

A Review of Research on Public Service Motivation of Civil Servants in China

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Abstract: In the context of comprehensive reform, there is still a gap between the administrative capacity of Chinese civil servants and their expectations, and an accurate grasp of the intrinsic public service motivation of Chinese civil servants is a prerequisite for enhancing the aforementioned capacity. This paper analyzes the amount of existing literature and key variables on public service motivation of Chinese civil servants, introduces the trends of the literature and the current research results of the three key variables related to it, and reviews the overall research on public service motivation of civil servants in order to provide some insights for future research.

Keywords: Public Service Motivation; Civil Servants; China Scenario; Research Review

1. Introduction

Civil servants are the basic force of the country, bearing the major mission of promoting the steady progress of the Party and state undertakings, and have been playing the main role in the historical process of national development. One of the duties of civil servants is to provide public services, which is the basic attribute of government and the inevitable requirement of the rapid progress of society. The intrinsic public service motivation affects the motivation of civil servants to work and their performance at work, and determines whether civil servants can achieve the basic function of providing public management and services. However, the decentralization policy implemented in recent years has shifted the center of gravity of governance, increased the burden of government operations, and gradually made the work tasks of civil servants more complex and busier, in addition to the need to undertake difficult organizational tasks. At the same time, due to the increasingly strict management system of the state for civil servants and the narrow promotion space, the pressure and rewards borne by civil servants are not equal, which leads to the failure of some civil servants to maintain the right attitude in their work, and thus there is a general lack of public service motivation in the civil service (Zhou, J.F., 2014).

Research on public service motivation of civil servants began in China in 2010, and the direction of research vertically transitioned from examining the dimensions and outcome variables of public service motivation of civil servants to exploring the moderating role of their mediating variables and antecedent mechanisms; horizontally, the research scope of the three variables has been expanded, and each variable has been gradually enriched in terms of organizational and individual factors. However, as far as the current research is concerned, the influence of all three variables is somewhat homogeneous, which in turn does not allow for a more in-depth exploration of the role of public service motivation on the daily administrative behavior of civil servants. Therefore, this paper reviews the existing literature on public service motivation of civil servants in order to sort out and summarize the existing research results, expand and enrich the research ideas, improve the influence mechanism of public service motivation of civil servants more comprehensively, and then put forward practical suggestions for the management development of public organizations in order to promote the smooth implementation of various undertakings of the Party and the state.

2. Analysis of the number of articles published

Using the keyword "public service motivation of civil servants" as the keyword, we searched all the literature published before May 1, 2021 on China Knowledge, and retrieved a total of 263 documents. Further on the theme of "civil service", 75 relevant papers were selected, including 42 academic journals, 34 dissertations and 1 conference. After reading all the papers, 3 irrelevant papers were excluded, so only 72 relevant papers were analyzed in this paper.

After combing through the literature, it can be found that the study of public service motivation in China began in 2010, and gradually entered a rapid development stage after 2016, maintaining a stable output in recent years (Figure 1); before 2015, the research on public service motivation was basically a discussion of its dimensions or a theoretical construction, and in 2016, the study of its relationship with mediating factors began to appear, Empirical studies on public service motivation and antecedent mechanisms have gradually increased after 2017, meaning that scholars in China are gradually shifting from qualitative to quantitative studies on public service motivation, which is also in line with international trends.

