



A Spirit of Service to the Community

The fundamental
characteristic of the
public service

A spirit of service to the community

“The fundamental characteristic of the public service is acting with a spirit of service to the community. Public service leaders, interdepartmental executive boards, boards of interdepartmental ventures, and boards of Crown agents must preserve, protect, and nurture the spirit of service to the community that public service employees bring to their work.”

Public Service Act, 2020

“You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.”

Woodrow Wilson, 1913.

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This report combines findings from relevant academic literature with reflections from conversation with senior academics, to explore how the New Zealand public service may approach preserving, protecting, and nurturing the spirit of service that public service employees bring to their work. While providing original commentary on implications for the New Zealand public service, the report also draws extensively from various works of Professor James Perry and is not presented as an original work. The information in the report is intended for discussion purposes and does not propose any specific policy changes for the New Zealand public service. References to existing New Zealand policies and programmes are intended to be illustrative only. The report should not be read as being representative of the New Zealand public service’s current spirit of service policies or practices. Any opinions in the report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Public Service Commission or the New Zealand government.



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1. Introduction

- The Public Service Act requires that chief executives preserve, protect, and nurture the spirit of service that public servants bring to their work.
- There is extensive evidence on how the motivations of public servants differ from employees in other work settings.
- A spirit of service to the community is associated with multiple benefits, from effort to innovation to integrity.
- However, poorly targeted interventions can lead to reduced diversity, surface acting, cynicism, exploitation, and rule breaking.
- This paper canvasses many tactics that may help support a spirit of service to the community.

The Public Service Act 2020 identifies a spirit of service to the community as the fundamental characteristic of the public service. Chief executives are required to preserve, protect, and nurture the spirit of service that public servants bring to their work. As the leader of the public service, the Public Service Commissioner has an important role in guiding and supporting chief executives to achieve this aim. This paper seeks to explore what a 'spirit of service' might mean; how it can be preserved, protected, and nurtured; and what effects that might have on the integrity, services, and outcomes achieved by public institutions.

In July 2023, I spent time with Distinguished Emeritus Professor James Perry, who has written more than any other person about the distinctive values, ethics, and motivations of public servants. Perry defined the term 'public service motivation' in 1990,¹ though differences between private and public service motivations have been noted in academic texts since at least the mid-1800s, and indeed can be dated back to the writing of Aristotle.²

This paper draws from my recent conversations with Professor Perry, as well as conversations with Wouter Vandenberghe, Bradley Wright, Donald Moynihan, Alexander Kroll, Janet and Bob Denhardt, John Bryson, Barbara Crosby, and many others. Prior to meeting with Professor Perry, I summarised relevant literature including Perry's various books and articles, and particularly '*From theory to practice: Strategies for applying public service motivation*',³ '*Public service motivation research: Lessons for practice*',⁴ and '*Managing organizations to sustain passion for public service*'.⁵ This paper then tries to connect these findings with the New Zealand context and practice. While the intention is to summarise, share, and apply Perry's work for discussion within Te Kawa Mataaho, any errors or misinterpretations are my own.

In the past 30 years, there has been extensive empirical study into the antecedents, influences, and effects of public service motivation, as well as two related constructs: altruism and prosocial motivation. This paper aims to canvass a range of possible actions to preserve, protect and nurture the spirit of service that public servants bring to their work. Findings listed in this introduction are substantiated at relevant points during the text, with reference to the hundreds of studies conducted in this area since 1990.

The bright side of a spirit of service to the community

The evidence that a spirit of service to the community contributes to positive workplace behaviours is strong and largely consistent across many cultures. Key benefits include:

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- attraction to the public service,
- job performance,
- ethical behaviour,
- collaboration,
- innovative behaviour,
- discretionary effort,
- employee engagement,
- job satisfaction,
- reduced absenteeism, and
- increased employee retention.

These benefits should help public servants to deliver better service and produce better outcomes for New Zealanders, while displaying the integrity, values, and behaviours that contribute to a public service that New Zealanders trust and can be proud of.

The dark side of a spirit of service to the community

While most literature on public service motivation has focused on the benefits to organisations and to the public, there are several critiques and potential downsides from indiscriminate promotion of a spirit of service to the community, canvassed in this paper and summarised below:

- reduced diversity of thought,
- a rigid set of values that creates a barrier to inclusion,
- surface acting and inauthenticity,
- reactionary cynicism,
- emotional labour,
- labour exploitation, and
- empathetic or ethical rule breaking

These critiques are not downsides to a spirit of service itself, but to the misapplication of programmes designed to promote or leverage a spirit of service. In applying the tactics canvassed in this paper, it is important for us to be aware of and guard against potential unintended consequence.

Tactics for supporting a spirit of service to the community

This paper describes numerous tactics for supporting a spirit of service to the community that Te Kawa Mataaho may wish to consider in leading the system. It notes where these tactics are supported by evidence but does not directly assess their suitability for use in the New Zealand context. Of note, Perry has also done significant work on remuneration systems that support a spirit of service to the community, but these have not been included in this paper because they are outside the scope of interventions currently being considered by the Commission.

Several of the leading commentators on public service motivation note that it is much easier to find people with a spirit of service to the community than it is to change the motivations of existing staff.^{6,7,8} However, once in the public service, the spirit of service that public servants bring to their work can be influenced by environmental factors, both deliberate and accidental. Different authors have proposed lists of actions that leaders can take to support a spirit of service,^{9,10,11} summarised below and explained in subsequent chapters:

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- Selecting for a spirit of service to the community
 - Project organisational images to attract high public service motivation prospects,
 - Shape job advertising to emphasise mission and public values,
 - Use realistic job previews so both parties can assess person-role/person-organisation fit,
 - Screen in candidates with high public service motivation, and
 - Screen out candidates likely to discourage prosocial orientations in others.
- Cultivating public service values
 - Establish shared principles and values,
 - Define norms in a way that allows for both belonging and difference (inclusion),
 - Design onboarding to align organisational and employee public service values,
 - Create mentoring partnerships to share and reinforce public service values, and
 - Implement training programmes that improve understanding of public service values and ethical competencies among public servants.
- Promoting leaders who display a spirit of service to the community
 - De-emphasise competency in 'managing up' in favour of managing down and out,
 - Use 360-degree feedback to build more complete perspectives of candidate values and behaviours,
 - Prefer to promote from within as this reduces information asymmetries,
 - Create positive images of ethical leadership and celebrate ethical role models, and
 - De-emphasise people-leadership as the only aspirational career path, and provide opportunities for non-people leaders to lead culture.
- Developing leaders who communicate and model public service values
 - Clearly articulate mission and vision,
 - Strengthen employee mission valence,
 - Develop lines of sight to ultimate aspirations,
 - Develop leadership styles that inspire followers,
 - Embrace servant leadership to empower followers, and
 - Acknowledge followers' worth and collective efficacy.
- Leveraging the meaningfulness of public work
 - Design work to allow for direct contact between employees and service beneficiaries,
 - Use self-persuasion or other self-administered interventions,
 - Engage in storytelling,
 - Incorporate job crafting to increase meaningfulness, and
 - Offer career counselling to maximise mission valence.
- Creating a supportive work environment
 - Cultivate a sense of relatedness and team,
 - Establish robust learning and growth opportunities,
 - Where possible, provide employees with a choice of assignments,
 - Enable bounded employee autonomy, innovation, and play, and
 - Promote subjective career success.

