

Bradley E. Wright
Georgia State University
Robert K. Christensen
University of Georgia

Kimberley Roussin Isett
Georgia Institute of Technology

Motivated to Adapt? The Role of Public Service Motivation as Employees Face Organizational Change

Bradley E. Wright is associate professor of public management and policy in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University. His research focuses on how employee attitudes and behavior are influenced by the interaction between characteristics of the employee and their organizational work environment.
E-mail: bwright32@gsu.edu

Robert K. Christensen is associate professor of public administration in the Department of Public Administration and Policy, School of Public and International Affairs, at the University of Georgia. His research focuses on prosocial and antisocial motivations and behaviors in the public and nonprofit sectors. He is a current Lilly Teaching Fellow at the University of Georgia.
E-mail: rc@uga.edu

Kimberley Roussin Isett earned a doctorate in management from the University of Arizona in 2001. Her research focuses on institutional pressures and dynamics in implementing government services, with a particular interest in the delivery of services to vulnerable populations. To date, she has been awarded just under \$1 million in research grant money and has worked with elected officials and policy makers at all levels of government.
E-mail: kim.isett@pubpolicy.gatech.edu

Researchers concerned with organizational change have consistently emphasized the role that the work environment plays in employee acceptance of change. Underexamined in the public management literature, however, is the role that employee values, particularly public service motivation (PSM), may play in employee acceptance of change. Some scholars have noted a positive correlation between employee PSM and organizational change efforts; this article extends this work by attempting to isolate the mechanisms that explain this relationship. Using data from a survey of employees in a city undergoing a reorganization and reduction in workforce, the authors find that only employees who scored high on a single dimension of PSM—self-sacrifice—were more likely than others to support organizational change. Rather than support changes for their potential to improve public service, this finding suggests that employees with higher PSM may simply be less likely to resist changes that might disadvantage them personally.

Although bureaucratic organizations are thought of as intractable, the recent unprecedented loss of more than 600,000 public sector jobs since the 2008 economic crash (Klein 2012) illustrates that change is just as pervasive in the public sector as in the private. For current government employees, this massive reduction in workforce is changing workloads, substantive duties, as well as perceptions about job security and efficacy.

As we know from the extant literature on change, all change is not created equal. There is planned change and unplanned change, discontinuity changes and marginal changes, austerity changes and changes driven by slack, internal change and external change, and any combination of the above (and others) (cf. Hall 2002; Tushman and Anderson 1986; Zaltman, Duncan, and Holbek 1984). Each of these kinds of

changes can have different processes and emphases that affect the viability, scope, and extent of change accomplished and sustained. Despite the myriad permutations that change can take, one thing is for certain: employee support for change is critical for success (Bordia et al. 2004; Ford, Ford, and D'Amelio 2008; Isett et al. 2013; Isett, Morrissey, and Topping 2006; Kelman 2005; Saka 2003). But the factors that might influence whether or how much employees support change are likely to differ depending on what changes are made.

One factor that influences employee support for change is the values that motivate employees to work in the public sector in the first place (Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Naff and Crum 1999; Ritz and Fernandez 2011). Employees with higher levels of public service motivation (PSM) value the interests and needs of others, particularly those of the broader community (Rainey and Steinbauer 1999, 23).

Because of this, employee PSM conceivably influences how receptive one is to organizational change in public organizations. While previous studies suggest a positive correlation between employee PSM and employee commitment to change, this article explicitly tests the underlying mechanisms that contribute to this relationship.

While previous studies suggest a positive correlation between employee PSM and employee commitment to change, this article explicitly tests the underlying mechanisms that contribute to this relationship.

Up until now, exploration of the relationship between employee PSM and support for organizational change has been limited. Current studies emphasize how the specific content of the change may affect the public and coincide with employees' valuation of public service. In particular, it has been suggested that employee PSM may increase commitment to organizational changes that are intended to improve the delivery of public services (Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Naff and Crum 1999). However, all changes in the public

sector are not driven by an improvement in services. Rather, they can be driven by the need to cut costs as well. Given the emphasis in the current literature, it is uncertain whether past theory and findings regarding PSM's effect on employee support for change still hold when the changes are focused on cost cutting. In addition to the potential for losing their jobs or having to work harder with fewer employees, evidence suggests that government employees often do not see the cost-cutting reforms as being very successful (Micheli 2012). Under such conditions, it is uncertain whether past theory and findings regarding PSM's effect on employee support for change still hold. In this article, we address this gap in the literature by testing whether PSM increases commitment to or mitigates the potential negative effects of austerity reforms. In doing so, we build on existing studies by suggesting and testing specific mechanisms by which PSM may influence employee commitment to change.

Public Service Motivation and Commitment to Organizational Change

Employee commitment to change refers to the cognitive dedication that “binds an individual to a course of action deemed necessary for the successful implementation of [planned] change” (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002, 475). While there are many antecedents of commitment to change (discussed in the next section), employee values have been found to play an important role in precipitating resistance (Hultman 1979) or willing internalization of change implementation (Klein and Sorra 1996). This may be especially true in the public sector, where employees' altruistic values and desire to serve society make them more likely to support their organization's missions as a function of value congruence (Weiss and Piderit 1999).

In this regard, certain employee values may be of particular importance in public sector organizations undergoing change. Defined as “a general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people” (Rainey and Steinbauer 1999, 23), PSM may be associated with employee support for organizational changes in the public sector (Cerase and Farinella 2009; Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Naff and Crum 1999; Paarlberg and Lavigna 2010; Perry and Wise 1990; Ritz and Fernandez 2011). While scholars have explained this relationship in slightly different ways, consistent across this work is a common emphasis on how the content of change may affect the public and coincide with employees' valuation of public service. For example, in their original description of PSM, Perry and Wise (1990) suggested that PSM could increase employee support for public sector innovation and reform as a function of increasing their interest in and commitment to an organization that provides public services. In other words, PSM would increase employee commitment to the organization; “committed employees are likely to engage in spontaneous, innovative behaviors on behalf of the organization, [and] such employees are likely to facilitate an organization's adjustment to contingencies” (Perry and Wise 1990, 371). While research has not directly tested this full causal sequence, empirical evidence supports the notions (1) that PSM increases organizational commitment (Castaing 2006; Cerase and Farinella 2009; Crewson 1997; Leisink and Steijn 2009; Vandenabeele 2009), (2) that PSM increases the positive perception of change (Naff and Crum 1999),

and (3) that PSM decreases employee resistance to organizational change (Ritz and Fernandez 2011).