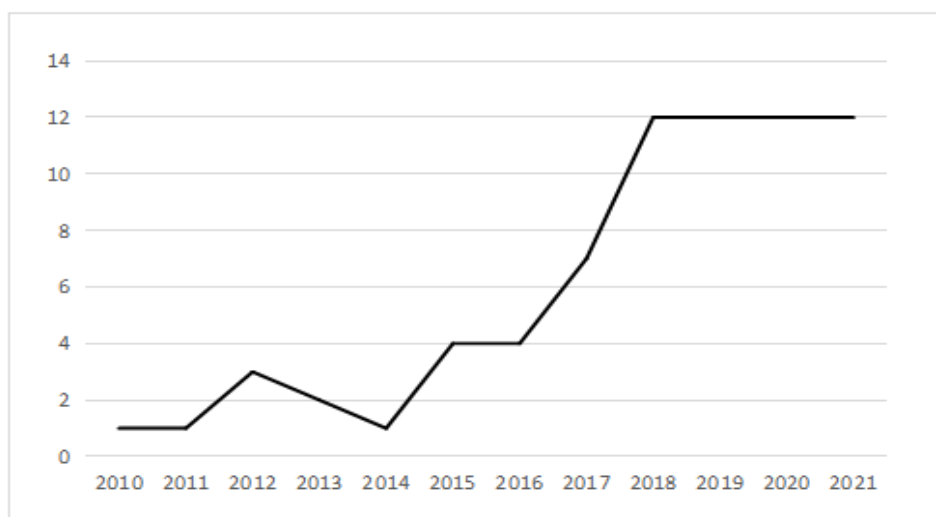


Figure1. Trends in the volume of public service motivated posts by Chinese civil servants

3. Key variables on public service motivation of civil servants

A typology of published literature shows that research on outcome variables, the role as mediating variables, and antecedent variables of public service motivation of civil servants are three important directions of current research (see Figure 2). The research in the three directions is summarized as follows.

3.1 Public service motivation outcome variables for civil servants

Among all the studies, the research on outcome variables is the most numerous (27 articles), and the current outcome variables mainly include the personal performance, job burnout, job satisfaction, career identity of civil servants, and the construction of the organization's incentive system and welfare system reform, so these variables can be grouped into two parts: the personal behavior of civil servants and the construction of the public organization's system. In terms of personal behavior, the literature exploring how civil servants' public service motivation affects their job performance is the most numerous, and Li Xiaohua and Dong Jun (2012) were the first scholars to conduct a study on it. They used MPA graduate students in China to distill the three factors of interpersonal facilitation, job risk, and task performance in personal performance, and studied the relationship between civil

servants' public service motivation and each factor, and then found that public service motivation of civil servants is positively related to individual performance. Subsequent research on it is mostly found in master's theses, and most scholars discuss the impact of public service motivation on individual performance of civil servants while generally introducing antecedent or mediating variables to deepen their grasp of the relationship. He, Yuming (2020) found that the level of public service motivation among civil servants in China is high and positively affects individual job performance. However, demographic variables will affect the performance of public service motivation and individual performance in each dimension. Xu Shijia (2016) introduced two variables, person-organization matching and leader-member communication, to explore the influence of civil servant's public services motivation on the work performance of 318 civil servants and their direct supervisors in some provincial organs in Hunan Province by means of paired survey samples.

In general, research on the relationship between public service motivation and personal performance of civil servants is at a peak, and a large proportion of the relevant literature has been published in recent years, but the research has reached maturity, and various dimensions of public service motivation and personal performance of civil servants have been comprehensively explored and the research results obtained in China are relatively consistent. In the early stage of China's research on public service motivation, Gao Ren (2012) briefly discussed the relationship between public service motivation and motivation, and the study of institutional improvement was put on hold for some time after that. With the deepening of domestic research on public service motivation theory, scholars pay more and more attention to its practical application significance in the public sector, so they introduce the public service motivation theory into the construction of public sector incentive system and put forward improvement suggestions for the current problems. Zhang Lin et al. (2021) put forward constructive opinions on this issue. They provide theoretical support for establishing a perfect long-term incentive mechanism for public service motivation of civil servants in order to stimulate the public service spirit in the new era, starting from the aspects of civil servants' salary and treatment as well as training and assessment. Liu (2021) also proposed the path of motivation to strengthen the level of public service motivation of grassroots civil servants in China from the aspects of team innovation, organizational change and social participation, in order to promote the innovative leap of grassroots civil servants' motivation system. By combing the years of publications, we can see that the literature in this area has been published in recent years, which means that the influence of public service motivation on the construction of public sector institutions is gradually entering the research vision of scholars.