Risks that may diminish a spirit of service to the community

The list above describes many potential interventions to support a spirit of service to the community. Other research has considered the risks to a spirit of service to the community: what behaviours, activities, or events would cause the spirit of service that public servants bring to their work to be

diminished? Based on the literature canvassed in this paper, and subsequent discussions with Professor Perry, several risks are summarised below:

- The presence of public servants with strong perceived self-interest,
- Communication that emphasises self-interest and extrinsic incentives on public servants,
- High-powered incentives that link performance with pecuniary rewards,
- Poor public perception of public servants and agencies,
- Perceptions that selection and advancement is not based on merit,
- Blurred distinctions between political and administrative spheres, politicisation of the public service,
- Observed unethical behaviour of other public servants,
- ‘Red tape’ and bureaucratic impediments to effectiveness,
- Frustration with barriers to implementation, wasted effort, abandoned reforms, and
- Misalignment between the mission of the organisation and the values of the individual.

When public servants lose their spirit of service to the community, it may be difficult to restore. When public servants lose faith in the public service as a place for them to display their spirit of service to the community, they may leave the public service, and be difficult to re-attract.

Outline

This paper is organised in several chapters following this introduction.

- Chapter 2 explores the history of a spirit of service to the community in New Zealand.
- Chapter 3 notes that a spirit of service to the community is not an academic construct, and that in order to draw on relevant evidence we must explore similarities and overlap with related theories.
- Chapters 4 to 9 each explore a group of tactics for supporting a spirit of service to the community:
 - selecting for a spirit of service to the community,
 - providing opportunities for newcomers to learn public service values,
 - promoting leaders who display a spirit of service to the community,
 - developing leaders who communicate and model public service values,
 - leveraging the meaningfulness of public work, and
 - creating a supportive work environment.
- Chapter 10 describes how progress on promoting a spirit of service to the community can be sustained and institutionalised.

2. A Spirit of Service in New Zealand

- Writings by Māori authors describe service to community as a key concept in te ao Māori.
- A 'spirit of service to the community' first appeared in legislation in 1962.
- New Public Management emphasised rational self-maximisation by public servants.
- Social theories tend to be self-fulfilling, as theory influences language and then behaviour.
- A spirit of service to the community has undergone renewed interest and emphasis since 2016.

Service is not a new concept and has a long history in New Zealand. Service to whānau, hapū, iwi, and whenua is described as an important kaupapa in te ao Māori in writings by Māori authors. Service is also a longstanding value in many other traditions. A spirit of service to the community has featured in New Zealand public service legislation since 1962 but taken on additional prominence in the New Zealand public service since 2016, following several decades where other motivations had been emphasised.

Te Hāpai Hapori

In preparing this discussion document, I sought to include some exploration of how te ao Māori concepts may relate. It didn't seem right to start the history of service in New Zealand with the State Services Act of 1962. Literature on governance and public administration have privileged colonial systems and sought to minimise indigenous knowledge and practices. Making sense of a spirit of service to the community in New Zealand without te ao Māori arguably represents further colonisation.¹² However, thematising Māori concepts as a non-Māori author is highly problematic and can easily become instances of cultural appropriation. This paper therefore acknowledges the past and present material and epistemic dispossessions against Māori people, and further acknowledges the limitations of my understanding of concepts of service or *Te Hāpai Hapori* in te ao Māori.

Writings by Māori authors make mention of the importance of membership of a collective or community, of relationships with others, and of responsibilities owed by the individual to the collective. Justice Joe Williams writes "In traditional Māori society, the individual was important as a member of a collective. The individual identity was defined through that individual's relationships with others. It follows that tikanga Māori emphasised the responsibility owed by the individual to the collective. No rights were ensured if the mutuality and reciprocity of responsibilities were not understood and fulfilled."¹³

Other authors related these responsibilities that are morally owed to the collective to the concept of manaakitanga. Hirini Moko Mead writes: "All tikanga are underpinned by the high value placed upon manaakitanga – nurturing relationships, looking after people, and being very careful about how others are treated."¹⁴ Similarly, Brannelly and colleagues remark: "Manaakitanga may be defined as the act of providing hospitality and encompasses values such as generosity and kindness, and responsibility to look after people" and further "the Māori term manaakitanga forms the basis of all well-intentioned human interaction. Manaakitanga refers to the respecting of the other (living, dead, nonhuman ...), to nurturing and fostering relationships and treating the other with care and respect."¹⁵

Mead defines "he tangata aroha ki te tangata" as: "a person who is concerned about people and wants to help wherever possible. The marae might be a focus of their life, and they are always helping those in need, always present at tangihanga and other collective events."¹⁶ These sentiments are echoed by Fiona Cram who describes the concept of "mahi aroha", that is, "essential work undertaken out of a

love for the people”,¹⁷ and Cleve Barlow further explains mahi aroha: “A person who has aroha for another expresses genuine concern towards them and acts with their welfare in mind...It is the act of love that adds quality and meaning to life.”¹⁸

History of ‘spirit of service’ in legislation

The first use of the phrase ‘a spirit of service to the community’ seems to be by Edgar Gladden in his 1945 monograph *‘The civil service: Its problems and future’*. Gladden described the core requirements of the public service as that it be “impartially selected, administratively competent, politically neutral, and imbued with a spirit of service to the community” (emphasis added).¹⁹ This phrase was subsequently adopted in New Zealand’s 1962 State Services Act (in the long title), and in the 1988 State Sector Act (in the purpose statement). A spirit of service to the community is given additional prominence in the Public Service Act 2020:

‘Section 13: Spirit of service to community

(1) The fundamental characteristic of the public service is acting with a spirit of service to the community.

(2) Public service leaders, interdepartmental executive boards, boards of interdepartmental ventures, and boards of Crown agents must preserve, protect, and nurture the spirit of service to the community that public service employees bring to their work.’

New Public Management

This focus on a spirit of service to the community in New Zealand over recent years stands in stark contrast to the assumptions of the previous decades. The reforms of the late 1980s, primarily the State Sector Act 1988 and Public Finance Act 1989, assumed that public servants were motivated primarily by self-interest. Treasury officials at the time were influenced by the work of ‘New Institutional’ economists like O.E Williamson in how they thought of the relationship between ministers and public servants as analogous to market transactions in the private sector.²⁰ Over the following decades, New Zealand public administration discourse often focused more on ‘incentives’ than moral duty.²¹ Policies were subsequently designed that would align the presumed self-maximising incentives of public servants with the goals of ministers.^{22,23}

Social science theories tend to become both self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating.²⁴ Theory, in this case of public servants as self-interested and extrinsically motivated, shapes institutional designs and management behaviours. If a system is designed around assumptions of extrinsic motivations, then the extrinsically motivated will rise to the top. In addition, people who would otherwise have been intrinsically motivated will be encouraged to focus on incentives and extrinsic rewards.

