

## **Factors Affecting Public Service Motivation: Empirical study of municipal employees in the three Southern border Provinces of Thailand**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this research was to study the factors affecting public service motivation the dimensions of which are attraction to public policy making, commitment to the public interest, compassion and self-sacrifice of the municipal employees. The data were selected through Multi-stage random sampling method from municipal employees in the three southern border provinces of Thailand. 750 questionnaires were sent out and subsequently data from 640 municipal employees were used. The regression analysis was employed to test the research hypotheses. Results showed that goal perception and cultural understanding had positive influence on four dimensions of public service motivation. Transformational leadership had positive influence on attraction to public policy making, compassion and self-sacrifice. Role stress had negative influence on commitment to the public interest.*

**Keywords:** Public service motivation, Goal perception, Role stress, Cultural understanding Transformational leadership

### **1. Introduction**

Changes and competitions have been dramatically increasing in the current world of competitiveness and diversity. Thailand government sectors and public employees have taken the major roles in making the country prosper in economics, society, politics and technology among the world top rankers. At present, the public employees cannot adjust well in the changing world of competitiveness, and this ineffectiveness can decrease the government efficiency. The IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook ranked Thailand government efficiency at the positions 30 and 39 for the year 2000 and 2001, respectively. This ranking has alerted the changes and improvement of Thailand government efficiency based on the New Public Management (NPM). The NPM focuses on efficiency of public service of the local administration organizations which are the closest service sectors to local area people. New strategic plans in which the administrative procedure and management were adjusted and integrated were implemented for developing Thailand public administration during the year 2002 to 2007. Thailand public administration procedures were made more customer-oriented administrative style.

According to NPM, the goals of the public administrative work are to serve the public. The public administrative offices should therefore educate and train public employees in changing their attitudes on public services. These services offices have to achieve their major missions in giving the standardized services to the public.

Hence, the Local Administration Department, the government sector responsible for supporting and enforcing the effectiveness of the administration of local administrative offices, has identified the strategies to enforce the effectiveness of public services and administration of the local area administration organization. At present, problems and obstacles in administration of Thailand local area administration organizations exist in several areas. These problems are, such as various and disparate standards of public services among different administration organizations (Kutchamath, 2007); lacks of cooperation of involved people and sectors; allocation of work that does not match public employees qualification; ineffectiveness of communication between administrators and public employees; and lacks of enforcement in work form the administrators and enthusiasm in work of public employees (Suevises, 2009).

The most important factor contributing to service efficiency among government employees is to enhance their public service motivation (Li, 2008). Public service motivation should be done by directing the public employees' motivation more to the public interest. That is to adjust attitude, value and behavior of public employees for the public interest. Perry and Wise (1990) explained that Public Service Motivation was originated from three concepts. The Rational motives is the concept related to individual satisfaction to be involved in decisions making in the public policy and therefore putting more efforts in public policy making. The Norm-based motives are the concept related to awareness in one's responsibility in public service. Finally, the Affective motives are the concept related to one's compassion for others. Based on the concepts of Public service motivation, Perry (1996) found that there were four dimensions related to public service motivation. These are attraction to public policy making, commitment to the public interest, compassion and self-sacrifice.

Studies on public service motivation have initially been done in western countries. In Asia, several studies were conducted in Korea (Kim, 2005; 2006) and in China (Li, 2008; Bangcheng, 2009; Liu, Tang, & Zhu, 2008). There were, however, no studies done in Thailand on this topic. Moreover, there have been very few studies on causal factors on public service motivation (e.g., Camilleri, 2007; Park & Painey, 2007). From the related literature, a few studies were conducted to investigate the motivation dimension of goal perception and government organizational leadership (Javidan & Waldman, 2003). However, there were findings that role stress was one of the important factors that can affect successful improvement of public administration (Addae, Parboteeah & Velinor, 2008). Cultural understanding was also found as an important factor reflecting the sociohistorical context of the local people. This factor of cultural understanding is related to the cultural diversity aspect of the three southern border provinces of Thailand in particular. The current study was, therefore conducted to investigate factors that influence public service motivation covering the dimensions of goal perception, role stress, transformational leadership and cultural understanding of municipal employees in the three southern border provinces of Thailand.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section reviews the concept on public service motivation and its causal factors: goal perception, role stress, transformational leadership and cultural understanding to provide the background knowledge for the study on factors influencing public service motivation.

