

Review Article

The Impact of Public Service Motivation on Job Satisfaction in Public Sector Employees: The Mediating Roles of Work Engagement and Organizational Commitment

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Received 12 June 2022; Accepted 1 August 2022; Published 22 August 2022

Academic Editor: Xuefeng Zhang

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In the public service sector, staff's motivation is of great significance for the developments of both the service team and the governmental service departments. This research develops a model to study the effects of public service motivation on job satisfaction and further assesses the mediation effects of work engagement and organizational commitment. Five-hundred and fifty employees from Chinese public service sectors were engaged in the questionnaire-based study. The results show that public service motivation plays important roles in work engagement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. Furthermore, work engagement and organizational commitment are the factors to mediate public service motivation and job satisfaction. Therefore, our findings suggest that staff in the public sector with enhanced public service motivation generally appear more involved in their work, are more loyal to their organizations, and demonstrate more positive work attitudes to improve productivity.

1. Introduction

The public sector's primary duty is to support citizens and organizations with necessary public products and services, in which service constitutes this sector's function and is also one of the most critical obligations in servicing governments. Employees in the public sectors play significant roles in realizing the principal duty, so there is great necessity to study the employees' work attitudes and behaviors in the public sector. The literature shows that work attitudes, behavior, and performance are not related solely to individuals or organizations but also may be attributable to the relationship between individuals and organizations.

There currently exist two theories in this area, which are public service motivation (PSM) theory and the person-organization fit (P-O fit) theory [1–3]. The PSM theory argues that PSM is positively correlated with work attitudes and behaviors and employees with higher PSM have elevated

levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Therefore, PSM is considered as a significant individual predisposition to explain the public employees' work attitudes [1, 4–6]. The P-O fit theory considers relationship between person and organization as the key factor that results in the individual's attitudes, behaviors, and others [7, 8]. It assumes that P-O fit completely mediates PSM and work attitudes, while PSM has no straightforward correlation with neither work attitudes nor performance when considering P-O fit [1, 9].

For both PSM and P-O fit studies, work attitudes, which include job satisfaction and organizational commitment, are the mostly frequently examined criteria [7, 10]. There are two distinct views: the first one is that PSM automatically increases public employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while the second holds the standpoint that PSM imposes indirect and positive effect on work attitudes with P-O fit as the mediating factor [9, 11]. Now,

there is the trend to accept the first view, but there still exists the research gap and further studies are warranted in the research area.

The PSM theory seeks to stress the sheer weight of public service motivation. Its theoretical assumption is that a stronger public service motivation tends to suggest improved job satisfaction, work performance, and organizational commitment [4]. Given the significant relations among PSM, work attitudes, and work performance, PSM has gradually become an essential element used to explain job satisfaction, work performance, and turnover intention [12, 13], which are associated effectively with individuals' attitudes and organizational behaviors. Additionally, previous studies not only have emphasized the association between PSM and work attitudes, but also have focused on evidence-based research of the correlation between PSM and social behaviors, participation in public serving activities, civil organizing, citizen's organizational behaviors, etc. [14].

In China, the central government has gradually raised its requirements to the civil servants with the purpose of developing a servicing government. In this circumstance, studies on the relationship between the civil servants' PSM and work attitudes would be of great meanings. The 17th and 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communists pointed out clearly that the overall goals for comprehensive reformation in China are to accelerate the reformation of the administration, to establish a servicing government, and to develop and comprehend the socialism with Chinese characteristics to promote the system of national governing and modernism of governing measurements. The staff throughout the public sector are the very executors and operators of this implementation. China is undergoing a new era of "quintuple ages," the age of reforming and opening, the age of cultural renaissance, the age of China's rise, the age of digitization, and the age of globalization. The 19th National Congress clearly illustrated that, by entering a new era, the most critical objective of the administration reformation is to recruit a highly competent and professional team to enable the public sector staff to achieve results and accomplishments that satisfy the citizenry. However, to build a servicing government and to improve the service's quality and capacity, the public service staff's work attitudes must be developed and shaped and their consciousness of altruism needs to be cultivated as well, as these can enable them to perform more satisfying and desirable jobs. In this way, the ultimate goal of reforming the national administration can be achieved eventually.