Another variant of this theme suggests that employees with higher PSM are more likely to support organizational change, primarily because of their direct commitment to changes that improve public service provision and less because of their commitment to the organization. Paarlberg and Lavigna (2010) conceptually outline a more direct theoretical link between public service values and organizational change. Noting research on the positive relationship between employee satisfaction, motivation, perceptions of organizational effectiveness, and organizational changes that benefit citizens (Lee, Cayer, and Lan 2006; Paarlberg 2007), they argue that organizational changes designed to benefit others can be an effective tool to manage and satisfy employees' motivations by “providing a face for employees' public service values, thereby translating abstract organizational goals into significant—and very practical—action” (Paarlberg and Lavigna 2010, 714). Consistent with the rationale that employees with high PSM will favor changes that improve government services and benefit the public, Naff and Crum's (1999) study of federal employees found that PSM was associated with more positive perceptions about organizational changes stemming from the National Performance Review (NPR). In the same vein, albeit running the opposite causal direction, Moynihan and Pandey (2007) found that changes can actually foster employee PSM, perhaps because the reforms are intended to reduce red tape and make government more responsive to citizens.

To advance our understanding of the underlying mechanisms at work in this relationship, an investigation of the effects of different dimensions of PSM on employee commitment to change is warranted.

To advance our understanding of the underlying mechanisms at work in this relationship, an investigation of the effects of different dimensions of PSM on employee commitment to change is warranted. As noted earlier, past scholars have suggested that employees with higher PSM are more likely to support organizational reforms because they perceive that these reforms are consistent with the high value they place on meaningful public service.

This rationale suggests that three of the four specific dimensions of PSM identified by scholars (Kim et al. 2013; Perry 1996) are particularly important: attraction to public service, commitment to public values, and compassion. First, attraction to public service is important because it captures the individual's general interest in participating in the public policy process and in activities for community and social development. Second, the commitment to public values dimension is important because it reflects an individual's support for specific public values (equity, ethics, and the interests of future generations) that government programs are supposed to promote. A third dimension, compassion, represents the degree to which the employee has an affective bond and identifies with the constituents who are the intended beneficiaries of government programs and services. In other words, PSM increases commitment to change because it makes employees more supportive of the interests, values, or beneficiaries that these changes are intended to help advance. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1a: Employee attraction to public service is positively related to commitment to change.

Hypothesis 1b: Employee commitment to public values is positively related to commitment to change.

Hypothesis 1c: Employee compassion is positively related to commitment to change.

The ability of this causal mechanism to explain the relationship between PSM and positive support for change is limited because it requires that employees see the changes as benefiting the organization or its clientele. Unfortunately, such positive perceptions of organizational change may be the exception rather than the rule given the prevalence of concerns that public management reforms may lower the quality of government services and put the public at greater risk (Battaglio and Condrey 2009; Boyne 2003; Haque 2001; Yang and Kassekert 2010). Not surprisingly, the findings of at least one study fail to support the claim that PSM increases the positive perception of change (Cerese and Farinella 2009).

Other studies have raised questions regarding the practical significance or effect size of PSM's influence on employee attitudes toward change. While Naff and Crum (1999) found that PSM increased the likelihood that employees would feel that the NPR had a positive effect on improving public services, they also found that few federal employees (21 percent) reported feeling positive about the changes related to NPR, and, on average, even employees with high PSM did not hold very positive views. These latter findings seem more consistent with scholarly claims regarding the pervasiveness of employee resistance to change (Ford, Ford, and D'Amelio 2008). Resistance to change could conceivably be even stronger among employees with higher PSM when the change is driven more by the need to reduce costs than the need to improve service delivery by making government more responsive to citizens and reducing organizational red tape.

Given that the current explanation for why PSM may increase employee support for organizational change requires the tenuous assumption that the employees trust the organization in which they work or that the proposed change is doing what is in the best interest of the public, we suggest an additional mechanism that focuses instead on the potential for PSM to reduce resistance to change. Drawing from the logic of Lewin's force field analysis (1951), champions of change are often more successful when they use strategies to reduce the resisting forces than strategies that strengthen the driving forces in favor of change.

Much of the literature focusing on organizational change suggests that change often fails because of employee resistance driven by personal fears that the change will adversely affect them in some way (Coch and French 1948; Miller and Monge 1985; Wanberg and Banas 2000). Employees often fear changes that might result in losing familiar or comfortable social dynamics, gaining additional, less desirable tasks, or even losing their job. Employees with higher PSM, however, are often thought of as being more willing to sacrifice their own interests and preferences for the benefit of society (Perry and Wise 1990). Research suggests that when an employee's

values are associated with a higher concern for others, they are less inclined to evaluate information or actions in terms of their own personal costs and benefits (Korsgaard, Meglino, and Lester 1997). Such employees may be less likely to resist organizational change because they are less likely to worry about how the changes will affect them personally. Employees with higher PSM, therefore, may not just be more likely to accept change because of the benefits it may provide others but also because they are less likely to resist changes that might benefit the organization or its clients more than themselves.

This effect may be particularly important in light of scholars' suggestion that self-sacrifice provides the underlying foundation of PSM (Kim and Vandenabeele 2010; Koehler and Rainey 2008). Having compassion or public values and interests is not enough; PSM also requires acting in the interests of others at the expense of self-interest. In fact, PSM is often discussed in terms of the time, money, and effort that individuals give up to help others (e.g., Brewer 2003; Houston 2006), including an individual's willingness to substitute service to others for tangible personal rewards such as pay or status (Perry and Wise 1990). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Employee self-sacrifice is positively related to commitment to change.

