

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION ON JOB SATISFACTION: MEDIATING EFFECTS OF WORK ENGAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

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Abstract

This study explores how Public Service Motivation (PSM) influences job satisfaction (JS) among public sector employees in Pakistan, with a particular focus on the roles of work engagement (WE) and organizational commitment (OC) as mediating factors. Public sector workers are central to delivering essential services and ensuring the smooth operation of government functions, so understanding what drives their satisfaction and performance is crucial.

Using theories from motivation and organizational behavior, the study introduces a conceptual model to examine both the direct and indirect effects of PSM on job satisfaction. Data were collected from 365 employees across key public organizations in Pakistan, including Pakistan Railways, SNGPL, and WAPDA, through a structured questionnaire. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to assess the relationships between variables.

The findings show that employees with higher levels of PSM are more likely to feel engaged in their work and committed to their organization, both of which significantly enhance their overall job satisfaction. Moreover, the results confirm that work engagement and organizational commitment serve as important links in the connection between PSM and job satisfaction.

Overall, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of employee motivation in the public sector, particularly in a non-Western context. It also offers practical recommendations for human resource practices—emphasizing the need to cultivate public service values, strengthen employee engagement, and build organizational loyalty in order to foster a more motivated, satisfied, and effective public workforce.

Keywords: Public Service Motivation (PSM), Job Satisfaction (JS), Work Engagement (WE), Organizational Commitment (OC)

1. Introduction

The primary duty of providing essential infrastructure and services to both residents and institutions falls on the public sector. Public servants, who form the operational core of service delivery, are essential to this mission. Therefore, understanding their work behaviors and attitudes is essential, as these factors can profoundly influence the overall quality of public service. Existing scholarly literature highlights that employee attitudes and behaviors are shaped not only by individual traits or organizational characteristics but also by the dynamic interplay between the two. Two influential theoretical frameworks address these relationships: PSM and Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit). PSM theory suggests that individuals with a strong drive to serve the public tend to experience higher JS and demonstrate greater OC (Kara et al., 2023; Perry & Wise, 1990; Stefurak et al., 2020). Conversely, P-O Fit emphasizes the importance of congruence between personal values and organizational culture as a core determinant of employee behavior and attitudes (Kristof-Brown & Jansen, 2012). Some scholars argue that P-O Fit mediates the impact of PSM on work outcomes, implying that the influence of PSM on attitudes is contingent upon an environment aligned with those motivations (Bright, 2007; Kim, 2012).

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Among various work-related outcomes, JS and OC are among the most frequently examined within both frameworks (Kristof-Brown & Jansen, 2012; Wright & Pandey, 2008). While some perspectives advocate that PSM directly enhances these attitudes, others contend that their relationship is indirect, mediated through P-O Fit (Bright, 2021). Although the notion that PSM exerts a direct effect is gaining acceptance, a definitive empirical consensus remains elusive, underscoring the need for further research.

PSM has gained recognition as a crucial construct for understanding public employees' work attitudes, performance levels, and intentions to remain in their roles (Coursey et al., 2012; Perry, 1996). Additionally, empirical evidence links PSM to civic engagement, prosocial acts, and volunteerism (Houston, 2006), highlighting its wider societal significance.

In Pakistan, recent years have been marked by significant reforms in public administration aimed at enhancing service quality, transparency, and performance management. Initiatives such as the Pakistan Citizen's Portal and the e-Office platform exemplify efforts to digitize governance and promote accountability. Institutions like the National School of Public Policy and the Civil Services Academy play vital roles in fostering professional development. Yet, persistent challenges—including institutional inertia, inadequate incentive structures, and political interference—hamper reform progress. Embedding principles of meritocracy, skill-based postings, and a culture of performance are critical for sustaining long-term improvements. Against this backdrop, examining the role of PSM within Pakistan's unique socio-cultural and administrative setting becomes increasingly vital. Most existing research on PSM originates from Western contexts, necessitating investigations into whether similar dynamics influence Pakistani public sector employees' attitudes and behaviors. This study aims to explore how PSM impacts work attitudes such as JS, engagement, and commitment, with WE and OC serving as potential mediators. The insights derived are expected to deepen theoretical understanding and offer practical guidance for human resource strategies in Pakistan's public institutions.