With most of the theories and findings obtained in the context of Western culture and the special social, politic, and economic conditions of China, there is need to answer the following question: does public service motivation also affect work attitudes in the Chinese cultural context, which Confucianism influences significantly? Therefore, it is essential to investigate public sector staff's work attitudes and their influencing factors in this context based upon the PSM theory. The findings will also contribute to a more rational and comprehensive understanding of PSM's relation to work attitudes. According to the above, given that this work has

been conducted with reference to the Western theory of PSM and its measures, public sector staff are used as the subjects to investigate in more depth the influencing mechanism of PSM on work attitudes (job satisfaction) by introducing work engagement and organizational commitment as the intervening variable with the goal to reveal the functional system of PSM that affects work attitudes. By doing so, it may serve as a reference for the human resource departments in the Chinese public sector.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. PSM, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment. Public service motivation, initiated by Perry and Wise [4], is defined as individual's inclining reaction to the main or overall public service departments and organizations. Specifically, an improved level of PSM purports to suggest that the individuals thereof arguably tend to serve in the public sector due to their strong community spirit. Following this concept, more extensive studies have been conducted to establish a more comprehensive and accurate definition of PSM. Vandenaebale [15] contends that PSM needs to be viewed as a belief, value, and attitude that transcends people and organizations' self-interests, focuses instead on political entities' interests, and encourages individuals to engage in appropriate actions at the proper time. Although Rainey and Steinbauer [16] extended the definition of PSM from the public to private sector, they believe that PSM is a general motivation of altruism serving the communities' interests. Currently, PSM theory has become a critical criterion and benchmark to investigate public sector staff's work behaviors and performance, and both domestic and oversea researchers have also tested and applied it widely. Accordingly, it has gained practical value in the field of human resources management in the public sector.

Many practical studies have demonstrated that, with higher PSM levels, individuals' commitment to public organizations leads further to better job satisfaction [17, 18]. Public departments are governmental organizations with the goal to serve the social public interests. Thus, this working environment can fulfill individuals' altruism-related demands and motivation to serve the public's interests, which facilitates the level of job satisfaction of those with a higher PSM [12, 19]. Further, other studies have introduced mediating variables, such as the person-organization fit, organizational characteristics, and department variances, and the results have shown the indirect effects of public sector staff's PSM on their job satisfaction, which can be strengthened or weakened by the variables above [20]. Domestic studies have demonstrated that public sector staff's PSM affects their job satisfaction positively [21, 22] and the effect can be more obvious, especially when it comes to public spirits and self-sacrifice. In addition, it also functions significantly as a mediator between the value of work and job satisfaction [23].

Generally, organizational commitment concerns a mental state of the relationship between the staff and the

organization or a psychological attachment to certain organizations, which reflects the consistency of staff and organizations' value directly [24]. From the perspective of person-organization fit, the compatibility of people and working environment is reached largely through the consistency fit and supplementary fit. While PSM is a general altruism motivation to serve the public's interests, it promotes the consistency of people and organizations' value in serving the public [16]. Further, public organizations also fulfill the internal demands, expectations, and preferences of the individuals who serve society [25]. Kim [1] states that higher level of PSM tends to reflect higher level of loyalty and emotional attachment to their departments, such that PSM can facilitate the staff's organizational commitment. Plenty of studies have verified the positive associations between PSM and organizational commitment [16]. In the same vein, this paper proposes the fact that altruism motivation can also be a function of a higher PSM in the public sector, which would then lead to stronger organizational attachment and greater commitment.

Based upon the studies above, PSM obviously serves to predict job satisfaction and organizational commitment. That is, on the one hand, a higher level of PSM can improve job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and, on the other hand, it may reduce or eliminate (if possible) turnover intentions. With this end in view, this paper formulates the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Job satisfaction is significantly and positively conditioned by PSM.

Hypothesis 2. Organizational commitment is significantly and positively conditioned by PSM.