Rebirth

Beginning in 2016, there has been a renewed interest in how public servants are motivated by a spirit of service to the community. In his role as State Services Commissioner, Peter Hughes began talking about a spirit of service to the community in his speeches, and with his colleagues around the State Sector Leadership Team and now Public Service Leadership Team table. Successive Public Service Leadership Group hui asked senior public servants to reflect on their own spirit of service. The Spirit of Service Awards celebrated the selflessness of public servants. Te Kawa Mataaho social media posts highlight examples of the spirit of service. The Public Service Act 2020 identified the spirit of service as the fundamental characteristic of the public service, and charged public service leaders with preserving, protecting, and nurturing this spirit. References to a spirit of service are prominent across Te Kawa Mataaho document.

3. A Spirit of Service in Theory

- 'A spirit of service to the community' is primarily used in New Zealand and has no precise definition, but is related to public service motivation, altruism, and prosocial motivation.
- Public service motivation is modified by an individuals' congruence with organisational mission and values, organisational identification, and the organisation's internal and external reputation.
- Public service motivation is more prevalent in public organisations due to self-sorting.
- Individuals tend to be more altruistic when their basic psychological needs are met.
- A sense of mission increases effort, persistence, and innovation in pursuing goals.

'A spirit of service to the community' is not defined in legislation nor in any standards or guidance issued by the Commission. One peculiarity of 'a spirit of service' is that, while we all agree with it and feel aligned to it at a general level, it means different things to different people. It has something to do with intrinsic motivation, or altruism, or that our work is worthwhile. Or that we act with integrity, or with empathy, or with compassion.²⁵ Testimonials at the 2017 Leaders Summit revealed some common themes, but also subtle differences.²⁶ This was reinforced by a 2018 ANZSOG survey of 1500 New Zealand public servants; most public servants identify strongly with a spirit of service, while ascribing to it a range of meanings.²⁷ A spirit of service to the community is perhaps best understood as a 'boundary object' – a concept that has plasticity of meaning to allow different interpretations, while allowing sufficient commonality to form the basis of agreement.^{28,29} In his Paterson Oration, Peter Hughes described both this commonality and plasticity: "While we might each talk about it in different ways, at some level I think we're all talking about the same thing."³⁰ Boundary objects benefit from their plasticity – too much definition reveals divisions and disagreement.

One aspect of this difference can be how public servants relate to the beneficiaries of that service at different levels. As Brewer and colleagues note, some people relate to helping individuals ('Samaritans'); some to helping communities ('communitarians'), others to making New Zealand a better place ('patriots'), and others still to helping all people ('humanitarians').³¹

Peter Hughes defined a spirit of service to the community in 2019:

"The first thing is putting the needs of others first. It's about opening our hearts, minds and energies to the needs of others. It's about being totally focused on the customer, client or citizen.

Secondly, it's about bringing the right attitude to that. Not that we are subservient in any way, but we approach our work with humility and the desire to serve others, to be of service to others.

Finally, it's absolutely about having a higher purpose. It's about being motivated by something bigger than ourselves. The desire to use our skills and our talents to make our world, and within it our country, our families, our communities, a better place."

The phrase 'a spirit of service to the community' is commonly used in New Zealand but used less frequently overseas. In exploring how international research can help New Zealand public servants to preserve, protect, and nurture the spirit of service that public servants bring to their work, it is useful to draw from related constructs: public service motivation, altruism, and prosocial motivation.

Public administration theory has "long emphasised the distinctive character and motives associated with public institutions."³² Early theorists, like Woodrow Wilson³³ and Max Weber³⁴ noted the ethic of duty and responsibility that animated public servants. The 1940s, 50s and 60s saw increased attention

paid to the motivations of public servants^{35,36,37} before the formalisation of motivational theory and the beginnings of empirical research.^{38,39,40,41}

In 1982, Perry and Porter observed that the literature on motivation primarily focused on private sector employees.⁴² The Civil Service Reform Act 1978 (US) had attempted to transport lessons on motivation from the private sector, primarily merit pay and performance specification. By 1982, these had proven ineffective at best, and destructive at worst, and so Perry began a 40-year exploration for how and why motivations in the public sector differ.

Public service motivation

Perry and Wise first defined 'public service motivation' in 1990.⁴³ Unlike Gladden's 'spirit of service', which was intended as a normative ideal, Public Service Motivation was intended as a description of the motivations that public servants had, that were distinctive to the public service or more prevalent there. Public service motivation was originally assessed through survey data of US public servants, and was demonstrated to have four components:

- attraction to public policy making,
- civic duty/commitment to the public interest,
- compassion, and
- self-sacrifice.⁴⁴

Subsequent study across 12 countries, including both western and non-western jurisdictions, revealed that these four components were remarkably stable between cultures and contexts. International studies have led to a slight revision of the original four components:

- attraction to public participation,
- commitment to public values,
- compassion, and
- self-sacrifice.⁴⁵

There have been well over 400 studies on public service motivation.^{46,47} These studies demonstrate that public service motivation is associated with several positive workplace outcomes, as described in the following paragraphs.

Individuals with high public service motivation are more attracted to jobs in the public service. This provides us with a recruitment advantage in attracting talent. Once individuals are in the public service, public service motivation is correlated with employee engagement and increased job satisfaction. In turn, these are associated with reduced absenteeism, and improved retention.

Public service motivation is positively correlated with job performance, as defined and measured in a variety of ways. This is because public service motivated employees apply more effort in their work, both in the tasks that are specified and in 'discretionary effort', going above and beyond what is required. Sometimes going 'above and beyond' involves inventing new solutions to overcome barriers and make a positive difference in society, and public service motivation is correlated with innovation.

They are more likely to behave honestly and ethically, due to an alignment of personal and organisational values. They are likely to demonstrate organisational citizenship behaviour, supporting others in their organisation and other organisations to achieve public missions.

It is important to note that public service motivation literature begins from the question of what are the motives that distinguish public servants, and not, as in most employee motivation literature, what

are the behaviours that managers are seeking to motivate. Management literature suggests that the main behaviours that managers seek to motivate are to:

- join and sustain employment;
- fulfil expectations of coworkers, supervisors, external stakeholders associated with the mission of the organisation; and
- motivate innovative and spontaneous activity beyond role expectations.⁴⁸

In each case, there is now robust empirical evidence that public service motivation supports the behaviours that help public agencies to perform. Thus, public service motivation (and a spirit of service to the community) is both descriptive and normative: it describes the motivations that are **characteristic of** public servants, as described by Perry and Wise,⁴⁹ and the motivations of **an ideal** public service, as originally described by Gladden.⁵⁰

Even as far back as 1990, Perry and Wise reported that public service motivation is influenced by social, political, and institutional context, and that a failure by the organisation to recognise the altruistic motivations of public servants could lead to discouragement, diminishment of public service motivation, or exit from the public service.⁵¹ That is, public service motivation is influenced by external factors, and can be preserved, protected and nurtured, or else diminished, by different practices.

Altruism

Altruism refers to acting with the goal of benefitting another. There was a trend in economics, sociology, and sociobiology/evolutionary psychology literature through the 1970s and early 1980s that contended that apparent altruism was, in fact, reflective of egoistic motives.⁵² The claim was that what individuals perceived as altruism was actually motivated by a desire to belong, to be praised, or to be rewarded (see: ‘social exchange theory’).⁵³ More recent theory and evidence suggests that true altruism does exist, and is part of human nature.⁵⁴ Humans are a cooperative species that has flourished because of the willingness of its community members to act for the benefit of others.