2. Hypothesis Development

2.1. PSM and Employees Attitudes

PSM, initially conceptualized by Perry and Wise (as cited in Kjeldsen & Andersen, 2013; Perry & Wise, 1990), describes an individual's intrinsic response to working within public sector institutions. Essentially, a heightened level of PSM indicates that individuals are driven by a strong sense of community and a desire to serve the public good. Building upon this, further scholarly efforts have sought to refine and broaden the definition of PSM. Vandenabeele et al. (2017) argue that PSM should be understood as a set of beliefs, values, and attitudes that transcend self-interest, emphasizing commitment to political and social causes rather than personal gain, thereby inspiring timely and appropriate engagement. Although Rainey and Steinbauer expanded PSM's scope to include private sector motivation, they viewed it as a form of altruism aimed at community service. Today, PSM has become a vital benchmark for examining the motivations, behaviors, and performance of public servants, with both domestic and international researchers extensively testing its relevance, underscoring its significance in human resource management within public organizations.

Empirical evidence suggests that higher PSM levels are associated with increased OC and JS among public sector employees (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013). Since public agencies are tasked with serving societal interests, their work environment naturally caters to individuals' altruistic motivations, thereby enhancing JS among those with strong PSM (Coursey et al., 2012). Additionally, various studies have identified mediating factors like person-organization fit, organizational characteristics, and departmental differences that modulate the influence of PSM on JS—either amplifying or diminishing it (Kjeldsen & Hansen, 2018). Notably, PSM positively influences JS, especially when driven by public spirit and self-sacrificing tendencies,

and serves as a mediator linking work values to JS (Huntsman et al., 2022). OC, which reflects an employee's psychological attachment and alignment with an organization, is largely influenced by the compatibility and shared values between the individual and the organization (Meyer et al., 1993). From a person-organization fit perspective, PSM fosters value congruence by emphasizing altruistic motives aligned with public service. Furthermore, public organizations tend to meet the internal needs, expectations, and preferences of their employees, reinforcing this alignment (Potipiroon & Ford, 2017). Kim (2012) posited that elevated PSM correlates with increased loyalty and emotional bonds to the organization, thereby strengthening OC. Numerous studies have confirmed the positive linkages between PSM and organizational attachment (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). Consequently, it is reasonable to hypothesize that PSM, as a reflection of altruistic motivation, enhances organizational loyalty and dedication, leading to greater commitment. Drawing from the above literature, PSM clearly predicts both JS and OC. Elevated PSM levels tend to boost these attitudes while potentially reducing turnover intentions. Based on this understanding, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: PSM significantly and positively influences JS.

Hypothesis 2: PSM significantly and positively influences OC.

2.2. Relationship between Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction

Work engagement, a concept that gained prominence around 1990, has become a focal point in positive psychology related to work. While it shares similarities with constructs like involvement, JS, and OC, it remains distinct in its focus on the vigor, dedication, and absorption of employees (Wefald & Downey, 2009). Empirical research, such as a study involving 343 nurses, demonstrated that those with higher engagement levels demonstrated greater efficiency and a stronger willingness to deliver people-centered services (Mahiro et al., 2014). In a similar vein Zeffane & Bani Melhem, (2017) discovered that WE functions as a mediator between OC, performance, and satisfaction in addition to being a predictor of JS and intentions to leave. According to additional study, WE has a negative impact on turnover intentions but a good impact on OC and JS (Achmad et al., 2023). Employee satisfaction may be greatly increased and turnover can be decreased when leaders actively engage with their staff. The following hypotheses result from the fact that WE is a crucial predictor of a number of work-related attitudes and behaviors.

Hypothesis 3: Work Engagement has an impact on JS.

Hypothesis 4: Organizational Commitment has a favorable impact on JS.