Context and Commitment to Change

While the foregoing hypotheses emphasize the potential role that employees' values may play in their acceptance of change, considerable research already highlights the importance of work environment and management practices in employee acceptance of change (Fernandez and Rainey 2006). Consistent with this literature, we expect that the conditions under which changes are made are likely to be more important than the values that an employee brings to the job. If PSM is important, it must be able to explain employee commitment beyond what can be accounted for by these factors. To help isolate any potential effects of PSM on employee commitment to change, our study controls for a number of alternative explanations for employee commitment to change. A brief description of and justification for each control variable is described next.

Communication about changes can provide important information that helps reduce stress and anxiety stemming from employees' uncertainty about what specific changes will occur, how the changes will affect their jobs, and how they should respond to the changes (Miller and Monge 1985; Wanberg and Banas 2000). Communicating accurate and timely information about planned organizational change not only helps explain the need for change but also helps employees better understand how change is likely to specifically affect or, just as important, not affect them.

Employee participation in the pre-change process also provides greater opportunity to communicate and learn more about the changes but does so in a way that suggests that the employee can actually influence what or how changes are made (Bordia et al. 2004). Together, communication and participation expose

Employees with higher PSM, therefore, may not just be more likely to accept change because of the benefits it may provide others but also because they are less likely to resist changes that might benefit the organization or its clients more than themselves.

employees to information that can dispel any unnecessary concerns or incorrect information about the rationale for or effects of the change (Bordia et al. 2006), as well as support employees' need for competence and autonomy. Thus, it is not surprising that so many studies have found that communication of change-related information and employee participation in the design or nature of the change can improve employee attitudes toward, and successful implementation of, change (Armenakis et al. 2007; Conway and Monks 2008; Jimmieson, Terry, and Callan 2004; Miller and Monge 1985; Rafferty and Griffin 2006; Rafferty and Restubog 2010; Wanberg and Banas 2000).

We control for two other aspects of the work environment that are important to acceptance of change. First, social support during times of change can shape how well employees cope with and commit to change (Shaw et al. 1993). Second, the salience or personal impact of the changes on an employee and their work environment is likely to affect personal commitment to change. Employees who are more directly affected by change will likely experience greater stress (Ashford 1988) and reduce their acceptance of change.

In addition to controlling for the environmental conditions that might influence employee commitment to change, we also control for a number of employee characteristics, including gender, salary, employment status (full time or part time), and two proxy measures of organizational level (salary and whether the respondent supervised other employees).

The theoretical rationale for three additional characteristics may be especially compelling. First, we control for employee job satisfaction, even though the exact relationship between job satisfaction and employee commitment to change is still being determined. While some have found that commitment to change increases job satisfaction by reducing stress in the job (Rafferty and Restubog 2010), others have noted that job satisfaction decreases commitment to change because employees who are more satisfied before the changes have the most to lose as changes commence (Ritz and Fernandez 2011). To this, we add a third possibility that job satisfaction may actually increase commitment to change because employees who are more satisfied with their jobs are more likely to be committed to their organizations (Meyer et al. 2002), and, as noted earlier, organizational commitment can, in turn, foster adaptability and openness to change (Denhardt 1993; Perry and Wise 1990).

Similarly, we control for organizational tenure as an alternative explanation of employee commitment to change because employees with longer employment relationships may be more likely to have well-developed psychological contracts that not only could be violated by change but also could be more resistant to change (Rousseau 2001). Finally, we control for employee change-related self-efficacy, as employee commitment to change has been found to be influenced by the employees' personal beliefs regarding their ability to handle the proposed changes and to function well in their jobs despite the changes (Wanberg and Banas 2000).

Methods and Analysis

Data

To investigate the relationship between public service values and public employee acceptance of change, we used data from a 2010

survey of local government employees in the southeastern part of the United States. As a result of economic pressures and the need to cut costs, the city proposed a series of what it referred to as "fiscal austerity measures" that included permanently eliminating nearly 30 full-time positions (primarily positions vacant because of hiring freezes and early retirement incentives) and restructuring to reduce the number of departments from 15 to 8. This reorganization proposed to change reporting relationships and duties and, in some cases, even require physical relocations as the city reduced costs by consolidating all city employees into two buildings. In addition to these changes, the city announced that there would be no wage or step increases for a second consecutive year and changed its health insurance coverage to require higher deductibles and employee contributions. The changes were formally proposed at a city council meeting in April, approved in May, and proposed to begin in July of the same calendar year.

The survey was conducted by sending a questionnaire to all city employees in June 2010, as the city began to implement a planned reorganization of services and departments. To help limit the possibility that employees' responses do not reflect their true attitudes and opinions, the survey was conducted anonymously and by a neutral third party so that the employees would be less concerned that their managers would identify or react to their individual responses. Also, to guard against the possibility of post hoc rationalization, the survey was conducted only a couple of months after the changes were formally proposed, a month after they were approved, and—depending on when the respondent returned the survey—one to two weeks before the implementation began.¹

Employees with city e-mail addresses were asked to participate in an online survey by e-mail, while those without e-mail addresses were given printed surveys to complete and mail directly to the research team. From this, a total of 449 usable surveys were received (245 completed online and 204 received in the mail), for an estimated response rate of 44 percent. Demographics for the survey respondents are reported in table 1.

Measures

Each study variable was measured using items from established measures. For example, to assess the dependent variable, employee commitment to change, we used five items developed by Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) to measure when an employee wants to act in support of the change because of his or her belief in the inherent benefits of the change. In line with the theoretical underpinnings of hypotheses 1a–1c, affective commitment to change exists when the change is desired by the employee because it improves his or her job, the ability to achieve organizational goals, or the services provided to the clientele. Of the three types of employee commitment identified by Herscovitch and Meyer (2002),² affective commitment to change has received the most research attention (Wright and Isett 2012) and has been found to be associated with lower employee turnover intentions (Neves 2009; Rafferty and Restubog 2010), higher job satisfaction (Rafferty and Restubog 2010), and an increase in employee behaviors that champion or cooperate with change (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002; Meyer et al. 2007).

