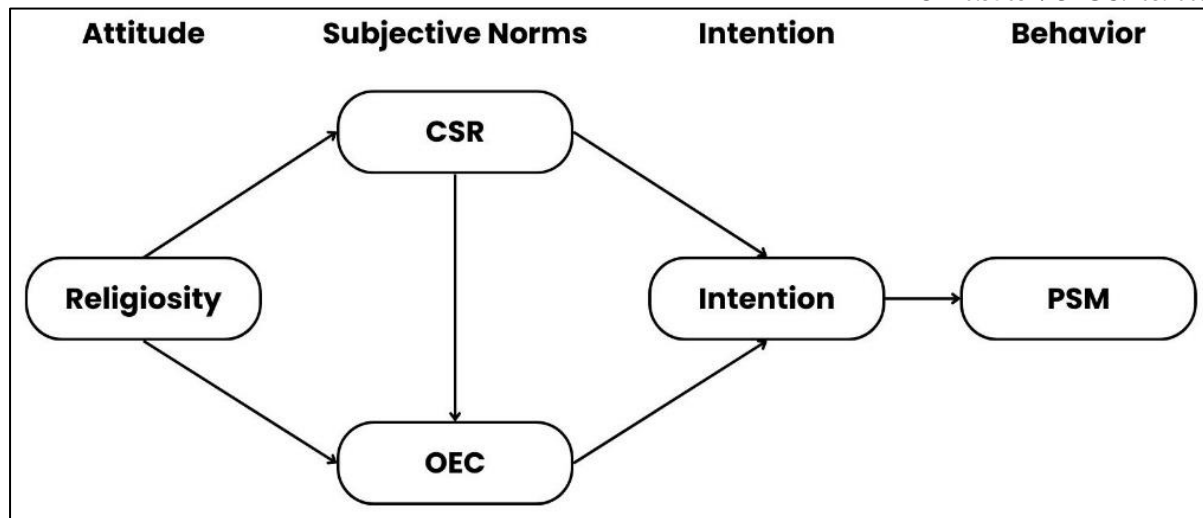


Figure 2: Suggested Research Framework Based On Theory of Planned Behaviour

Conclusion

To sum up, Perry (1990) notion that Public Service Motivation could only be found in public sector organization has been challenged. Western studies such as done O’Riordan (2013) and Jacobsen (2021) had shown that indeed, PSM could exist in private sector, when certain conditions are met, such as 1) When employees roles had clear social impact or public service values, 2) When companies involved in social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, healthcare, or education, and 3) When companies activities benefit the public good or is driven by altruism.

As such, it is crucial to conduct a study in Malaysia, where research on Public Service Motivation (PSM) in private sector is limited. While Western studies have demonstrated that PSM can exist in private organizations under specific conditions, the cultural and organizational context in Malaysia may present unique factors influencing PSM. Examining how religiosity, corporate social responsibility and organizational ethical climate will align with PSM in Malaysian context will provide valuable insights for current and future studies

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