2.3. The Mediating Function of Organizational Commitment and Work Engagement

Recently, scholars have increasingly recognized the vital role of WE within organizational behavior, emphasizing Kahn's (1990) assertion that highly engaged individuals physically, emotionally, and spiritually invest themselves into their roles. An empirical study involving South Korean government agencies revealed that OC functions as a mediator between PSM and JS (Park, 2020). Extending this to the Pakistani public sector context, it is hypothesized that both WE and OC serve as mediating variables linking PSM to JS.

On one hand, PSM's altruistic nature fosters improved JS and reduces turnover tendencies. Conversely, as constructive and job-focused states, OC and WE enhance employees' zeal and general performance. As a result, PSM uses these mediators to directly and indirectly affect work attitudes. The following theories are put out in light of this.

Hypothesis 5: PSM has a beneficial impact on employee engagement at work.

Hypothesis 6: The association between PSM and JS is mediated by WE.

Hypothesis 7: The association between PSM and work satisfaction is mediated by OC.

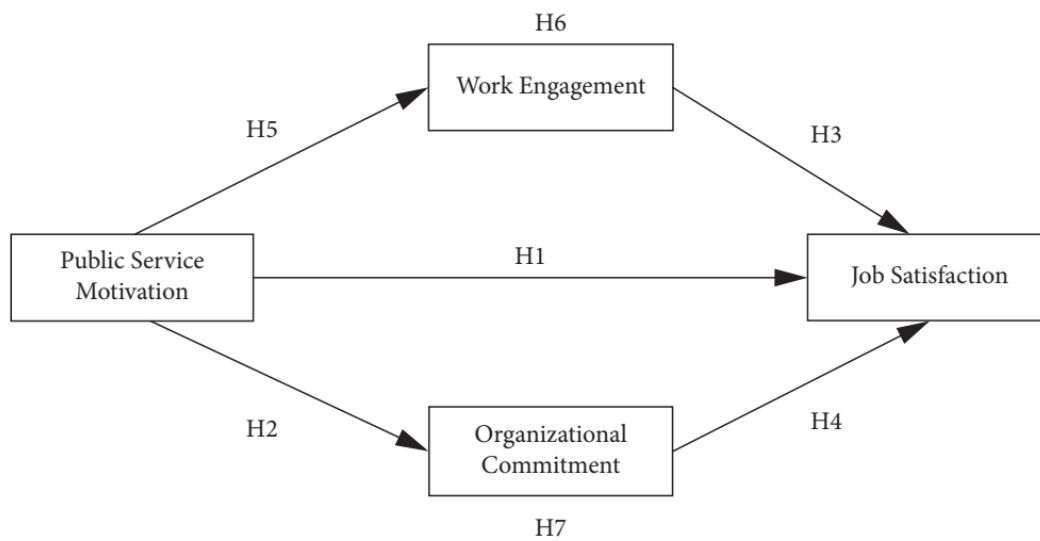


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

3. Methods

This study targeted employees from the Pakistani public sector, specifically civil servants and personnel from three federal government departments. A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 400 were returned. After screening for completeness, 365 valid responses were retained, yielding a usable response rate of 60%. The sample comprised 68% male and 32% female participants. Regarding age distribution, 7.7% were under 25 years, 34.5% were between 25 and 30 years, 40.5% were between 31 and 40 years, and 17.4% were above 41 years. Educational qualifications indicated that 13.9% had college-level education or below, 55.1% held a bachelor's degree, and 31% had attained a master's degree or higher. In terms of professional experience, 31.3% had less than 5 years, 24% had 6–10 years, 15.6% had 11–20 years, and 29.1% had more than 21 years of experience. Occupational roles were categorized as Engineers (59.5%), officers (26.9%), and junior and Clerical staff (13.6%). The study employed Perry's (1996) PSM scale, consisting of five items such as "meaningful public serving matters to me" and "I am prepared to better serve the society." Work engagement was measured using Kanungo, (1982) scale, which included statements like "I have been 100% dedicated to my job." Job Satisfaction was assessed using Boateng & Hsieh, (2019) four-item scale, with items such as "overall, I am satisfied with my current job" and "no matter what, I will not leave my current job." Organization Commitment was evaluated using Meyer et al.'s (1993) four-item scale, featuring items like "I feel emotionally attached to my organization." Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The internal consistency of the scales, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was as follows: PSM = 0.875, WE = 0.793, JS = 0.838, and OC = 0.844.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Cronbach's alpha values, correlation coefficients, and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. The findings support Hypotheses 1, 2, and 5 by demonstrating a positive correlation between PSM and WE ($r = 0.424$, $p < 0.01$), OC ($r = 0.439$, $p < 0.01$), and JS ($r = 0.356$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, there were significant positive relationships between OC ($r = 0.698$, $p < 0.01$)