Evolutionary biologists propose alternate reasons for why altruistic behaviours may have persisted in the human species, even if these reasons were not part of the conscious reasoning of the individual: ‘kin selection’ suggests that individuals are more altruistic toward relatives because this increases the chance of their genetic material being passed down;⁵⁵ ‘vested interests’ suggests people are likely to be more successful (genetically) if they are part of a group that is successful and so engage in apparent altruism in order to contribute to the overall success of the group;⁵⁶ ‘reciprocal altruism’ suggests that altruistic behaviour by an individual is likely to increase altruistic behaviour by others in the group, ultimately benefitting the initiator;⁵⁷ and ‘costly signalling’ describes situations where the act of altruism signals resource availability and therefore mate suitability.⁵⁸

Psychologist Daniel Batson distinguished between four motives for altruistic behaviour: behaviour that ultimately benefits the self (‘egoism’, as predicted by social exchange theory), behaviour for the purpose of benefiting the other person (‘individual altruism’, or ‘empathetic altruism’), behaviour for the purpose of benefitting a group (‘collectivism’), and behaviour to uphold a moral principle (‘principlism’).⁵⁹

While altruism research is often focused on altruism outside the workplace – Samaritans, volunteerism, etc. – is it sometimes used in a workplace and public administration context to refer to acts of selflessness.^{60,61,62,63} Altruism therefore describes a behaviour that exists inside and outside the public service, and that overlaps with spirit of service and public service motivation. Public service motivation has been described as “a general altruistic motivation”⁶⁴ and a “particular form of

altruism.”⁶⁵ This paper uses altruism research where useful to inform the application and management of a spirit of service.

Prosocial motivation

A related construct is prosocial motivation, defined as “the desire to expend effort to benefit other people.”⁶⁶ While most research on public service motivation has been focused on the understanding the spirit of service to the community that public servants bring to their work,⁶⁷ research on prosocial motivation has focused on how employees can be motivated to “care about contributing to other people and to the organisation.”⁶⁸ Another distinction is that literature on public service motivation has tended to focus on societal altruism (when employees want to contribute to social outcomes), whereas prosocial motivation research has focused on organisational citizenship behaviour (when employees help each other without over promise of reward) and interpersonal altruism (when employees seek to help individuals or groups in one’s direct contact).⁶⁹ Nonetheless, prosocial motivation and public service motivation overlap with each other, and each have some similarities with, or are components of, a spirit of service to the community.

As described above, a spirit of service to the community is a unifying concept that animates all public servants. One could imagine the spirit of service of public servants in different roles being more or less aligned to aspects of public service motivation, altruism, and prosocial motivation. For example, public servants involved in front line service delivery might be animated by interpersonal altruism, policy analysts animated by societal altruism, and back-office staff animated by organisational citizenship behaviour as the path through which they enable others to improve outcomes for New Zealanders.

Related constructs

A spirit of service to the community, public service motivation, altruism, and prosocial motivation help explain our attitudes to people. There are several related constructs that help explain our attitudes toward institutions.

‘Mission valence’ refers to “an employee’s perceptions of the attractiveness or salience of an organisation’s purpose or social contribution.”⁷⁰ Mission valence helps explain why individuals who demonstrate public service motivation are attracted to specific public service organisations. Mission valence literature suggests that public servants will demonstrate more public service motivation if they feel aligned to the goals of their organisation. This will become particularly relevant in later sections of this paper in the context of person-organisation fit, and the recommendation to make mission-oriented career counselling available to public service employees.

‘Social identity’ refers to the part of our self-identity that is related to our membership in groups. Several aspects of social identity contribute to our pride as public servants and are positively correlated with public service motivation: organisational identification, identity salience, and organisational prestige. ‘Organisational identification’ is defined as “the spirit driving individuals to take pride in being recognised as part of an organisation.”⁷¹ Organisational identification is associated with employee engagement, job satisfaction, and employee retention. However, strong organisational identification can lead to stress and depression when the organisation does not have a positive image in the external environment⁷² – this will become important later in this paper when public service motivation is associated with emotional labour and the potential for burnout.

‘Identity salience’ refers to the relative importance of different group memberships.⁷³ An individual may be part of many groups in a personal or professional capacity. Professionally, an individual might identify with their job title, profession, team, agency, or with the public service overall. The ‘unified public service’ concept that informed the creation of the Public Service Act aimed to strengthen the

salience of the public service identity.^{74,75} A strong unified public service identity is likely to improve cooperation between departments. The order, or relative importance, of each group membership is important.⁷⁶ Groups with a 'differentiated group identity', in which individuals identify more with a subgroup than with the whole group, were unable to effectively manage common pool resources. Conversely, those with a stronger 'superordinate group identity', where individuals identify more strongly with the whole than with the subgroups, were able to manage resources more effectively. Uneven distribution within a group was associated with higher charity concern (those with more helping those with less) and lower jealousy, when compared with uneven distribution between members of different groups.⁷⁷ These studies suggest that how we identify, and with whom, will affect our ability to work with others and share resources.

'Organisational prestige' refers to the understanding of employees about the views of people outside the organisation,⁷⁸ shown to be a major determinant of employees' attitudes and behaviours.⁷⁹ Some researchers distinguish between the perceived organisational identity (how employees or candidates view the organisation) and construed organisational identity (how they believe the public views the organisation) and note that both contribute independently to organisational identification.⁸⁰ Organisational prestige is positively associated with public service motivation⁸¹ - this suggests that how we talk about public service and public service departments, both internally and externally, can reinforce or diminish the spirit of service that public servants bring to their work.

This cluster of related constructs suggests that the relationship between role and motivation is not a simple one. Individuals are motivated by making a difference, and care that the role is aligned to that goal, but their motivation is also affected by how they think about their organisation, and how they perceive the public thinks about that organisation.⁸²

Theoretical foundations

In exploring how to preserve, protect and nurture a spirit of service to the community, we must explore and draw inferences from related academic constructs described above. For the purpose of this paper we consider a spirit of service to the community, public service motivation, altruism, and prosocial motivation to have similar meanings, and will be used somewhat interchangeably. Organisational identity, identity salience, organisational prestige, and mission valence are related or supporting constructs that help explain the relationship between motivations and public service practices.

Public service motivation, altruism, and prosocial motivation research are in turn informed by underlying theory. This theory helps explain **why** people are motivated by a spirit of service to the community, **why** those people often choose to work in the public service, and **how** their employment context can affect their motivations. In a review of public service motivation literature, Gordon Abner and colleagues suggest that there are three main clusters of relevant literature:

- predisposition-opportunity theory (including attraction-selection-attrition and person-organisation fit);
- self-determination theory (including motivational crowding); and,
- goal theory.⁸³

Predisposition opportunity theory

'Predisposition-opportunity theory' seeks to answer the question of why do people contribute varying amounts to their organisations?⁸⁴ This theory conceives of individuals having three types of social motives: rational motives (self-interest), normative conformity (a desire to belong and confirm to group norms), and affective bonding (emotional or intrinsic responses). Predisposition-opportunity

theory therefore assumes that the varying effort that individuals contribute to an organisation is based upon the opportunity that the role provides to fulfil those social motives.