3.2 Researches on the motivation of civil servants' public service as the mediating variable

The study of public service motivation as a mediating variable to explore its effect on various factors is also a hot topic in recent years (26 articles), and the number of related papers is increasing year by year. A review of all the relevant literature shows that the current research focuses on the mediating role of public service motivation in the organizational-individual model, Organizational aspects include work characteristics, leadership style and organizational climate, work characteristics mainly include work embedding, work freedom, etc. Leadership styles include paternalistic leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and leadership exchange relationships; organizational climate includes organizational equity, organizational culture, and organizational commitment. Individuals can be divided into two parts: cognitive and behavioral, Cognitive factors include emotional commitment, turnover tendency, job burnout, job satisfaction, etc.; behavioral factors include job performance, constructive behavior, work engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, etc. In addition to "job performance", which remains a hot topic of research, scholars have paid special attention to the influence of "career plateau" on individual behavior of civil servants in recent years. Tan (2021) found that the career plateau of grassroots civil servants negatively influenced their advocacy behavior; relative deprivation partially mediated the relationship between career plateau and advocacy behavior; public service motivation of grassroots civil servants negatively moderated the relationship between career plateau and relative deprivation, which in turn influenced advocacy behavior of grassroots civil servants. Zeng Li (2021) also found that career plateau negatively affects civil servants' job performance, while public service motivation plays a negative moderating role in this path, and civil servants with high public service motivation have a lower negative effect of career plateau on job

performance. This research trend also implies that in recent years scholars are expanding and searching for factors related to public service motivation of civil servants in order to expand the scope of their research and maximize the utility of public service motivation of civil servants in various mechanisms.

3.3 Antecedent variables of public service motivation of civil servants

Compared to the previous two directions, research on the antecedent mechanisms of public service motivation is slightly less developed (7 articles). Separate research on antecedent variables has been conducted only in recent years, and earlier explorations of antecedent variables were only slightly analyzed when civil servants' public service motivation was used as a mediating variable to study its moderating role or to measure it, and it was not treated as a separate research topic; Shi Mengqing (2017) first conducted a systematic study of the impact of transformational leadership on civil servants' public service motivation, after which Scholars only began to pay attention to separate research on the role of antecedent variables on civil servants' public service motivation, although at first they still focused on the influence of different leadership styles on civil servants' public service motivation, but soon scholars began to study different types of antecedent variables, Zhang Jing (2018) tested the influence of career identity and public value choice on public service motivation of civil servants and found a positive correlation between them, and both positively influence public service motivation of civil servants. Yiming Dai et al. (2021) found that job autonomy can increase civil servants' public service motivation, and their basic psychological needs play an important mediating role in it. It can be seen from the trend of publications that research in this direction is at an early stage of development, and more and more scholars are aware of the importance of studying the antecedent mechanisms of public service motivation in civil servants, and understanding its antecedent variables can provide a more accurate grasp of the applicability and utility range of public service motivation.

4. Conclusion

Through the literature, we can find that the research on public service motivation in China is going through a phase of development from shallow to deep and step by step, and the published literature is gradually shifting from systematic reviews to empirical studies. This shows that the research on public service motivation in China has made certain achievements. However, at the same time, we should also see that there is still a lot of room for the development of public service motivation in China, and all aspects of research need to be improved.

In terms of theoretical research, there is currently no representative definition of public service motivation in China, and there is no consensus on its understanding. Even though there are multiple views on the type of motivation attributed to public service motivation, most scholars introduce it by directly quoting the definitions of similar foreign viewpoint representatives to explain it, and no local theory has been developed in China, and the lack of clarity of this general framework theory has led to more inability to define the concepts under which it belongs. Without a clear understanding of a concept, it is difficult to compare the results of the study, so it is necessary to make a targeted definition of the connotation of the concept of public service motivation of civil servants.