and WE ($r = 0.608$, $p < 0.01$) and JS, supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4. Since all Cronbach's alpha values were higher than the cutoff of 0.70, good dependability was indicated.

Table 1: Reliability Coefficients, Correlations, and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SE	PSM	WE	OC	JS	α
PSM	3.70	0.68	1				0.875
WE	3.35	0.81	0.424**	1			0.793
OC	3.72	0.66	0.439**	0.534**	1		0.844
JS	3.50	0.72	0.356**	0.608**	0.698**	1	0.838

Note: $N = 365$; ** $p < 0.01$

4.2 Factor Analysis

The validity of the model was tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The four-factor model produced good fit indices, as indicated by Table 2: $\chi^2(96) = 212.845$, CFI = 0.975, TLI = 0.969, and RMSEA = 0.047. The discriminant validity of the four constructs was confirmed by the poor fit of other models.

Table 2: Model Fit Comparisons

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
PSM, WE, OC, JS	212.845	96	2.22	0.975	0.975	0.969	0.047

4.3 Common Method Bias

A number of statistical and procedural controls were used to mitigate any possible common technique bias. According to CFA, there was little chance of significant bias because the single-factor model fit poorly ($\chi^2(104) = 23.266$; CFI = 0.690; RMSEA = 0.160). Further demonstrating the data's resilience, the addition of a common technique component produced insignificant gains in model fit ($\Delta CFI = 0.006$).

4.4 Path Testing

SEM, or structural equation modeling, was employed to assess the suggested theories. PSM was a positive predictor of WE ($\beta = 0.442$, $p < 0.001$), OC ($\beta = 0.444$, $p < 0.001$), and JS ($\beta = 0.435$, $p < 0.001$), as indicated in Table 3. Furthermore, JS was significantly predicted by OC ($\beta = 0.465$, $p < 0.001$) and WE ($\beta = 0.481$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 3: Path Coefficients from SEM

Path	SC	CR	p
PSM \rightarrow OC	0.444	11.811	<0.001
PSM \rightarrow WE	0.442	10.206	<0.001
PSM \rightarrow JS	0.435	12.659	<0.001
WE \rightarrow JS	0.481	14.827	<0.001
OC \rightarrow JS	0.465	15.807	<0.001

The mediation functions of OC and WE were validated by bootstrap analysis. Both indirect effects were statistically significant, as Table 4 demonstrates.

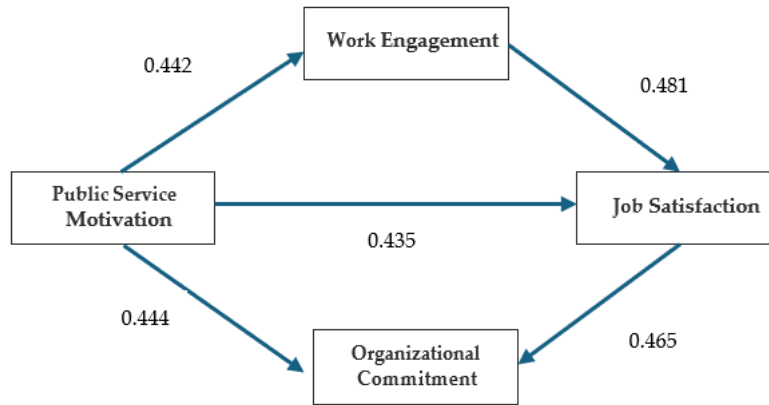


Figure 2: Hypothesized Model

Table 4: Standardized Bootstrap Mediation Effects

Path	Effect	SE	95% CI (Bias-Corrected)
PSM → WE → JS	0.294	0.034	[0.243, 0.350]
PSM → OC → JS	0.267	0.032	[0.215, 0.345]