2.2. Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction. Work engagement, which has enormously attracted academic attention, was first proposed by in 1990 and excited great many positive psychological studies in work-related areas. However, many other researchers also believe that there are both similarities and differences among work engagement and involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment [26], exploring the relation between engagement and work attitudes. In an empirical study that engaged 343 nurses, Mahiro et al. [27] discovered that nurses with higher work engagement worked more efficiently and were more willing to engage in their work and provide people-oriented services constantly. Zeffane and Melhem's study [28] suggested that work engagement can not only serve as a valuable indicator of people's job satisfaction and turnover intentions, but also serve as a mediating factor among organizational commitment, performance, and job satisfaction. Mahiro et al. [27] and other researchers have claimed that work-related organizational commitment and job satisfaction are positively and significantly conditioned by work engagement, whereas turnover intentions are negatively conditioned by work engagement. Further, team leaders' work engagement can improve employees' job satisfaction considerably and eliminate turnover intention effectively

[29]. According to this, work engagement serves the function of predicting staff's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and other work-related behaviors. Given the above, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3. Job satisfaction is significantly and positively conditioned by work engagement.

Hypothesis 4. Job satisfaction is significantly and positively conditioned by organizational commitment.

2.3. Work Engagement and Organizational Commitment as Mediators. In recent years, more and more researchers have focused on the critical theoretical value and practical potential of work engagement in the scope of organizational behavior studies and have been trying to demonstrate what Kahn [30] concluded: individuals with greater work engagement will dedicate themselves to their behavioral roles and try to express and present themselves physically, consciously, emotionally, and spiritually. Additionally, empirical analysis of survey data collected from central government agencies in the Republic of Korea found that organizational commitment acts as a mediator between PSM and job satisfaction [31]. This study engaged participants from the Chinese public sector to investigate whether work engagement and organizational commitment mediate PSM and job satisfaction. On the one hand, PSM has an "altruistic" nature and helps improve public sector staff's job satisfaction and eliminate turnover intentions. On the other hand, work engagement and organizational commitment are a positive, comprehensive, and work-related status that enhances staff's enthusiasm to work and therefore improves their work performance overall [32]. As a result, it can be said that PSM affects not only public sector staff's work attitudes directly, but also work attitudes indirectly via work engagement and organizational commitment. Hence, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5. Work engagement is significantly and positively conditioned by PSM.

Hypothesis 6. Work engagement acts as a mediator of PSM and job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 7. Organizational commitment acts as a mediator of PSM and job satisfaction.

3. Methods

Public sector staff were the main participants in this study, and the samples included civil servants and staff from public institutions and organizations. Questionnaires were distributed to MPA students at 4 universities in the Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces. We chose subjects from these two provinces owing to the approachability of the universities there. The universities' education centers coordinated the study, and the questionnaires were distributed and collected during the MPA classes. During the process, 600 questionnaires were distributed and 580 collected. Five-hundred

and fifty questionnaires were retained after excluding 30 invalid ones (response rate 91.67%).

The percentage of males and females in all samples were 52% and 48%, respectively; with respect to age, 6.7% participants were under 25 years old, 35.5% were 25–30, 39.5% were 31–40, and 18.4% were 41 and above. 12.9% of the participants had college degrees and lower, 57.1% held bachelor's degrees, and 30% held master's degree and higher. With respect to work experience, 31.3% had 5 years or less, 24% had 6–10 years, 15.6% had 11–20 years, and 29.1% had 21 years or more. 59.5% were clerical staff, 26.9% were at the office-level, and 13.6% were at the county level and above.

Perry's PSM scale [33] was used. Examples of its 5 items include "meaningful public serving matters to me" and "I am prepared to better serve the society." Kanungo's work engagement scale [34] was employed, which includes "I have been 100% dedicated to my job" and 3 other items. Boateng and Hsieh's scale [35], which includes four items, was used to assess the public employee's job satisfaction. Sample items comprise "overall, I am satisfied with my current job" and "no matter what, I will not leave my current job." Organizational commitment was evaluated with a four-item scale that Meyer et al. [36] developed and validated. Sample items include such statements as "I feel emotionally attached to my organization."