As noted earlier, early public service motivation literature sought to answer the question: what are the unique motivations of public servants? This question assumes that some mechanism results in the sorting of individuals with certain predispositions into certain employment settings. Attraction-selection-attrition theory observes that these three dynamic processes determine the cohort of employees in an organisation.⁸⁵ Prospective employees make judgements about the fit between their predispositions and the organisation's goals, structures, processes, and culture. Organisations then select people with the attributes that they (consciously or unconsciously) desire. People then leave the organisation if they don't fit. A consequence is organisations tend to feature increasingly homogenous personalities over time.

Predisposition-opportunity theory and attraction-selection-attrition theory are broadly related to person-organisation fit or person-environment theory, that generally explore the effects of congruence (or 'fit') between an individual and the environment in which they are situated (in this case, their employment). The relationship between an individual's public service motivation and their job satisfaction is mediated by this congruence.

Public service motivation is concerned with motivations that are more prevalent in public institutions, but this does not explain whether the higher public service motivation is associated with the role or the organisation. Some empirical study suggests that the work itself is more influential than whether the work is in the public or private sector.⁸⁶ Other research has found that once person-job fit was controlled for, public service motivation had no significant effect on person-organisation fit.⁸⁷ People care more about being a nurse, a social worker, or a teacher, than whether their organisation is part of this thing we call the public service.

Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory focuses on how different types of motives affect an individual's motivation to act.⁸⁸ Within the Commission we have tended to categorise motivations as either intrinsic or extrinsic, but self-determination theory instead suggests a continuum from controlled to autonomous:

- "Amotivation: A state in which the individual lacks any intention to act, that is, the absence of motivation.
- External regulation: The least autonomous type of extrinsic motivation. It is a response to external demands, which may include externally imposed rewards.
- Introjected regulation: Acting because of pressure as a way to avoid guilt or to maintain self-esteem.
- Identification: An individual acts out of identification with the importance of a behaviour, thereby accepting it as his or her own.
- Integration: The individual acts because the action is congruent with his or her own values and needs, that is, internalised and integrated.
- Intrinsic: Doing an activity for its inherent enjoyment or satisfaction rather than a separable consequence."⁸⁹

Several theorists propose different categories of psychological needs that motivate an individual's behaviour, however, the basic conclusion of these different theories is that individual motivations change as certain psychological needs are met.^{90,91} A spirit of service to the community is likely to be maximised as individuals fulfil their basic needs of autonomy, competency, and belonging.⁹²

The inverse is also likely to be true. ‘Motivational-crowding theory’ suggests that more autonomous motivations tend to be displaced by more controlled motivations.⁹³ Individuals who are encouraged by their environment to be focused on pay, power, or prestige, will tend to be less motivated by a spirit of service.

Goal theory

Goal theory suggests that motivation is purposeful – it is less concerned with why people are motivated and more concerned with how motivation influences behaviour and performance.⁹⁴ Individuals are more committed to achieving a goal if they perceive that goal as meaningful, achievable, and that their efforts will be instrumental in whether those goals are achieved. Goal theory has been applied to the study of public servant behaviour through the construct of mission valence (described above); individuals who are energised by their organisation’s mission will put greater effort into their work.⁹⁵

These different theories are, to some degree, mutually reinforcing. Selecting a workforce with a stronger spirit of service to the community will result in value congruence, a reduction in principal-agent problems, and in increase in public service identification. When individual and organisational values are aligned, public servants are likely to be stimulated by identification and integration (higher order extrinsic motivations from self-determination theory). This reduces the need for monitoring, and allows for greater employee autonomy. And identification with the public service improves the quality of effort applied, and leads to public servants feeling a sense of ownership of the goals of the organisation.⁹⁶

4. Selecting for a Spirit of Service to the Community

- Project organisational images to attract high public service motivation prospects.
- Shape job advertising to emphasise mission and public values.
- Use realistic job previews so both parties can assess person-role/person-organisation fit.
- Screen in candidates with high public service motivation.
- Screen out candidates likely to discourage prosocial orientations in others.

A key component of the spirit of service clause in the Public Service Act 2020 is that chief executives are to preserve, protect, and nurture the spirit of service that public servants bring to their work. This implies that a spirit of service is not something that the public service creates in people, but something that they already have. Existing public servants are therefore assumed to have selected the public service as a place to work in order to express their spirit of service, and/or the public service has selected them because of the motivations they display (see predisposition-opportunity theory).

The overwhelming finding of 40 years of public service motivation research is that the best way to maximise a spirit of service is to select individuals to work in the public service whose spirit of service is already high. Perry points to this simple summary by Steve Kelman: “If you want to harness the ability of public service motivation to improve the performance of your employees, you need to be looking for people with that motivation to join your organisation in the first place.”⁹⁷

Perry identifies several benefits to selecting for high spirit of service individuals:

- “The predispositions of employees are likely to be better aligned with the types of incentives offered by the organisation;
- The person selected is more likely to fit the job and team;
- The person selected is likely to be a good fit for the organisation;
- Employee motives are more likely to reflect identification or integration with the organisation’s values; and
- Employees are likely to have greater commitment to goals embedded in their job and organisation.”⁹⁸

Despite this, public service motivation had no effect on the ratings of cover letters by US human resource professionals.⁹⁹ So what then are the practical steps that could be taken to improve the selection of public servants who are motivated by a spirit of service to the community? Research supports four categories of action:

- “project attractive missions and organisational images to prospects;
- tailor position descriptions and advertising to emphasise mission and public values;
- screen in candidates with high public service motivation;
- and screen out candidates with motivations that crowd out intrinsic or prosocial orientations.”¹⁰⁰

Project attractive missions and organisational images to prospects

Work by Grindle¹⁰¹ and Goodsell¹⁰² suggests 9 features of an attractive organisational mission for public service organisations, combined in the table below.

System requirements	Prime Qualities	Essential Elaborations	Temporal Aspects
A Purposive Aura	1. A central mission purpose permeates the agency	2. The societal need met by the mission is seen as urgent	3. Has a distinctive reputation based on achievement
Internal Commitment	4. Agency personnel are intrinsically motivated	5. Agency culture institutionalises the belief system	6. Agency history is known and celebrated
Sustaining Features	7. Beliefs are open to contestation and opposition	8. Qualified policy autonomy to permit appropriate change	9. Agency renewal and learn are ongoing

A second model¹⁰³ suggests that there are two aspects of an organisations image that influence whether that organisation will be attractive to individuals with a strong spirit of service to the community: the perceived organisational identity, or how they view the organisation, and the construed external identity, or how they believe the public views that organisation. To support this view, Perry notes several examples of organisations with negative public identities (US Inland Revenue Service and Federal Bureau of Prisons) that have at various times been very attractive to altruistically motivated staff because they have been able to communicate clear images about their missions, how these missions advance outcomes valued by society, and the distinctiveness of what the organisation contributes.¹⁰⁴

Tailor position descriptions and advertising to emphasise mission and public values

Various studies have demonstrated that job advertisements are an underutilised tool for shaping public organisational images.^{105,106} These studies examined job advertisements in the US, Denmark, and the Netherlands, and found that public employers rarely emphasise elements associated with a spirit of service to the community, like service to citizens or the social significance of the work. Such elements were more common in the 1960s and 70s but declined in popularity during the New Public Management movement.¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, not only are altruistically-motivated individuals attracted to job advertisements that emphasise public interest,¹⁰⁸ self-interested individuals are repelled by branding relating to a spirit of service.¹⁰⁹ Experimental studies found that, while both approaches were effective, inspirational messages about job tasks were better attractors than messages focused on organisational mission.¹¹⁰