5. Conclusions

This study, which included 365 workers in the public sector, suggested a method that shows how PSM affects JS and emphasizes the mediating roles of WE and OC. The results showed that job satisfaction is significantly and favorably predicted by PSM and is significantly and favorably influenced by both WE and OC. Moreover the relationship between PSM and JS is mediated by these two variables.

5.1. Significance of the study

Building on these conclusions, it is crucial for management to consider several key points: Firstly, when the public sector recognizes the practical importance of PSM theory, it can adopt various strategies to enhance its employees' PSM levels. Human Resource departments, in particular, should integrate PSM into their recruitment processes by evaluating and measuring candidates' motivation to serve the public. Currently, Pakistan's public sector primarily relies on assessments of writing skills and administrative capabilities during recruitment—methods that do not effectively reveal an applicant's genuine motivation. As a result, it becomes challenging to identify candidates who embody the spirit of "being the first to show concern and the last to enjoy oneself," which directly influences their work attitude and ethical standards. Furthermore, promoting PSM should be a priority during new staff orientation and ongoing training. This study underscores PSM's direct impact on JS, providing HR departments with compelling evidence of the necessity to embed PSM development into their human resource practices. Secondly, cultivating WE and OC can be achieved by fostering a strong sense of duty among employees to serve the public. The study shows that these factors not only directly affect JS but also mediate the influence of PSM on satisfaction. Therefore, actively encouraging the spirit of public service is essential. Service is the core function of a government, and the question at hand is whether public employees dedicate their full effort and consciousness to serving not just their superiors but also society at large. From a governance perspective, the concept of a "public servant," as embraced by the Pakistani government and aligned with Perry's (1996) PSM theory, supports this goal—promoting altruism and a commitment to public service to enhance engagement and efficiency. Additionally, improving the professional capabilities and service quality of public workers through targeted training is

vital. Recent reforms have led to organizational restructuring and staff redistribution, which have impacted efficiency and role clarity. Addressing these challenges through professional development can help employees adapt to new roles, thereby boosting their engagement and commitment. Thirdly, implementing well-designed incentive schemes can significantly increase JS among public workers. System reforms—such as adjusting wages, integrating pension schemes, streamlining responsibilities, and revising titles—have positively influenced employee attitudes and organizational citizenship behaviors. To sustain these improvements, both internal and external motivation strategies should be employed. Externally, performance-based pay structures and differentiated incentives can motivate employees effectively, especially younger staff members. Internally, recognition awards, opportunities for promotion, reputation-building, and fostering a sense of competence and self-authority are crucial. Balancing these internal and external incentives helps reinforce motivation, prevents negative effects associated with overreliance on external rewards, and nurtures a service-oriented administrative culture.

5.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the valuable insights gained, this study has certain limitations that future research should address. First, the sample was restricted to public service employees from only three departments—Pakistan Railways, SNGPL and WAPDA—necessitating broader studies that could include cross-regional or cross-sector analyses, including private organizations. Second, as the PSM measurement scales employed are rooted in Western contexts, their applicability to the Pakistani socio-political landscape may be limited. Developing a fully localized instrument that reflects Pakistan's unique cultural and political nuances is essential for more accurate assessments. Third, this study primarily focused on individual-level variables, but organizational culture and workload differences across departments can also influence work attitudes. Incorporating organizational-level variables and employing cross-level analytical methods would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how PSM operates within diverse organizational contexts.

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