### **2.1 Concept on Public Service Motivation**

Concept on Public Service Motivation was originated in the year 1982 showing its relationship to public services (Rainey, 1982). Perry and Wise (1990) stated that Public Service Motivation (PSM) was the personal motive a person responded to basic motive of the organization in public services. PSM is viewed as the mechanism that reflects public service behaviors of public employees. It is an important phenomenon leading to efficient operations in public services. PSM is therefore a significant quality of public employees. It can be reflected in an individual's effort and attention in meeting the mission of public organizations. PSM is divided into three concepts.

1. Rational Motives refer any actions taken by an individual to achieve the greatest goal of his or her satisfaction. This can be attained when the person gets involved in the process of policy formulation; the participation in the policy making results in motives in their work and build up their self- image. Ration motives can motivate an individual in his/her attraction to public policy making, commitment to a public program and satisfaction in giving public service.

2. Norm-based motives are one of most consensus quality of public employees in providing public services. This type of motives results from an attempt to provide public services for all people at the same standard. Norm-based motives leads to another major motive in public service, loyalty to duty, which is based on the concept of social equity and social justice -- all people should have the same privileges in accessing public resources for their better life.
3. Affective motives are the reasons driving individuals' awareness of diverse social contexts, being nationalistic and sensitivity to others. Affective motives show in their commitment in the public service program.

Perry (1996) studied six dimensions of the public service motivation of public employees. The six dimensions under investigation were: 1) Attraction to public policy making refers to the motives to urge and enforce self-image building. 2) Commitment to the public interest is the co-occurred motive in showing interest for public service. 3) Civic duty concerns awareness of one's duty to the public. 4) Social justice concerns the activities to promote the underprivileged group for resource or economics and political privileges. 5) Self-sacrifice is the motives, closely related to public service motivation, concerning the willingness to serve other people. 6) Compassion is the major motive held in most governmental officials. Results of Perry's study showed that only four dimensions of 1) attraction to public policy making, 2) commitment to the public interest, 3) compassion and 4) self-sacrifice can be used in measuring public service motivation. These four dimensions were widely used as the dimensions of public service motivation in several studies Switzerland (Ritz, 2009), Korea (Kim, 2005; 2006), China (Liu, Tang, & Zhu, 2008; Li, 2008).

## 2.2 Goal Perception

Goal perception refers to feelings and ideas of public employees in perceiving the goals for public services of their organizations. Clarification of goals and missions to be accomplished and awareness of the goals and commitment in achieving the goals of public employees are important for the public service jobs. Goal perception is one of the important factors that influences public employees work proficiency. Goals for work are mechanism to encourage public employees in committing to the assigned jobs and motives to drive them to accomplish the expected goals. Locke & Latham (2002) postulated that the clearly stated goals can promote work motivation and leads to better achievement on work. Ritz (2009) found that the goal-oriented job has a positive relationship with the public service motivation in the dimension of attraction to public policy making ( $r = 0.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and commitment to the public interest ( $r = 0.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Jung & Rainey (2011) investigated the relationship between the organizational prospect on public employees' quality and public service motives of public employees. Results showed that goal commitment and goal importance, goal perception and mission perception had the positive correlation with public service motivation. Results also showed that clarification of the organizational goals perceived by public employees resulted in better work. Therefore, we hypothesized that;

- H<sub>1a</sub> Goal perception has a positive influence on Attraction to public policy making
- H<sub>1b</sub> Goal perception has a positive influence on Commitment to the public interest
- H<sub>1c</sub> Goal perception has a positive influence on Compassion
- H<sub>1d</sub> Goal perception has a positive influence on Self-sacrifice

## 2.3 Role stress

Role stress is the mental condition that affects the person's feelings, and it can cause psychological stress that can be reflected in his or her behavior. One of the causes of role stress in work is the condition when they have some information that is different from what they have known before about their jobs or the situation when they do not know about what they are expected of in their job. Role stress also occurs when the job assigned to them is not clearly stated. In other words, the government employees have role ambiguity or role conflict in their job when they are not given clear roles in their jobs (Quick & Nelson, 2009). The role stress occurs when they are not clear with their role and responsibilities concerning the job they are doing, or when they are not clear on what are expected of them by the organization, and when the public employees cannot get involved in decision making nor express their ideas concerning the goals of the organization concerning the jobs they are doing (Jackson, & Schuler, 1985). Gilboa, Shirom, Fried, & Cooper (2008) found that role stress is the barricade for the job success of public employees. It also prevents them from challenges in learning and advancement in the jobs they are doing. Camilleri (2007) showed that role stress was one of the factor that hinder public service motives.