One successful case study is the city of San Francisco. In 2016, the city council started using a ‘choose purpose’ slogan to court ICT professionals who were willing to give up a higher-paying job for one that they found meaningful.¹¹¹ Similar campaigns saw increases in applications from spirit of service motivated candidates in the city of Minneapolis and the German Federal Armed Services.¹¹² There is now a significant body of research suggesting a trade-off between a job’s meaningfulness and the remuneration that individuals are willing to accept.^{113,114,115,116}

Screen in candidates with high public service motivation

Let’s say that the above approaches have been successful, and there is a wide pool of prosocially-motivated candidates applying for roles in the public service. How do we ensure that we’re selecting

the right people? Perry suggests three tactics: use screening processes that are predictive of a spirit of service; use situational interviews to identify candidates willing to engage in behaviours epitomising a spirit of service to the community; and use validated tests that predict a predisposition toward service.¹¹⁷ Selecting for a spirit of service to the community is consistent with a broader trend in human resource management, hiring for fit with the organisation's values, not merely for the technical competencies of the job.

Many countries, though not New Zealand, have institutionalised examination processes for screening public service candidates. Some New Zealand agencies have used psychometric testing, but there have been concerns raised as to their predictive value and cultural bias. If existing spirit of service survey instruments, like those used in Te Taunaki the Public Service Census, were used in job selection processes, we could expect to see gaming as applicants adjust their responses based on social desirability cues. More recent work has explored whether personality testing could be used as a proxy for spirit of service; a spirit of service is positively correlated with honesty, humility, emotionality, agreeableness, and openness to experience, and negatively to conscientiousness, but these findings are more suggestive than definitive.¹¹⁸

'Implicit social cognition tests' or 'implicit association tests' are other potential tools for screening candidates. These tests are designed to pair categories of information in order to test how a candidate's sense of self is related to different concepts. In an implicit association test designed to measure prosocial motivation, one study paired the categories 'me' and 'not me' with concepts associated with 'service' ('compassion', 'duty', 'give', 'helping') and 'profit' ('gain', 'win', 'money', 'take', and 'capitalise').¹¹⁹ One advantage of implicit association tests is that they may be more difficult to game than other screening processes, although the overall efficacy of such approaches is still unknown.

A more mature tool for screening in candidates with high public service motivation is biographical data. Biographical data is already one of the best predictors of employee performance and turnover¹²⁰ and can be used to predict altruism and prosocial behaviour.¹²¹ One study found that people with a spirit of service were more likely to have volunteered for a charitable organisation, but were no more likely to engage in philanthropy.¹²² However, in the US, selecting for volunteerism had a negative effect on ethnic diversity.¹²³

Behavioural-based interview questions, like those used in the New Zealand public service, can be tailored to help explore a candidate's motives and orientation toward others. Perry suggested the following questions as examples of behavioural questions likely to elicit information about the spirit of service that candidates would bring to their work:

- "Tell me about a time when you really identified with an organisation's values and goals.
- Talk about a time when you made a personal sacrifice for an organisation for which you worked previously.
- Tell me about how you helped a citizen or someone outside your organisation in a prior job.
- Talk about a time when you gave back more than you got in return.
- Talk about how your participation in an organisation made it better.
- Tell me about the last time you volunteered to do something extra."¹²⁴

Screen out candidates likely to discourage prosocial orientations in others.

In order to build a public service cohort that has a high spirit of service to the community, it is necessary not only to identify and select thus motivated candidates; selfish and extrinsically motivated

candidates must be screened out.¹²⁵ The presence of high or low public service motivation individuals impacts the motivations of others in the workplace.

One study explored the consequences of offering lower remuneration to assess the willingness of participants to opt for mission-oriented jobs.¹²⁶ While this did have some predictive value in identifying candidates with a spirit of service to the community, it had several negative consequences, including that it also selected for candidates that perceived themselves as less competent (and therefore had less opportunity to earn more elsewhere) and also worked against activities designed to increase public service diversity (because individuals from less-privileged backgrounds often had personal or family-related commitments). Further, leveraging the altruistic motivations of public servants to perform more work than they are compensated for has been criticised as a form of exploitation.¹²⁷ Other methods, described below, still improved the selection of prosocially-minded candidates without these negative effects.

As honesty is positively associated with a spirit of service to the community, several studies have explored screening tests for honesty.^{128,129,130,131} One study demonstrated the use of a test with an obvious opportunity for cheating, and then observed which candidates opted not to cheat when given the opportunity.¹³² A reproduction study offered evidence that such tests had strong cross-cultural validity.¹³³ However, authors cautioned that while such methods could be readily applied in an experimental setting, if they were institutionalised they would be more likely to be gamed.¹³⁴

(Note: While tests for honesty have strong cross-cultural validity, the implications of this honesty depend on context. In high-corruption countries, dishonest candidates were more likely to prefer careers in the public service, whereas in low corruption countries there was a strong correlation between honesty and wanting to work in the public service.¹³⁵ As a country with low levels of corruption, New Zealand public servants are likely to score highly on tests for honesty.)

Another tool suggested by Perry was the use of realistic job previews as a selection and self-selection tool. This is based on the theory that the values of the organisation and prospective employees inform whether an organisation and candidate are well-matched.¹³⁶ Realistic job previews offer the candidate a look at what working for that organisation entails, looking at things like the tasks of an average day, and the context and challenges the organisation faces. These have been used for some time by the US Office of Personnel Management as a tool for candidate self-evaluation. Realistic job previews improve the accuracy of job expectations and thereby increase organisational commitment, job satisfaction, performance, and retention.^{137,138,139} Realistic job previews include both positive and negative aspects of the job to enhance the motivational fit of their staff, and may include videos, documents, meetings with current employers or stakeholders, and structure observation. Several agencies in other jurisdictions have made their realistic job previews publicly available online.^{140,141,142,143} Realistic job previews can be extended through temporary placements and internships, and in countries where employment law allows, probationary employment. Such opportunities provide an opportunity for extended mutual evaluation.

Perry observed that that, in general, public agencies around the world tend to underinvest in recruiting and selecting the right people. He suggested that managers be trained and then held accountable for assessing value alignment in candidates.¹⁴⁴

5. Cultivating Public Service Values

- Establish shared principles and values.
- Define norms in a way that allows for both belonging and difference.
- Design onboarding to align organisational and employee values.
- Create mentoring partnerships to share and reinforce public service values.
- Implement training programmes that improve understanding of public service values and ethical competencies among public servants.

