The idea that public officials should set aside their personal interests in the pursuit of the common good and serve the larger community is a long-standing belief. Philosophers dating to Plato, Aristotle, and Confucius gave voice to the view that public officials are obligated to public service. Sylvia Horton (2008) traces the idea of a public service ethos from its early expressions to the Middle Ages, and subsequently to twentieth-century Europe and America. We came to the brink of cutting the thread to the heritage of public service beginning with Watergate, a turbulent era in American public service (Light 1999). As Donald Moynihan (2008) observes, the normative model on which we once relied is being displaced by different institutional designs that have embedded within them different assumptions about human nature. Reliance on markets and quasi-markets, extrinsic incentives, and self-interest increasingly are displacing public service norms and intrinsic values and beliefs. Patrick Dunleavy and Christopher Hood have characterized the new regime “as a chain of low-trust principal/agent relationships (rather than fiduciary or trustee-beneficiary ones), a network of contracts linking incentives to performance” (1994, 9). These assumptions about human nature are at risk of becoming cast in stone in our public institutions, ensuring a self-fulfilling prophecy in which we get the behaviors that mirror the assumptions.

Just as prospects for the survival of the normative model of public service were fading, scholars from many disciplines (Koehler and Rainey 2008) rediscovered models of human nature that gave rise to different views of motivation and its foundations. These models do not begin with self-interest, but instead with doing good for others and the well-being of society, much like the classical views of public service. The label commonly applied to these models and to this line of research in public administration is public service motivation (PSM). This symposium is dedicated to reviewing and exploring the content and empirical support for the new motivational perspectives.

The Symposium Papers
What have we learned? In the opening article of the symposium, “Public Service Motivation: Twenty Years of Research and an Agenda for the Future,” James L. Perry, Annie Hondeghem, and Lois Recascino Wise take stock of developments since “The Motivational Bases of Public Service” (Perry and Wise 1990) appeared in the fiftieth-anniversary volume of Public Administration Review. The picture they paint is one of progress in the expansion of research in public administration and social and behavioral sciences. They note that public administration is joined by several other disciplines in conducting research on PSM. The different disciplines converge around the idea of other-oriented motives.

Even as Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise report progress, research findings during the last decade have begun to identify nuanced understandings of PSM. The original propositions of Perry and Wise have gathered empirical support, but the research raises new questions about causality and calls for more complete models to explain the antecedents and outcomes associated with PSM. They propose directions for research that will help provide answers to lingering questions.

Confirming what we think we know. Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise’s call for more definitive studies about PSM’s origins and effects is the subject of the next symposium contribution. In “Unanswered Questions about Public Service Motivation: Designing Research to Address Key Issues of Emergence and Effects,” Bradley E. Wright and Adam M. Grant address important questions regarding PSM’s origins and consequences that have not been answered by existing research. Although Wright and Grant note that significant progress has been made in documenting the existence of PSM, they also point to a limitation—what we know depends on how we know it. The cross-sectional survey research designs that are commonly used in PSM research are useful for demonstrating its existence, but they are not well suited for answering important causal questions.
The core of Wright and Grant’s article focuses on fundamental questions that are directly related to propositions offered by Perry and Wise. The first part of their article grapples with the origins of PSM and its implications for the relationship between PSM and sector of employment. The second part focuses on assumptions regarding the potential effects of PSM on job performance. Wright and Grant go a step beyond identifying fundamental questions that still need to be answered. They discuss specific studies whose research designs can help fill knowledge gaps and inform our understanding of PSM. Their identification of concrete directions for research complements existing PSM research, and the studies they propose have the potential to significantly strengthen our understanding of PSM.

**Internationalizing the research.** The next article, “A Strategy for Building Public Service Motivation Research Internationally,” follows up on another issue raised in the Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise review. This involves the conceptualization and operational measurement of PSM. Sangmook Kim and Wouter Vandenabeele start by noting the spread of PSM research internationally and the widespread agreement surrounding a public service ethic. The goal of their article is to create a foundation for a more universal construct, one that builds from research originating in the United States that may be limited by its cultural and institutional roots.

Kim and Vandenabeele recommend three changes in line with their goal. They review research to assess commonalities in the content of PSM internationally and then propose modest changes in the conception of PSM to bring it into line with their findings. First, their analysis leads them to propose that PSM continue to be conceived as a four-dimensional construct, with self-sacrifice, representing the altruistic or prosocial origins of PSM, as the foundational concept. Second, three other concepts—attraction to public participation, commitment to public values, and compassion, representing instrumental, value-based, and affective motives—round out their proposed modifications to the construct. Finally, they propose that scholars use all four dimensions in measuring the construct because they collectively represent PSM. They argue that the proposed changes will make the research more universal as PSM is studied increasingly in countries around the world.

**Putting research to work for practice.** The concluding article in the symposium is “Transformational Leadership and Public Service Motivation: Driving Individual and Organizational Performance,” by Laurie E. Paarlberg and Bob Lavigna. Their article shifts the symposium’s focus from issues of internal and external validity of scholarship to the application of research findings. Paarlberg and Lavigna provide ideas about how we can practice what we preach about public service motivation.

Their starting point is the observation that our understanding of how to translate research about prosocial motivation into more effective management practices is underdeveloped. A growing body of research has moved the study of PSM from understanding what motivates public servants to exploring how a variety of public service motives influence performance. Similarly, additional attention has been paid to the practices of transformational leadership. Paarlberg and Lavigna draw on concepts from transformational leadership to address a practical management question: how can managers harness the positive effects of public service motivations to enhance employee and organizational performance? They mine the growing body of empirical and applied research to build their case. Paarlberg and Lavigna propose a variety of ways for managers to incorporate public service values across an organization’s management systems.

**Conclusion**

This symposium is intended to share with the public administration community promising developments about our understanding of motivation for public service. Research advances have brought us to the point at which we can begin to identify a distinctive body of knowledge to guide public policy makers, executives, managers, and employees about public service motivation. These symposium articles are designed to establish a benchmark for future research advances and improvements in human resource and leadership practices in public organizations.

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