From the results of the afore-mentioned research studies, it can be hypothesized that reduction of role stress can increase motivation in public service. Therefore, we hypothesized that;

- H<sub>2a</sub> Role stress has a negative influence on Attraction to public policy making
- H<sub>2b</sub> Role stress has a negative influence on Commitment to the public interest
- H<sub>2c</sub> Role stress has a negative influence on Compassion
- H<sub>2d</sub> Role stress has a negative influence on Self-sacrifice

## **2.4 Transformational leadership**

Transformational leadership takes an important role, according to the New Public Management (NPM), in improving the administration of the public organizations by the identification of the organizational visions (Trottier, Van Wart, & Wang, 2008). The transformational leadership can enhance public service motivation of public employees in each organization if the goals of public services are clearly stated among public employees (Paarlberg, & Lavigna, 2010). Judge, & Piccolo (2004) postulated that transformational leadership can occur in changes of the behaviors of leaders of the organizations in four dimensions. 1) Charisma or idealized influence is the changes of personality of the leaders to be admired and followed by officials under his or her administration. 2) Inspirational motivation is the changes in leaders' behaviors in stating visions for his or her goals for work clearly that the followers feel like to follow the vision and this brings about the higher standard of work and the more effective communication of the visions to accomplish the goal. 3) Intellectual stimulation is the leaders' behaviors that can motivate the fellow co-workers' intellectual conception and in taking more risks in their work. 4) Finally, individualized consideration refers to the behaviors of the leaders to be more considerate to the needs of their fellow co-workers. The leaders should take the roles of a mentor or trainers to their fellow co-workers as well as good listener to their needs. Judge, & Piccolo (2004) conducted a meta-analysis on transformational leadership and found that the transformational leadership had a positive influence on their fellow co-workers' motivation ( $\beta = 0.32, p < .01$ ) Piccolo, & Colquitt (2006) studied the influences of transformational leadership on job behavior and found that the transformational leadership had a positive influence on their fellow co-workers' motivation ( $\beta = 0.20, p < .05$ ). Ritz (2009) found that leaders' behaviors were positively related to public service motivation in the dimension of attraction to public policy making ( $r = 0.04, p < .01$ ) and commitment to public interest ( $r = 0.15, p < .01$ ). Therefore, we hypothesized that;

- H<sub>3a</sub> Transformational leadership has a positive influence on Attraction to public policy making
- H<sub>3b</sub> Transformational leadership has a positive influence on Commitment to the public interest
- H<sub>3c</sub> Transformational leadership has a positive influence on Compassion
- H<sub>3d</sub> Transformational leadership has a positive influence on Self-Sacrifice

## **2.5 Cultural Understanding**

Cultural understanding refers to feelings or ideas of public employees about surrounding factors in their work: those concerning the regional context resulting in capability in communication between the public employees and the service receivers. This includes their understanding in cultural sensitivity toward their work and their co-workers. Cultural sensitivity reflects sociohistorical factors representing personality, value and beliefs concerning their daily life. Ritz (2009) showed that the native language had the positive relationship with the organizational performance ( $\beta = 0.107, p < .01$ ). It was also found that the native language had the negative relationship with attraction to public policy making ( $r = -0.10, p < .01$ ). Puck, Mohr, & Rygl (2008) had conducted a study on public employees with different cultural background, different native languages and roles of communication that influence adjustment in work of public employees. Results showed that cultural sensitivity was one influential factor in adjustment to working of public employees at a significant level ( $\beta = 0.470, p < .01$ ). It can be said that native language had an influential effect on public service motives. Lack of communication skills of the government employees can lead to the factors of compassion, self-sacrifice and commitment to the public interest in serving the public which will in turn affect the job satisfaction of public employees and the work of the organization. In the meantime, positive attitude toward cultural had an effect on public service and adjustment in working of public employees was in accordance with the findings of Pruegger, & Rogers (1994) found that cultural understanding can be used to adjust attitude and work behavior of public employees. Therefore, we hypothesized that;

- H<sub>4a</sub> Cultural understanding has a positive influence on Attraction to public policy making
- H<sub>4b</sub> Cultural Understanding has a positive influence Commitment to the public interest
- H<sub>4c</sub> Cultural understanding has a positive influence on Compassion
- H<sub>4d</sub> Cultural understanding has a positive influence on Self-Sacrifice

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Sample and procedures**

Data were collected from municipal employees in the three southern border provinces (Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat) of Thailand. These participants were civil servant and permanent municipal employees and were selected by multi-stage random sampling. 750 were sent out and 640 were returned, yielding a response rate of 85.33%.