The five-point Likert scale: 'strongly disagree' (1), 'disagree' (2), 'neither disagree nor agree' (3), 'agree' (4), 'strongly agree' (5) was employed for the quantifications. Cronbach's alphas were to 0.875, 0.793, 0.838, and 0.844, respectively.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Analysis. Table 1 tabulates the mean, standard errors, correlations, Cronbach's alpha values, and others of the study variables. The correlation matrix shows that the correlation coefficients (r) between PSM and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work engagement are, respectively, 0.356, 0.439, and 0.424, with all p values smaller than 0.01. These r values indicate positive relations, providing strong evidence for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 5. The positive correlation of organizational commitment ($r=0.698$, $p<0.01$) and work engagement ($r=0.608$, $p<0.01$) with job satisfaction strongly supports Hypotheses 3 and 4. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.793 to 0.875, which outweigh the minimum threshold value (MTV) of 0.70, suggesting the study scale's reliability.

4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The study employs the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the four-factor model's goodness of fit. Three fit indices, which are comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), were used to examine the model fit. The present study attempts to propose five alternative model conceptualizations (Table 2). The hypothesized four-factor model fits good to the data ($\chi^2(96)=212.845$, $p<0.001$; CFI=0.975, IFI=0.975,

TLI=0.969, and RMSEA=0.047) when comparing to the five alternative models. When it comes to the one-factor mode, the fit is less adequate ($\chi^2(104)=23.266$, $p<0.001$; CFI=0.690, IFI=0.691, TLI=0.642, and RMSEA=0.160). The CFA results demonstrated the proposed four-factor model's construct distinctiveness.

4.3. Test of Common Bias Methods. As this research was conducted using self-reported data, it may include common bias methods [37, 38]. The common bias methods, such as anonymity, forward, and backward integral, are used. Further, CFA was used to test the participants' self-evaluations, and model fit is unsatisfactory ($\chi^2(104)=23.266$, $p<0.001$; CFI=0.690, IFI=0.691, TLI=0.642, and RMSEA=0.160). Therefore, the presence of severe common bias methods is unlikely. Then, using common method factors to test the common method variances in comparison to the hypothesized four-factor model, $\Delta\chi^2/df=0.025$, $\Delta CFI=-0.006$, $\Delta IFI=-0.006$, $\Delta TLI=-0.002$, and $\Delta RMSEA=0.002$, in which the variance of all fit indices was smaller than 0.03, indicated that the modeling had not been optimized significantly after common method factors were added and no noticeable common bias methods were found in the testing [39].

4.4. Hypothesis Tests. The data's fit was evaluated by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as there is necessity to verify the model proposed to test the hypothesis (Figure 1). With $\chi^2(99)=372.634$, $p<0.001$, CFI=0.942, TLI=0.929, and RMSEA=0.071, there are excellent fit indices for the model. The CFI and TLI were both higher than 0.9, and the RMSEA was equal to or less than 0.08. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, PSM affected JS positively ($p<0.001$, standardized coefficient (SC)=0.424), which lent strong support to Hypothesis 1; PSM affected OC positively ($p<0.001$, SC=0.420), which lent strong support to Hypothesis 2. The direct relation between WE and job satisfaction ($p<0.001$, nonstandardized coefficient (NSC)=0.511) and between organizational commitment and job satisfaction ($p<0.001$, NSC=0.402) was both significant and positive, which supported Hypotheses 3 and 4. Further, PSM affected WE positively ($p<0.001$, NSC=0.439).

A bootstrapping method was adopted to test the indirect and mediating effects in the path structural equation model. Table 4 illustrates that PMS imposes statistically noteworthy indirect effect on job satisfaction (SE=0.034; CI=0.243 and 0.350; the CI did not include zero), which is through work engagement (PS \rightarrow WE \rightarrow JS). In this sense, work engagement serves as a mediator between PSM and job satisfaction fully, which provided strong evidence for Hypothesis 6. Further, PSM's indirect effect on job satisfaction through organizational commitment (PSM \rightarrow OC \rightarrow JS) was statistically robust (SE=0.033; CI=0.225 and 0.335), justifying the role of organizational commitment as a mediator between PSM and JS. Accordingly, Hypothesis 7 was supported as well.

TABLE 1: Means, standard errors, correlations, and Cronbach’s alpha values of the study variables.