To test the hypotheses regarding the underlying mechanisms that drive the relationship between PSM and change support, each of

Table 1 Characteristics of Survey Respondents

	Percent
Gender	
Female	21.1
Male	78.9
Employment	
Full-time	95.5
Seasonal/Part-time	4.5
Nature of the Job	
Clerical/Support	9.5
Professional/Technical	45.7
Manager/Executive	12.9
Service/Maintenance	31.9
Gross Annual Salary	
0–15,000	4.0
15,001–30,000	17.1
30,001–45,000	39.8
45,001–60,000	24.4
60,001–75,000	9.0
75,001–95,000	3.3
95,001 and higher	2.4
Department	
Engineering	2.7
Fleet	5.2
General Administration	7.3
General Services	4.8
Neighborhood/Community Services	2.5
Parks & Recreation	7.1
Planning	2.7
Public Safety	24.4
Public Works/Utilities	35.5
Technology Services	4.4
Other	3.3

the four dimensions of PSM was measured using a newly revised four-item measure developed and validated for use in samples in the United States and several other countries (Kim et al. 2013). The bivariate correlations (table 2) between the measures of the four dimensions suggested that they were highly related (ranging from .61 to .68), as one would expect given that they represent different aspects of the same concept; they were also relatively distinct, as no two dimensions shared greater than 46.2 percent of their variance. While the measures of all four dimensions were at or near the 0.70 level of reliability suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), the internal reliability measure for compassion was a bit low, albeit higher than that reported by many previous studies (DeHart-Davis, Marlowe, Pandey 2006; Moynihan and Pandey 2007). Given the strength of the evidence supporting this

newly developed measure (Kim et al. 2013) and the importance of testing the effects of all four dimensions (Kim and Vandenberg 2010), we chose to include the compassion measure in our analyses.

As discussed earlier, we attempted to isolate the effects of PSM on employee commitment to change by controlling for a number of common antecedents of employee support for organizational change. Estimates of each of the control variables previously discussed were produced using established measures. Social support for change, the appropriateness of change-related information, employee change self-efficacy, and degree of participation in change were measured using items adapted from Wanberg and Banas (2000).³ We also controlled for the salience of the change for the individual by using a single item adapted from Kelman (2005) and for employee job satisfaction using five items developed to assess general job satisfaction (Agho, Mueller, and Price 1993).

Responses for all questionnaire items were recorded using a five-point Likert scale (ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). The item wording for each measure is provided in the appendix. The means, standard deviations, and reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha in parentheses, where applicable) for each measure are reported in table 2.⁴

Empirical Results

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a series of ordinary least squares multiple regression models testing the relationship between PSM and affective commitment to change after controlling for common antecedents for change. The results are reported in table 3. In the first model, we looked only at the effects of the control variables not directly related to PSM or the change process. This controls-only model, driven primarily by employee job satisfaction and salary, explained 13 percent of the variation in employee commitment to change. In the second model, we added change-related factors to the controls and were able to explain 42 percent of the variation in employee commitment to change. Employees who felt more adequately informed about and involved in the changes were more likely to commit to the organizational reform. Similarly, employees were more likely to be committed to change when they were more confident about their ability to handle change and satisfied in general with their jobs. Not all of our results were consistent

Table 2 Measure Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities

	Range	Mean	Stdev	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Affective Commitment to Change	5–25	14.43	3.87	(0.83)												
2 Attraction to Public Service	4–20	16.21	2.46	0.22	(0.81)											
3 Commitment to Public Values	4–20	16.72	2.21	0.14	0.61	(0.66)										
4 Compassion	4–20	15.88	2.38	0.19	0.62	0.68	(0.76)									
5 Self-Sacrifice	4–20	12.92	3.10	0.31	0.53	0.42	0.52	(0.82)								
6 Change Information	3–15	8.71	2.94	0.52	0.21	0.20	0.19	0.23	(0.85)							
7 Change Efficacy	1–5	3.67	0.91	0.30	0.16	0.21	0.11	0.08	0.29	na						
8 Change Participation	2–10	4.64	1.92	0.52	0.09	–0.02	0.08	0.24	0.61	0.21	(0.68)					
9 Change Social Support	3–15	10.04	2.20	0.25	0.18	0.16	0.20	0.16	0.45	0.24	0.37	na				
10 Change Salience	1–5	3.13	.99	–0.07	0.07	0.02	0.05	–0.01	0.12	–0.02	0.18	0.15	na			
11 Job Satisfaction	5–25	19.61	3.78	0.33	0.36	0.23	0.21	0.29	0.26	0.32	0.25	0.25	–0.11	(0.88)		
12 Organizational Tenure (years)	0–37	12.59	8.60	0.02	–0.07	–0.01	–0.05	0.07	–0.01	0.04	0.07	0.05	–0.05	0.08	na	
13 Salary	1–7	3.37	1.22	0.10	0.03	0.15	0.03	0.07	0.09	0.14	0.04	0.08	–0.08	0.05	0.54	na

Bolded $p < 0.05$.