The research instrument was constructed based on theories and related literature in steps as describe hereafter. 1) The English version of the questionnaires was used after translating it into Thai and into English to avoid misunderstanding and deviation. 2) The questionnaires were edited in terms of content and language quality. 3) The questionnaires were piloted using the Think aloud technique. 4) The questionnaires were edited and reviewed by the experts for the content validity using Content Validity Index (CVI).

#### **3.2 Measures**

All of the scales described below were scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strong disagreement, 5 = strong agreement). Public service motivation were adapted from Perry (1996) and Kim (2009) and measured with 4 dimensions: 1) attraction to public policy making measured with 3 items; 2) commitment to the public interest measured with 6 items; 3) compassion measured with 6 items; and 4) self-sacrifice measured with 6 items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the indicators were: 0.833, 0.800, 0.882, and 0.890, respectively.

Goal perception were adapted from Jung & Rainey (2011) and measured with 6 items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.864.

Role stress were adapted from Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman (1970) and measured with 10 items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.801.

Transformational leadership were adapted from Trottier, Van Wart, & Wang (2008), and Judge & Piccolo (2004) and measured with 16 items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.953.

Cultural understanding were adapted from Perry (2000) and Puck, Mohr & Rygl (2008) and measured with 8 items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.860.

### **4. Results**

The respondents were 58.5 % female, 65% were Buddhists and 35% were Islam. An average age of the research respondents was 41.7 years, tenure was 11.7 years, 61.4% had at least a bachelor's degree, 70% used Thai in daily life and 2.8% used Melayu language.

Table 1 showed the statistical relationship between the variables of four dimensions of public service motivation (attraction to public policy making, commitment to the public interest, compassion and self-sacrifice) were positively correlated with goal perception, transformational leadership and cultural understanding; and negatively correlated with the factor of role stress. Moreover, Public service motivation was highly correlated with cultural understanding. In details, the Cultural understanding was highly correlated with the compassion ( $r = 0.584$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and commitment to public interest ( $r = 0.576$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Table 1 Means, standard deviations and correlations between variables**

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Attraction to public policy	4.043	0.567	(0.833)							
2.Commitment to public interest	4.086	0.539	.570**	(0.800)						
3.Compassion	4.256	0.517	.514**	.666**	(0.882)					
4.Self-sacrifice	4.060	0.564	.498**	.574**	.662**	(0.890)				
5.Goal perception	4.063	0.518	.539**	.564**	.508**	.428**	(0.864)			
6.Role stress	2.297	0.540	-.290**	-.406**	-.299**	-.249**	-.386**	(0.801)		
7.Transformational leadership	3.659	0.685	.427**	.338**	.205**	.305**	.335**	-.305**	(0.953)	
8.Cultural understanding	4.067	0.465	.549**	.576**	.584**	.565**	.529**	-.369**	.388**	(0.886)

Note: Cronbach's alpha on the diagonal in parentheses, \*\* p < .01

Table 2 presented the results of Regression Analysis showing that the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was less than 4 (Hair et al., 2010). This means that there was no multi-collinearity relationship among independent variables. This shows that goal perception has a positive correlation with public service motivation in all dimensions (H<sub>1a</sub>- H<sub>1d</sub> were accepted). Goal perception has a positive influence on attraction to public policy making at the highest level ( $\beta = 0.347, p < .001$ ), followed by the dimension of commitment to public interest ( $\beta = 0.316, p < .001$ ). Role stress was found to negatively correlate with commitment to public interest ( $\beta = -0.150, p < .001$ ) (H<sub>2b</sub> was accepted). On the other hand, role stress was not found to have any correlation with attraction to public policy making, compassion and self-sacrifice at the significant level .05 (H<sub>2a</sub>, H<sub>2c</sub>, H<sub>2d</sub> were rejected). Results also showed that transformational leadership has a positive influence on attraction to public policy making, compassion and self-sacrifice at the significant level 0.05 ( $\beta = 0.172, 0.068$  and  $0.060$  respectively) (H<sub>3a</sub>, H<sub>3c</sub>, H<sub>3d</sub> were accepted). Transformational leadership, however, was not found to positively correlate with the dimension of commitment to public interest ( $\beta = -0.044, p < .05$ ) (H<sub>3b</sub> was rejected). Additionally, findings of the study showed that cultural understanding had positive correlation with all dimensions of public service motivation (H<sub>4a</sub>-H<sub>4d</sub> were accepted). The factor of cultural understanding was positively correlated with public service motivation in the dimension of self-sacrifice at the highest level ( $\beta = 0.546, p < .001$ ) and compassion, respectively ( $\beta = 0.509, p < .001$ ).