The previous section emphasised the importance of recruiting and attracting staff who are motivated by a spirit of service to the community. It is much easier to recruit public servants who already bring a spirit of service to their work than it is to support or encourage public servants to have this motivation. Additionally, the presence of thus motivated public servants also encourages a spirit of service among their colleagues (and conversely, the presence of self-interested employees discourages a spirit of service among others in the organisation). The goal should therefore be to select individuals whose own values align as closely as possible with the organisation's values. However, inevitably this alignment will be imperfect. People coming from outside the public service, either as new graduates or mid-career transfers from another sector, will have different understandings of public service values. That is, when they enter the public service, they need to be supported to understand a set of assumptions and beliefs. And yet, work within a public organisation is not automatically associated with an increase in public service motivation.¹⁴⁵

Several studies suggest that socialisation with organisational values can improve the alignment of individual and organisational values.^{146,147} Social influences from prework settings are joined later in life by socialisation in work settings. A large-cohort survey found that “both supervisors and co-workers seem to have an effect on the internalisation of public service motivation.”¹⁴⁸ Perry suggests that socialising staff to public service values and principles contributes to three important outcomes:

- “Creating greater integration of staff and organisational public service values increases member–organisation fit, thereby increasing commitment, retention, and work effort.
- Socialisation expands prospects that members will act based on their identification with what the organisation does and their embrace of its values, increasing the autonomy of member behaviour.
- Greater integration increases employee mission valence and ultimately the work effort of employees.”¹⁴⁹

Bradley Wright and Sanjay Pandey recommend that managers can take several steps to support the alignment of individual and organisational values:

- “communicate how the organisation’s values and goals converge with the employees;
- communicate how the employee’s work contributes to the organisation and society;
- help employees understand that value conflicts they encounter in their work reflect competing responsibilities of public service; and
- provide rationales for policies so that employees understand them and how they can coexist with performance expectations in their jobs.”¹⁵⁰

Deneen Hatmaker and Hyun Hee Park suggest that there are two important leverage points for cultivating organisational values: induction and mentoring.¹⁵¹

Induction

The juncture at which employees are first hired is likely to be the time when they are most eager and anxious to learn appropriate behaviours and to ‘fit in.’^{152,153,154} Perry noted that despite the proliferation of onboarding literature, the main components are highly consistent, exemplified by an onboarding model developed by Booz Allen and Hamilton.¹⁵⁵ Note that best-practice onboarding goes far beyond the traditional first-day orientation, with planned opportunities for the socialisation of values extending from the recruitment phase through to the first year of employment. For example, one case study described the benefits of requiring new police recruits to write stories about how their department had made a difference in their lives and their communities (an example of self-persuasion, described further in section 8).¹⁵⁶

Mentoring

Mentoring is an effective mechanism for socialising organisational values, as supported by three large private sector meta-analyses^{157,158,159} and one meta-analysis of 25 research studies in the public sector.¹⁶⁰

Regardless of formal and intentional programmes, “newcomers engage in their own proactive efforts to seek information and establish ties with experienced organisational members who have access to valued resources”.¹⁶¹ For example, research in the New Zealand police suggests that the values of close colleagues in the first year had an inordinate impact on the career-long behaviours of police recruits.¹⁶²

Traditional one-to-one mentoring may not be sufficient for newcomer integration.¹⁶³ Formal mentoring may be augmented by developmental networks with multiple mentors providing access to different types of resources and support. Alongside a more conscious effort to promote mentoring, Perry suggested that organisations need to pay attention to praising and rewarding the role of mentors. Interestingly, a further meta-analysis found that mentoring had as positive effect on mentors as those mentored, with mentors expressing more job satisfaction and organisational commitment.¹⁶⁴

Despite the positive outcomes of mentoring, it is frequently difficult to sustain mentoring programmes due to difficulties attracting mentors and funding the coordination of mentoring programmes.¹⁶⁵ Several resources describe the components of successful mentoring programmes: Bozeman and Feeney (2009a, 2009b) describe a general model for the success of mentoring programmes in the public sector, including contributions to public service motivation, that will be of interest to those designing such programmes;^{166,167} Chronus provides a convenient programme outline of best practices.¹⁶⁸

Training

While there are now over 60 studies exploring the relationship between public service motivation and ethical behaviour,¹⁶⁹ there is relatively little evidence directly relating public service motivation with ethics training. However, ethical and values-based training has been thoroughly studied in a range of fields, including in the private and public sector, and different professions in each.^{170,171} This evidence points to how and where ethics training can be effective, neutral, or even counter-productive.^{172,173,174} Perry’s writings do not labour ethical training as this is not an area that he has studied directly, but in our conversations this came up frequently as an area where he thought considerable progress could be made. The future issuance of a new code of conduct may provide an opportunity to implement ethical training across the public service.

Tensions between aligning values and diversity of thought

One critique of cultivating organisational values is that it may reduce diversity of thought. This may be because individuals' values become more aligned through induction, mentoring, and training. Alternately, as predicted by attraction/selection/attrition theory, individuals with different values may not join the public service or may leave when they find their values are not aligned.

In an earlier paper on tactics for supporting public service motivation, Perry raised the prospect that seeking out and reinforcing public service values may reduce diversity within an organisation.¹⁷⁵ To some extent, this is inevitable, and even desirable: by screening out candidates whose values are incompatible with public service, we end up with a workforce that is more homogenous but also more ethical. But some consideration should be given to how programmes to cultivate public service values can be designed in a way that does not unnecessarily preclude diversity of thought and that provides opportunities for input by public servants with a wide range of perspectives (inclusion).

Here, the plasticity of meaning of spirit of service may again be helpful. A spirit of service to the community is a boundary object that means different things to different people; so long as public servants have altruistic or prosocial motivations beyond self-interest (pay, power, prestige), these motivations can broadly be assumed to be consistent with a spirit of service to the community. Nonetheless, we must be alert to the possibility that the organisational values to which we are inducting new public servants may represent a set of assumptions inherent both to a single cultural worldview and to a single administrative tradition.¹⁷⁶ A set of institutional values that seem alien to a diverse group of New Zealander may as a barrier to participation.

6. Promoting Leaders Who Display a Spirit of Service

- De-emphasise competency in ‘managing up’ in favour of managing down and out.
- Use 360-degree feedback to build more complete perspectives of candidate values and behaviours.
- Prefer to promote from within as this reduces information asymmetries.
- Create positive images of ethical leadership and celebrate ethical role models.
- De-emphasise people-leadership as the only aspirational career path and provide opportunities for non-people leaders to lead culture.

There has been considerable study on recruiting and selecting new entrants into the public service who display a spirit of service to the community (as described in section 4 of this paper). In addition, attention has been paid to the important role of leadership in preserving, protecting, and nurturing the spirit of service that public servants bring to their work (see sections 7 and 8 of this paper). It has also been reported that the presence of self-interested individuals, particularly in leadership positions, tends to diminish the spirit of service in others public servants.¹⁷⁷ And yet, there has been relatively little study into how to develop and promote public servants into leadership positions who demonstrate a spirit of service themselves, and can nurture a spirit of service in others.

Why is it hard to select leaders with a spirit of service to the community?

This is not a distinction to be glossed over lightly. Leaders who are self-interested are likely to be among the most capable and motivated to game any selection criteria. There are several theoretical reasons why self-interested individuals get promoted, even in a culture that values a spirit of service to the community:

- Self-interested individuals pursue career ambitions more aggressively.
- Self-interested individuals are more likely to engage in surface acting to improve their career progression.¹⁷⁸
- Dark-triad personality traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, sub-clinical psychopathy) are observed to be predictors of success in the corporate world.^{179,180}
- Once managers move onto that fast-rising trajectory, the associated pressures and rewards result in motivational crowding out.¹⁸¹
- The focus on ‘managing upwards’ and attentiveness to the needs of superiors¹⁸² crowds out a focus on making a positive different to society.
- Information asymmetries mean that hiring managers have a different perspective on the ethics of individuals involved than do their previous colleagues or subordinates.
- Hiring managers might only be saying that they’re looking for a spirit of service to the community, because that is what senior leaders say they should want, but instead are selecting for other criteria.