Table 3 Regression Analyses Predicting Affective Commitment to Change

	Controls Only		Controls&Change Related		Full Model	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Control Variables						
Job Satisfaction	0.34	0.00	0.19	0.00	0.18	0.00
Tenure	-0.10	0.08	-0.06	0.19	-0.07	0.14
Manager	0.00	0.95	-0.04	0.33	-0.06	0.22
Salary	0.19	0.00	0.13	0.02	0.13	0.02
Gender	-0.03	0.49	0.03	0.67	0.03	0.48
Fulltime	-0.10	0.04	-0.10	0.02	-0.09	0.04
Change Implementation						
Change Information			0.31	0.00	0.28	0.00
Change Participation			0.34	0.00	0.30	0.00
Change Efficacy			0.10	0.03	0.13	0.00
Change Social Support			-0.09	0.05	-0.07	0.14
Change Salience			-0.11	0.01	-0.08	0.06
Public Service Motivation						
Attraction to Public Service					0.01	0.87
Commitment to Public Values					-0.09	0.11
Compassion					0.06	0.35
Self-Sacrifice					0.14	0.01
R Square	0.14		0.43		0.46	
Adjusted R Square	0.13		0.42		0.44	

with expectations, as neither social support nor change salience was related to change commitment.

The third model, representing a full test of our hypotheses, explained 44 percent of the variation in employee commitment to change, suggesting that PSM contributes to our understanding beyond what can be explained by the control and change-related variables. The effect was statistically significant but substantively small, explaining an additional 2 percent of employee commitment to change.⁵ Contrary to expectations, only one of the four dimensions—self-sacrifice—was significantly related to affective commitment to change. While no support was found for hypotheses 1a–1c—that PSM increases employee commitment to change because of the value placed on how the changes may improve service provision—we found support for our second hypothesis—that PSM’s effect on employee commitment to change is a result of employees being less resistant to changes that may go against their own personal interests.

Given the relatively high correlations between the dimensions of PSM, it is possible that the effects of the remaining three dimensions of PSM were so intertwined that they cancelled each other out. In an attempt to rule out this potential explanation for the lack of support for hypotheses 1a–1c, a number of additional analyses were conducted.⁶ First, the degree of multicollinearity was estimated. The results suggested limited reason for concern, as all variance inflation factors were below 2.35 and tolerances were above 0.40. Second, a series of regression analyses was conducted that regressed employee commitment to change on each dimension of PSM separately. Although each of the PSM dimensions had a statistically significant bivariate relationship with commitment to change, it was important to see whether that relationship remained after controlling for the other factors commonly expected to influence this type of employee commitment. Our robustness checks underscore that only two dimensions—self-sacrifice and compassion—had statistically significant ($p < .05$) effects on commitment

when the other three dimensions of PSM were not included as independent variables in the model.

Concerns could also be raised regarding the makeup of the study sample. It is possible, for example, that the relationship between PSM and employee commitment to change may differ by occupation or unit. Employees in some units may face more change than others. While the size of many of the departments and the sample overall limits our ability to control by unit, some of this effect should be controlled for by including the change salience measure. Our sample included two occupational groups—public safety and utilities—that are likely to have strong subcultures and socialization processes that could make their responses less representative of city government employees in general. To test whether the inclusion of these employees influenced our findings, we re-ran the analysis after excluding the public safety and utility personnel. The findings were consistent with those using the full sample. In a model including all four dimensions of PSM predicting employee commitment to change, only self-sacrifice was statistically significant.⁷ In models including each dimension separately, only self-sacrifice was found to have a statistically significant effect.

Taken together, our results provide strong evidence for the effect of self-sacrifice on commitment to austerity-motivated organizational change. While there is limited support for the role that compassion might play in employee commitment to change, there is little, if any, evidence to support similar roles for employee commitment to public values or attraction to public service.

Conclusion

Work environment and employee motives shape how readily workers embrace organizational change. As economic conditions continue to spur public sector reorganization, our investigation into the role of public service motivation and employee commitment to change seems especially relevant. While previous work has shown that employees who exhibit higher levels of PSM are more likely to support organizational change, the theoretical explanation underlying those findings requires that employees value the changes for their potential to improve the services provided to the public (Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Naff and Crum 1999; Paarlberg and Lavigna 2010; Perry and Wise 1990).

Changes motivated by austerity policies are unlikely to have the same support as changes that emphasize program improvements. In addition to having less to gain in terms of program improvements, austerity-driven reforms often involve greater losses. Changes made in response to financial pressures are more concerned with cutting costs, often by reducing services, staff, and support. Beyond the loss of resources and staff, which hurt employees’ ability to do their job, changes often hurt surviving employees more directly by freezing salaries or increasing employee-paid benefit costs. Our study suggests that even under such conditions, employee PSM can be associated with greater commitment to change, albeit through a different mechanism.

In addition to extending the support for the effects of PSM by testing its relationship with employee support for change under a different set of conditions, we also advanced our understanding of this phenomenon by investigating the effects of different dimensions

of PSM to help isolate the theoretical mechanisms that explain this relationship. In doing so, we found little evidence that employee PSM increases support for change because of the potential for the changes to improve service to the community. While this may not be surprising given that the changes were driven more by the need to cut costs than by the need to improve service delivery, austerity reforms can have the ability to improve services, and even cutting costs can be justified as a necessary step to maintain more important services or keep taxes affordable for constituents.

Instead, our study found evidence that the employees with higher PSM are more likely to support organizational change because they are less likely to worry about how the changes will affect them personally. Just as self-sacrifice has long been considered an important aspect of PSM (Kim and Vandenberg 2010; Perry and Wise 1990), self-interest has long been considered an important source of employee resistance to change (Coch and French 1948; Miller and Monge 1985; Wanberg and Banas 2000). Even if employees are not worried about losing their job, they worry about how changes are likely to adversely affect their current, comfortable working relationships, job responsibilities, or ability to successfully perform assigned tasks. This suggests that although PSM does not increase support for austerity-driven changes because of their potential benefits, it can at least reduce employee resistance by decreasing the emphasis that employees put on the potential personal costs associated with these changes.