In terms of research variables, in fact, since the beginning of the research on public service motivation of civil servants, scholars in China have focused on the empirical study of it, aiming to explore different variables related to public service motivation of civil servants. The mediating moderating role played by civil servants' public service motivation has been the most discussed in all the literature, followed by the exploration of its outcome variables, while the literature that separately studies its antecedent variables has emerged only in recent years. It can be seen that, regardless of the variables, scholars are most concerned with the relationship between civil servants' public service motivation and personal performance, probably also because this variable is the most direct manifestation of public sector practitioners' This is probably also due to the fact that this variable is the most direct manifestation of the behavior of public sector employees, and this research hotspot continues to persist. Although research on variables related to public service motivation of civil

servants is flourishing, scholars have neglected the direction of exploring the mediators between public service motivation and the variables, which is important for clarifying how it affects the variables and the subsequent practical applications.

In terms of measurement tools, the above analysis shows that at present, China still relies more on foreign scales for measuring public service motivation of civil servants, whether it is perry's detailed scales or the cross-cultural simplified scales developed by kim or wright, which are the first choice of scholars to conduct research. Happily, however, scholars in China have realized the importance of developing local cross-cultural scales, and some scholars have created public service motivation scales based on foreign scales, modified them in the context of China's actual administrative culture, and conducted multiple reliability tests on the items to create public service motivation scales suitable for the Chinese context, and these scales have been widely accepted by domestic scholars and are more often used by scholars in the measurement of public service motivation in civil servants. This is a great step forward for public service motivation research in China.

In terms of practical applications, compared to earlier studies that focused on the relationship between public service motivation and variables, recent literature has focused more on the practical effects of public service motivation. Scholars have been able to integrate public service motivation theory into public service and social governance activities performed by civil servants and improve existing institutional mechanisms based on the effects of public service motivation on variables and the actual problems that arise in China, in an attempt to make research on public service motivation develop on the ground.

5. Future Research

With the flourishing of our economy and the extremely rapid development of our society, the people have higher evaluation standards for the government's public services and supplies. This requires civil servants to provide a higher level of public service. Civil servants should not only complete the work within their duties, but also go beyond the scope of their duties to provide services for the society and the public spontaneously in the interest of the people. And it is clearly stated in the report of the 19th Party Congress that we should strive to build a service-oriented society that is satisfactory to the people. In the context of this corporative reform, since we have a theoretical entry point for practice, we should strive to improve its research in all aspects, speed up its development and apply the theory to practice as early as possible. Future research can be improved and developed from the following aspects.

First, the meaning of public relations service motivation for this special group of civil servants should be clarified. Scholars in China can conduct more academic seminars on public service motivation of civil servants, exchange the latest international research results as well as the current domestic representative views and studies, so that domestic scholars can first reach a basic agreement on the understanding of public service motivation of civil servants, and then develop a scientific and localized public service motivation of civil servants that can be recognized by everyone, taking into account China's political system and traditional Chinese culture. Second, the definition of public service motivation should be enriched.

Second, we should enrich the measurement tools of public service motivation for civil servants. Although scholars in China have developed localized public service motivation scales, and some of them are widely used in China, it can be seen that these scales are adapted from foreign scales, while many other localized scales created by scholars using the classical original scale development method based on rooted theory have not been taken seriously. In fact, China's public service motivation is still at an early stage of development, so we can use different scales more often to verify their reliability and validity, and eventually find the most suitable localized scale for measuring public service motivation of civil servants in China.

Finally, more attention should be paid to the role played by public service motivation of civil servants in practical applications. We can explore in depth the known paths of public service motivation of civil servants and its influencing variables, expand the variable factors in the three broad directions horizontally according to our national conditions, and deepen our research on our civil servants in the context of our administrative requirements, civil service management system and behavioral norms to ensure that our research does not just stay at the theoretical level but more practically provides help for the development of our public sector. We will deepen our research on our civil servants to ensure that our research is not only at the theoretical level, but also more practical for the development of our public sector. (Leilei Ge, Zaili Sun, Yiran Li, 2018).

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