**Table 2 Regression Analysis of Influences of Goal perception, Role stress Transformational leadership and Cultural understanding on Public service motivation.**

	Attraction to public policy making		Commitment to public interest		Compassion		Self-sacrifice	
	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard Error	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard Error	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard Error	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard Error
Goal perception	0.347***	0.042	0.316***	0.04	0.260***	0.038	0.146**	0.044
Role stress	0.009	0.037	-0.150***	0.034	-0.048	0.033	-0.005	0.039
Transformational leadership	0.172***	0.028	0.044	0.027	0.068**	0.026	0.060*	0.03
Cultural understanding	0.406***	0.048	0.376***	0.045	0.509***	0.044	0.546***	0.051
F-value	114***		108.468***		93.915***		70.181***	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.437		0.428		0.395		0.329	
Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	0.433		0.424		0.391		0.325	

Note: \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

## **5. Conclusion and Discussion**

Results of the study showed that goal perception had positive influences on the public service motivation of the municipal employees in the three southern border provinces of Thailand in the dimensions of attraction to public policy making, commitment to the public interest, compassion and self-sacrifice. These findings were in accordance with the Goal Setting Theory. This theory explains that the causal effect of goal perception toward public service motivation in the way that goal perception and commitment in achieving the perceived goals help motivate individuals to achieve their goals. Locke & Latham (2002) view that if the public officials are aware of the goals of their jobs, they will put more commitments in achieving the goals. They will be more motivated to the job they are doing. The findings also agreed with those of Jung & Rainey (2011) postulating that in order to increase the public service motivation among public employees of the organization, the working goals must be clearly perceived by the responsible persons and they will be more motivated in achieving the goals. Transformational leadership was found to have positive correlation with the public service motivation in this study. Likewise, Ritz (2009) found that transformational leadership had positive correlation with attraction to public policy making and commitment to public interest. Park & Rainey (2008) suggested that if the transformation-oriented leaders made the goal of public service clear to public employees, they will be more motivated to accomplish the goals. In other words, it was found that the factors of transformational leadership and the goal clarity will lead to the public service motivation among public employees.

Moreover, Wright & Pandey (2008) stated that if the operating public employees were empowered in decision making, by the leaders, in the jobs they are responsible for, they will put more commitment and better plan for the work to achieve the goals. The current study also found that role stress among public employees had negative effects on their commitment to their jobs. It can be postulated that if public employees were less stressed of not knowing what their expected roles were, they would put more commitment in giving public services. Yun, Takeuchi, & Liu (2007) suggested that having the clear information pertaining the goals of the jobs assigned to them and the decision making power they have will motivate public employees more to their jobs in public services. The clarity of the assigned jobs and directions to accomplish them will reduce role stress, too. It is therefore essential that the transformation-oriented leaders motivate the public service and work behaviors of public employees by giving the clear goals for public services, empowering them with decision making in the jobs they are doing and give them the clear roles of their jobs. In that way the public service public employees will achieve the goals of the public service.

Results also showed that cultural understanding among public employees positively influenced their motivation in work. This finding was in accordance with the results of study of Puck, Mohr, & Rygl (2008). They studied the adjustment to work of public employees and found that cultural sensitivity among public employees was one of the influential factors in their adjustment to their work. Understanding of cultural difference of the service receivers is another way to motivate effective public service. It is suggested that public employees be educated or trained in cultural diversity so that they are aware of it and adapt and develop their working and communication skills to communicate more effectively with people from different cultures (Taylor- Ritzler, et al., 2008). Knowledge, skills and attitudes towards cultural diversity can be gained from training (Luger, 2011) and this awareness of cultural diversity will reflect in better public service (Jackson & Samuels, 2011).

This study, however, was limited to the basic information of public employees and the research variables used in this study were mostly constructed for the sample public employees in foreign countries. It is recommended that a qualitative study should be done in order to get more knowledge and better or more specific details or other dimensions to promote public service motivation to public employees in the three southern border provinces of Thailand. Further qualitative data procedure should be obtained in forms of in-depth interviews or group discussions so that the more specific variables on public service motivation are more scrutinized and the results more meaningful to such an area with cultural diversity like the three southern border provinces of Thailand.

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