Our finding that employees who score high on a single dimension of PSM—self-sacrifice—are likely less to resist organizational change has some implications for public management research and practice. For managers overseeing change, employees high in self-sacrifice may be good candidates to foster social support for change and ideal vehicles to disseminate organizational information about change. Such employees are more likely not only to support changes but also to provide a good role model for how employees can accept the potential personal costs associated with change. That said, it is important to note that the impact of PSM on employee commitment to change is small relative to other factors. While PSM can help explain or even generate support for change, the way in which management implements the change is much more important. In light of these substantive patterns, if we were to advise managers initiating change, our first recommendations would center around providing employees with clear information and opportunities to participate in the change process over human resource policies that favor recruiting employees with high public service motivation. Even so, it is useful to know that such employees are a little bit more likely to accept these changes because of their willingness to sacrifice some of their own interests for the sake of the organization and its clients. As such, these individuals may be ideal peer leaders in the change process.

For researchers, our work here suggests that PSM is likely to influence employee commitment to change, but not necessarily in the way originally expected. In particular, we argue that PSM's positive relationship to change commitment may be more a function of employee self-sacrifice than employee perceptions of and interest in

how changes may improve public programs or services. While our study was based on one organization,⁸ and it is not without the limitations typical in cross-sectional research, our findings are consistent with both previous theory (Kim and Vandenberg 2010; Koehler and Rainey 2008; Korsgaard, Meglino, and Lester 1997; Lewin 1951; Perry and Wise 1990) and empirical findings (Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Naff and Crum 1999). As a result, it is entirely possible that the role that self-sacrifice plays in explaining PSM's influence on employee support for change is just as important in service delivery reforms. Future research, including longitudinal work, is needed to validate our findings and to investigate whether the mechanism underlying this support differs by the type of reform.

Our study found evidence that the employees with higher PSM are more likely to support organizational change because they are less likely to worry about how the changes will affect them personally.

Appendix: Survey Measures

Affective Commitment to Change (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002)

- I believe in the value of this change.
- This change is a good strategy for this organization.
- This change serves an important purpose.
- Things would be better without this change. (R)
- This change is not necessary. (R)

Public Service Motivation (Kim et al. 2013)

Attraction to Public Service (APS)

- I admire people who initiate or are involved in activities to aid my community.
- It is important to contribute to activities that tackle social problems.**
- Meaningful public service is very important to me.
- It is important for me to contribute to the common good.

Commitment to Public Values (CPV)

- I think equal opportunities for citizens are very important.
- It is important that citizens can rely on the continuous provision of public services.
- It is fundamental that the interests of future generations are taken into account when developing public policies.
- To act ethically is essential for public servants.

Compassion (COM)

- I feel sympathetic to the plight of the underprivileged.
- I empathize with other people who face difficulties.
- I get very upset when I see other people being treated unfairly.
- Considering the welfare of others is very important.

Self-Sacrifice (SS)

- I am prepared to make sacrifices for the good of society.
- I believe in putting civic duty before self.
- I am willing to risk personal loss to help society.
- I would agree to a good plan to make a better life for the poor, even if it costs me money.

Change-Related Information (Wanberg and Banas 2000)

- The information about the changes has been communicated in a timely manner.
- The information I have received has adequately answered my questions about the changes.
- I have received adequate information about the forthcoming changes.

Participation in Change (Wanberg and Banas 2000)

- I have been able to participate in the implementation of the changes that have occurred.
- I have/had some control over the changes that have been proposed.

Change-Related Self-Efficacy (Wanberg and Banas 2000)

- Wherever the reorganization takes me, I'm sure I can handle it.

Social Support (Wanberg and Banas 2000)

- My coworkers have been available and willing to listen to my concerns about this change.
- My friends and family have been available and willing to listen to my concerns about this change.
- My supervisor has done a lot to help me manage the stresses of change during these reforms.

Change Salience (adapted from Kelman 2005; Wanberg and Banas 2000)

- The reorganization will have a major effect on my job.

Job Satisfaction (Agho, Mueller, and Price 1993)

- I like my job better than the average worker does.
- I find real enjoyment in my work.
- I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job.
- I am satisfied with my job for the time being.
- Most days I am enthusiastic about my work.

(R) Reverse worded

Notes

1. In this compressed time frame, we feel that the respondents were less likely to rationalize or reinterpret the changes in a more positive light.
2. Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) propose two other forms of employee commitment to change. Normative commitment to change occurs when the employee feels an obligation to act in support of the change and may develop when an employee feels the need to reciprocate for past benefits (such as employment itself or career development and support) provided by the organization. Continuance commitment to change occurs when an employee acts in support of change in order to avoid the potential costs that may be associated with failing to provide that support. In addition to being less germane to the theoretical rationale supporting the hypotheses studied here, the remaining two types of commitment to change were not included because they are expected to be less dependable forms of commitment given their emphasis on when the employee feels compelled to support the change (Wright and Isett 2011). When employees feel that they have no choice but to behave in support of the changes, their actions in support of change may be less persistent or consistent because they resent the lack of choice and may act in support of the change only enough to relieve their feelings of obligation or to avoid potential costs.

3. Unfortunately, because of the constraints on the questionnaire length, only a smaller subset of these items was used for three of the four scales.
4. No internal reliability is reported for the social support measure because each item in the measure represents a different source of support, with no reason to believe that support from one source would be related to or consistent with the level of support provided by other sources. Internal reliability estimates are not appropriate for such formative measures (Podsakoff et al. 2003).
5. Given the likelihood that work-related factors are much more important to commitment to change than personal motives or values, we think it is remarkable that PSM has an influence on employee attitudes regarding change even after controlling for change characteristics, one's general attitude, and other demographic or work-related variables. The effect is certainly not large, but it is statistically significant and consistent with theory.
6. Because of space limitations and the nature of the results (i.e., confirming reported analyses), these robustness checks are not reported but are available from the authors.
7. Excluding these employees raises some concerns regarding the statistical power of the analyses, especially given the high ratio of independent variables (15) to cases (210). In an attempt to address this, we applied $p < .10$ as our decision-making criteria for these analyses.
8. We note, however, that single-organization studies have served as the basis for related research (e.g., Nishii, Lepak, and Schneider 2008).