Var	Mean	SE	Gender	Age	Edu	Years	PSM	WE	OC	JS
Gender	0.520	0.500	1							
Age	2.856	1.129	0.094*	1						
Edu	3.118	0.758	0.035	0.073	1					
Years	2.784	1.637	0.113**	0.689**	0.297**	1				
PSM	3.700	0.680	0.072	0.014	0.025	-0.049	(0.875)			
WE	3.350	0.813	-0.076	-0.251**	-0.149**	-0.400**	0.356**	(0.793)		
OC	3.721	0.657	-0.049	-0.144**	-0.068	-0.283**	0.439**	0.534**	(0.844)	
JS	3.502	0.717	-0.065	-0.129**	-0.086*	-0.278**	0.424**	0.608**	0.698**	(0.838)

Note. N = 550, *p < 0.05, and **p < 0.01. SE means standard error; Var means variable; Edu means education; PSM means public service management; WE means work engagement; OC = means organization commitment; JS means job satisfaction.

TABLE 2: Comparison of measurement models for variables studied.

Model	X ²	df	X ² /df	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
Hypothesized four-factor model	212.845	96	2.217	0.975	0.975	0.969	0.047
Three-factor model							
PSM combined with WE	23.266	18	1.239	0.997	0.997	0.996	0.023
PSM combined with JS	56.171	25	2.247	0.987	0.987	0.981	0.048
PSM combined with OC	54.089	24	2.254	0.988	0.988	0.982	0.480
One-factor model (PSM, JS, and OC combined)	159.575	61	2.616	0.975	0.975	0.967	0.054
One-factor model (all constructs combined)	1561.730	104	15.017	0.690	0.691	0.642	0.160

Note. N = 550.

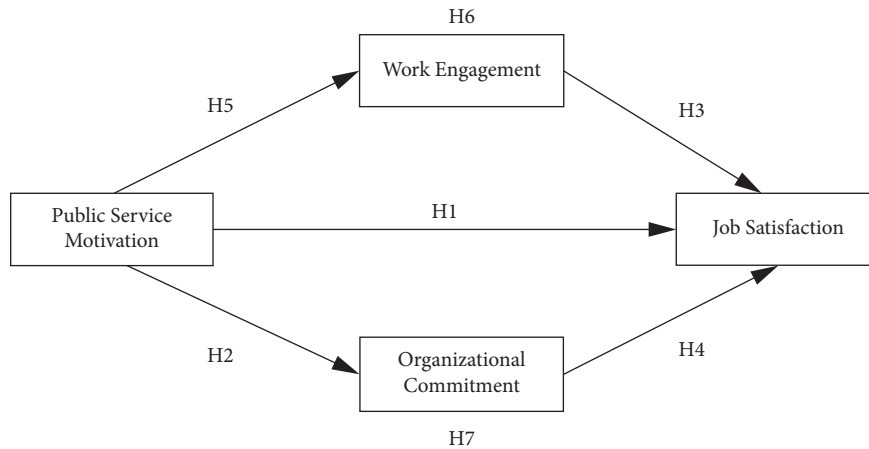


FIGURE 1: Research structure and hypotheses.

TABLE 3: Path test.

Path	Standardized coefficient (SC)	Nonstandardized coefficient (NSC)	SE	CR	p
PSM → OC	0.420	0.464	0.043	10.855	***
PSM → WE	0.432	0.403	0.036	11.216	***
PSM → JS	0.426	0.432	0.033	11.649	***
WE → JS	0.490	0.511	0.032	15.877	***
OC → JS	0.455	0.402	0.027	14.857	***

TABLE 4: Standardized bootstrap mediation effect test.

Path	Effect value	SE	Bias-corrected 95% CI			Percentile 95% CI		
			Lower	Upper	p	Lower	Upper	p
PSM → WE → JS	0.294	0.034	0.243	0.350	0.002	0.243	0.350	0.002
PSM → OC → JS	0.278	0.033	0.225	0.335	0.002	0.222	0.333	0.002

5. Conclusions

This study included 550 employees in the public sector as participants, proposed the mechanism which specifies the influence of PSM on job satisfaction, and presented the roles of work engagement and organizational commitment as mediators. Accordingly, the research concluded that the following: (1) job satisfaction is significantly and positively conditioned by PSM; (2) job satisfaction is significantly and positively conditioned by work engagement and organizational commitment, and (3) work engagement and organizational commitment mediate the relations between PSM and job satisfaction.