References

- Agho, Augustine O., Charles W. Mueller, and James L. Price. 1993. Determinants of Employee Job Satisfaction: An Empirical Test of a Causal Model. *Human Relations* 46(8): 1007–27.
- Armenakis, Achilles A., Jeremy B. Bernerth, Jennifer P. Pitts, and H. Jack Walker. 2007. Organizational Change Recipients' Beliefs Scale: Development of an Assessment Instrument. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 43(4): 481–505.
- Ashford, Susan J. 1988. Individual Strategies for Coping with Stress during Organizational Transitions. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 24(1): 19–36.
- Battaglio, R. Paul, Jr., and Stephen E. Condrey. 2009. Reforming Public Management: Analyzing the Impact of Public Service Reform on Organizational and Managerial Trust. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 19(4): 689–707.
- Bordia, Prashant, Elizabeth Jones, Cindy Gallois, Victor J. Callan, and Nicholas DiFonzo. 2006. Management Are Aliens! Rumors and Stress during Organizational Change. *Group and Organizational Management* 31(5): 601–21.
- Bordia, Prashant, Elizabeth Hobman, Elizabeth Jones, Cindy Gallois, and Victor J. Callan. 2004. Uncertainty during Organizational Change: Types, Consequences, and Management Strategies. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 18(4): 507–32.
- Boyne, George A. 2003. Sources of Public Service Improvement: A Critical Review and Research Agenda. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13(3): 367–94.
- Brewer, Gene A. 2003. Building Social Capital: Civic Attitudes and Behavior of Public Servants. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13(1): 5–26.
- Castaing, Sébastien. 2006. The Effects of Psychological Contract Fulfillment and Public Service Motivation on Organizational Commitment in the French Civil Service. *Public Policy and Administration* 21(1): 84–98.
- Cerese, Francesco Paolo, and Domenica Farinella. 2009. Public Service Motivation: How Does It Relate to Management Reforms and Changes in the Working Situation of Public Organizations? A Case Study of the Italian Revenue Agency. *Public Policy and Administration* 24(3): 281–308.
- Coch, Lester, and Paul J. R. French, Jr. 1948. Overcoming Resistance to Change. *Human Relations* 1(4): 512–32.

- Conway, Edel, and Kathy Monks. 2008. HR Practices and Commitment to Change: An Employee Level Analysis. *Human Resource Management Journal* 18(1): 72–89.
- Crewson, Phillip E. 1997. Public-Service Motivation: Building Empirical Evidence of Incidence and Effect. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 7(4): 499–518.
- DeHart-Davis, Leisha, Justin Marlowe, and Sanjay K. Pandey. 2006. Gender Dimensions of Public Service Motivation. *Public Administration Review* 66(6): 871–85.
- Denhardt, Robert B. 1993. *The Pursuit of Significance: Strategies for Managerial Success in Public Organizations*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Fernandez, Sergio, and Hal G. Rainey. 2006. Managing Successful Organizational Change in the Public Sector: An Agenda for Research and Practice. *Public Administration Review* 26(2): 168–76.
- Ford, Jeffrey D., Laurie W. Ford, and Angelo D'Amelio. 2008. Resistance to Change: The Rest of the Story. *Academy of Management Review* 33(2): 362–77.
- Hall, Richard H. 2002. *Organizations: Structures, Processes, and Outcomes*. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Haque, M. Shamsul. 2001. The Diminishing Publicness of Public Service under the Current Mode of Governance. *Public Administration Review* 61(1): 65–82.
- Herscovitch, Lynne, and John P. Meyer. 2002. Commitment to Organizational Change: Extension of a Three-Component Model. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 87(3): 474–87.
- Houston, David J. 2006. “Walking the Walk” of Public Service Motivation: Public Employees and Charitable Gifts of Time, Blood, and Money. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 16(1): 67–86.
- Hultman, Kenneth E. 1979. *The Path of Least Resistance: Preparing Employees for Change*. Austin, TX: Learning Concepts.
- Isett, Kimberley R., Sherry A. M. Glied, Michael S. Sparer, and Lawrence D. Brown. 2013. When Change Becomes Transformation: A Case Study of Change Management in Medicaid Offices in New York City. *Public Management Review* 15(1): 1–17.
- Isett, Kimberley R., Joseph P. Morrissey, and Sharon Topping. 2006. Systems Ideologies and Street-Level Bureaucrats: Policy Change and Perceptions of Quality in a Behavioral Health Care System. *Public Administration Review* 66(2): 217–27.
- Jimmieson, Nerina L., Deborah J. Terry, and Victor J. Callan. 2004. A Longitudinal Study of Employee Adaptation to Organizational Change: The Role of Change-Related Information and Change-Related Self-Efficacy. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 9(1): 11–27.
- Kelman, Steven. 2005. *Unleashing Change: A Study of Organizational Renewal in Government*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Kim, Sangmook, and Wouter Vandenabeele. 2010. A Strategy for Building Public Service Motivation Research Internationally. *Public Administration Review* 70(5): 701–9.
- Kim, Sangmook, Wouter Vandenabeele, Bradley E. Wright, Lotte Bøgh Andersen, Francesco Paolo Cerase, Robert K. Christensen, Céline Desmarais, et al. 2013. Investigating the Structure and Meaning of Public Service Motivation across Populations: Developing an International Instrument and Addressing Issues of Measurement Invariance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 23(1): 79–102.
- Klein, Ezra. 2012. Public-Sector Austerity in One Graph. *Wonkblog, Washington Post*, June 11. http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/public-sector-austerity-in-one-graph/2012/06/11/gIQA89NVV_blog.html [accessed June 18, 2013].
- Klein, Katherine J., and Joann Speer Sorra. 1996. The Challenge of Innovation Implementation. *Academy of Management Review* 21(4): 1055–80.
- Koehler, Michael, and Hal G. Rainey. 2008. Interdisciplinary Foundations of Public Service Motivation. In *Motivation in Public Management: The Call of Public Service*, edited by James L. Perry and Annie Hondeghem, 33–35. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Korsgaard, M. Audrey, Bruce M. Meglino, and Scott W. Lester. 1997. Beyond Helping: Do Other-Oriented Values Have Broader Implications in Organizations? *Journal of Applied Psychology* 82(1): 160–77.
- Lee, Haksoo, N. Joseph Cayer, and G. Zhiyong Lan. 2006. Changing Federal Government Employee Attitudes since the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 26(1): 21–51.
- Leisink, Peter, and Bram Steijn. 2009. Public Service Motivation and Job Performance of Public Sector Employees in the Netherlands. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 75(1): 35–52.
- Lewin, Kurt. 1951. *Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers*. Edited by Dorwin Cartwright. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Meyer, John P., E. S. Srinivas, Jaydeep B. Lal, and Laryssa Topolnysky. 2007. Employee Commitment and Support for an Organizational Change: Test of the Three-Component Model in Two Cultures. *British Psychological Society* 80(2): 185–211.
- Meyer, John P., David J. Stanley, Lynne Herscovitch, and Laryssa Topolnysky. 2002. Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitment to the Agency: A Meta-Analysis of Antecedents, Correlates, and Consequences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 61(1): 20–52.
- Micheli, Mark. 2012. Federal Managers Give Government a “C” in Cost Savings. *Government Executive*, September 12. <http://www.govexec.com/management/cutting-costs/2012/09/federal-managers-give-government-c-cost-savings/57851/> [accessed June 18, 2013].
- Miller, Katherine I., and Peter R. Monge. 1985. Social Information and Employee Anxiety About Organizational Change. *Human Communication Research* 11(3): 365–86.
- Moynihan, Donald P., and Sanjay K. Pandey. 2007. The Role of Organizations in Fostering Public Service Motivation. *Public Administration Review* 67(1): 40–53.
- Naff, Katherine C., and John Crum. 1999. Working for America: Does Public Service Motivation Make a Difference? *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 19(4): 5–16.
- Neves, Pedro. 2009. Readiness for Change: Contributions for Employee's Level of Individual Change and Turnover Intentions. *Journal of Change Management* 9(2): 215–31.
- Nishii, Lisa Hisae, David P. Lepak, and Benjamin Schneider. 2008. Employee Attributions of the “Why” of HR Practices: Their Effects on Employee Attitudes and Behaviors, and Customer Satisfaction. *Personnel Psychology* 61(3): 503–45.
- Nunnally, Jum C., and Ira H. Bernstein. 1994. *Psychometric Theory*. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Paarlberg, Laurie E. 2007. The Impact of Customer Orientation on Government Employee Performance. *International Public Management Journal* 10(2): 201–31.
- Paarlberg, Laurie E., and Bob Lavigna. 2010. Transformational Leadership and Public Service Motivation: Driving Individual and Organizational Performance. *Public Administration Review* 70(5): 710–18.
- Perry, James L. 1996. Measuring Public Service Motivation: An Assessment of Construct Reliability and Validity. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 6(1): 5–22.
- Perry, James L., and Lois Recascino Wise. 1990. The Motivational Bases of Public Service. *Public Administration Review* 50(3): 367–73.
- Podsakoff, Phillip M., Scott B. MacKenzie, Nathan P. Podsakoff, and Jeong Yeon Lee. 2003. The Mismeasure of Man(agement) and Its Implications for Leadership Research. *Leadership Quarterly* 14(6): 615–56.
- Rafferty, Alannah E., and Mark A. Griffin. 2006. Perceptions of Organizational Change: A Stress and Coping Perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 91(5): 1154–62.
- Rafferty, Alannah E., and Simon Lloyd D. Restubog. 2010. The Impact of Change Process and Context on Change Reactions and Turnover during a Merger. *Journal of Management* 36(5): 1309–38.

- Rainey, Hal G., and Paula Steinbauer. 1999. Galloping Elephants: Developing Elements of a Theory of Effective Government Organizations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 9(1): 1–32.
- Ritz, Adrian, and Sergio Fernandez. 2011. Intended and Non-Intended Effects of Managing Organizational Change in Public Organizations. Paper presented at the 15th Annual Conference of the International Research Society for Public Management, April 11–13, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland.
- Rousseau, Denise M. 2001. Schema, Promise, and Mutuality: The Building Blocks of the Psychological Contract. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 74(4): 511–41.
- Saka, Ayse. 2003. Internal Change Agents' View of the Management of Change Problem. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 16(5): 480–96.
- Shaw, James B., Mitchell W. Fields, James W. Thacker, and Cynthia D. Fisher. 1993. The Availability of Personal and External Coping Resources: Their Impact on Job Stress and Employee Attitudes during Organizational Restructuring. *Work and Stress* 7(3): 229–46.
- Tushman, Michael L., and Philip Anderson. 1986. Technological Discontinuities and Organizational Environments. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 31(3): 439–65.
- Vandenabeele, Wouter. 2009. The Mediating Effect of Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment on Self-Reported Performance: More Robust Evidence of the PSM–Performance Relationship. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 75(1): 11–34.
- Wanberg, Connie R., and Joseph T. Banas. 2000. Predictors and Outcomes of Openness to Changes in Reorganizing Workplace. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 85(1): 132–42.
- Weiss, Janet A., and Sandy Kristin Piderit. 1999. The Value of Mission Statements in Public Agencies. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 9(2): 193–223.
- Wright, Bradley E., and Kimberly R. Isett. 2011. Validating a Three-Dimensional Model of Employee Commitment to Change: Testing Antecedents and Consequences. Paper presented at the 15th Annual Conference of the International Research Society for Public Management, April 11–13, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland.
- Yang, Kaifeng, and Anthony Kassekert. 2010. Linking Management Reform with Employee Job Satisfaction: Evidence from Federal Agencies. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 20(2): 413–36.
- Zaltman, Gerald, Robert Duncan, and Jonny Holbek. 1984. *Innovations and Organizations*. Malabar, FL: Kreiger.