5.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications. Based upon the conclusions above, management should be aware of the following: (1) when the public sector realizes the practical value of PSM theory, it can improve its staff's level of PSM in various ways. Firstly, HR departments in the public sector should consider including PSM in their recruiting process and measure and test the potential candidates' PSM [40]. Currently, the main recruitment approach in China's public sector continues to be tests of writing documentation and administrative ability, which cannot detect and reveal the candidates' actual motivation. Under this circumstance, it would be difficult to shortlist candidates with the "be the first to show concern and the last to enjoy oneself" spirit, which would affect their work attitudes and professional ethics even further thereafter. In addition, establishing PSM should also be emphasized in the new staff training procedure. This study demonstrated that PSM plays a critical and direct role in job satisfaction, which can help the public sector's HR departments acknowledge PSM theory's value and provide solid evidence of the necessity to establish PSM in public service departments' staff; (2) work engagement and organizational commitment in the public sector can be promoted by cultivating employees' desire to serve the public. This research demonstrated that work engagement and organizational commitment not only affect job satisfaction directly, but also serve to mediate the relations between PSM and job satisfaction in part or entirely. Firstly, the public service spirit should be encouraged actively. Service is the most fundamental function of a servicing government. As suggested by Wilson [41], the question we are facing and merits government officers' attention, is whether the public service staff dedicate the most mind and efforts, and serve with their consciousness, not only to their superiors but also to the society. From the perspective of building a servicing government, the concept of "public servant" to which the Chinese government has always referred is consistent and is associated with the PSM theory that Perry developed [33]. They share the same goal to establish the public serving spirit in the public sector, promote altruism in service, and facilitate work engagement further to accomplish tasks more effectively. Secondly, public workers' professional ability and service quality should be improved via professional training. Currently, most system reformation has led to large scale government organizations' adjustment and redistribution of

staff, which has affected both their work efficiency and work content. The public sector should also adapt to the trend of reforming to address the challenges of governmental systems' reform positively, optimize the training of occupational skills and quality, and improve the staff's adaptability [41]. Ultimately, this will help them adapt to their new posts and enhance their work engagement and organizational commitment further; (3) with the development of reasonable and diverse incentive schemes, public workers' job satisfaction can be improved. With the background of the comprehensive system reform, major shifts, including the public sector's wage standard, pension integration, streamlining duties, and titles, have been promoted gradually, and these reforms have had a noticeable positive effect on public workers' work attitudes and organizational citizenship behaviors. The public sector considers the involvement of both internal and external incentives to build more diverse remuneration schemes against the background of administration system reform. On the one hand, they should use effective external motivating methods to adjust the entire remuneration structure and attempt to establish the structure based upon performance and targets [34]. With the distinct proportion of basic and bonus incentives, a stage of "different efforts for different pay" can be reached, which will promote younger employees' motivation and involvement effectively. On the other hand, in addition to emphasizing external material incentives, the public sector should concentrate more on internal incentives to establish an administration culture motivated by the value of service [42]. Because of the traditional incentive theory's overemphasis on external material incentives, it monitors its own internalizing process, which contributes largely to the "isolating effects" that compromise the function of internal incentives. Therefore, the public sector can promote employees' PSM via recognition prizes, promotion, motivation of reputation, sense of competency, self-authority, etc. These methods would increase job satisfaction and organizational commitment and also balance the internal and external incentives, thereby avoiding the negative isolating effects from external to internal incentives [43].

5.2. Limitations and Future Research. Admittedly, further research is warranted to address some of the limitations associated with the current study. Firstly, the participants in this paper were limited to public service workers in only two provinces (Yunnan and Guizhou), and a more extensive regional effort is required for future studies that could even be extended to cross-regions and cross-industries research in the private sector. Secondly, as PSM uses Western scales, the compatibility with Chinese scenarios may make the effects in the results unclear. Therefore, a fully localized measurement scale that encompasses the Chinese cultural and political background is required. Thirdly, the measures used in this study primarily address research variables on the individual level, while there are a different organizational culture and workload among different public departments; thus, variables on the organizational level need to be introduced to

assess the way in which PMS affects work attitudes via cross-level testing methods.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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