It is very difficult to evaluate the motivations of individuals. If we select for, and promote, individuals who express a strong spirit of service to the community, we risk these individuals engaging in surface acting. Self-interested individuals, who we might otherwise aim to exclude, are likely to be more Machiavellian and therefore attempt to present a spirit of service in order to achieve career rewards. When such false behaviours are observed by others, and particularly when such false behaviours are seen to be rewarded, this can lead to cynicism and the diminishing of the spirit of service that other public servants bring to their work.

Similarly, when the public service, an agency, or a particular leader, professes a commitment to a spirit of service, and then their actions are perceived to be misaligned to that value, this can be perceived as a betrayal of the implied relational contract of the organisation. Broken promises in turn contribute to cynicism and may lead to otherwise altruistic individuals mimicking self-interested behaviour.

Reducing information asymmetries in the evaluation of altruism

Research into workplace altruism by UK academic Adam Oliver suggests that, in any group where leaders are selected from outside that group in conditions of strong information asymmetry, the least-altruistic individuals tend to be selected as leaders¹⁸³ (see also, John Calhoun's 'disquisition on government,' and Friedrich Hayek's 'why the worst get to the top').¹⁸⁴ In contrast, when the group selects their own leader, they tend to pick highly altruistic individuals. The most radical interpretation of this finding is that departments should pick their own chief executives, cascading down to teams picking their own managers. More moderate solutions could include gathering 360-degree feedback from colleagues and followers as part of the selection process for senior leaders, and a preference for promoting from within where possible, because managers are likely to have greater insights into the values of their existing staff than of those from outside the agency.

Attracting high public service motivation individuals to leadership

However, high public service motivation individuals may not pursue leadership roles at all. Individuals who are strongly motivated by a spirit of service to the community may be drawn to front-line or beneficiary-facing roles (see 'empathetic altruism'), or technical roles (see 'principlism'), and therefore self-select out of people leadership. They may see people leadership roles as involving ethical compromises that they are not willing to make (see 'person-fit') or involving tasks that do not reflect the way in which they feel best able to contribute (see 'mission valence'). Because leaders disproportionately affect the spirit of service of their colleagues,¹⁸⁵ we need ways of encouraging public service motivated individuals to take on leadership roles. This can be achieved through ensuring that we create positive images of leadership roles that are seen as impactful but not ethically compromised, by highlighting positive role models, and/or by finding opportunities for non-people leaders to demonstrate organisational leadership and inspire colleagues.

Don't underestimate the required shift in mental models

The shift from New Public Management, with its focus on rational self-maximisation and extrinsic incentives, to a model predicated on a spirit of service to the community, represents a significant shift in the behavioural model of the New Zealand public service.¹⁸⁶ Some consideration should be given to how we are supporting the change among leaders who were socialised and advanced under the previous model. Pathways for change are discussed further in section 10 of this paper.

7. Leading with Mission, Inspiration, Communication

- Clearly articulate mission and vision.
- Strengthen employee mission valence.
- Develop lines of sight to ultimate aspirations.
- Develop leadership styles that inspire followers.
- Embrace servant leadership to empower followers.

Perry notes that a huge variety of leadership theories have proliferated in the social and behavioural science literature, and this is an area where the literature is poorly organised and the evidence unclear.¹⁸⁷ However, “developing leaders who communicate and model public service values is likely to produce several positive consequences for public organisations:

- Leader stimulation of awareness and acceptance of organisational missions increases levels of autonomous motivation, specifically identification and integration, which is more powerful and persistent.
- When employees pursue goals beyond self-interest, the goals are likely to be perceived as more difficult.
- Employees are likely to be more committed to goals associated with public missions and values.”¹⁸⁸

Public service motivation has been associated with several named leadership styles (each described below): charismatic, transformational, servant, and authentic. Despite vast tracts of commentary, the academic literature on leadership is of mixed quality. A lack of clear theory or generally accepted methodologies hampers the ability to make strong conclusions based on the available evidence.¹⁸⁹

Charismatic leadership

Charismatic leadership was a popular construct in early leadership literature. Charismatic leaders are known for their communication and rhetorical skills. Perry suggests charismatic leaders can be identified by “the influence of their personality on followers, their personal attachments to followers, personal vision, and personal dedication to their moral convictions.”¹⁹⁰ Charismatic leadership was popular in the 60s and 70s, particularly following the work of Robert Tucker,¹⁹¹ but is now seen as a ‘double-edged sword’, associated with less operational effectiveness and less adaptability.¹⁹² Nonetheless, charismatic leadership is positively associated with public service motivation through the self-concepts of followers.¹⁹³ Six behaviours of charismatic leaders have been identified that support public service motivation:

- “providing ideological explanations,
- emphasising collective identities,
- referring to history,
- referring to followers’ worth and efficacy,
- referring to collective efficacy, and
- expressing confidence in followers.”¹⁹⁴

In turn, these behaviours have been demonstrated to increase public service motivation, personal commitment to the leader and to the organisation’s mission, self-sacrifice, and organisational citizenship behaviour. What is particularly interesting about these behaviours is that they do not depend on the kind of soaring rhetoric or personal magnetism typically associated with charismatic

leadership. Indeed, John Antonaki and colleagues suggest nine imitable verbal tactics for charismatic leadership,¹⁹⁵ associated with a spirit of service to the community:¹⁹⁶

- metaphors, similes, and analogies;
- stories and anecdotes;
- contrasts;
- rhetorical questions;
- three-part lists;
- expressions of moral conviction;
- reflections of the group's sentiments;
- the setting of high goals; and
- conveying confidence that they can be achieved.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership theory primarily associated with the work of Bernard Bass, containing several distinct aspects:

- “emphasising intrinsic motivation and positive development of followers
- raising awareness of moral standards
- highlighting important priorities
- fostering higher moral maturity in followers
- creating an ethical climate (shared values, high ethical standards)
- encouraging followers to look beyond self-interests to the common good
- promoting cooperation and harmony
- using authentic, consistent means
- using persuasive appeals based on reason
- providing individual coaching and mentoring for followers
- appealing to the ideals of followers
- allowing freedom of choice for followers.”¹⁹⁷

Transformational leadership is often studied in contrast to transactional leadership which focuses on the use of rewards and punishments to achieve compliance. The relationship between transformational leadership and public service motivation has been studied extensively, with mixed and nuanced results. Several studies conclude that transformational leadership had only a relatively small impact.^{198,199,200} This contrasted with specific study on the promotion of public values by leaders (see section 8) which showed a much larger effect in supporting public service motivation.²⁰¹ One study suggested that when transformational leadership was associated with a reduction in procedural controls, this led to increased autonomy which in turn supported public service motivation.²⁰² Other studies directly contrasted transformational and transactional leadership styles, and found that transformation leadership was more beneficial in supporting public service motivation.^{203,204} A further study suggested that transformational leadership is only associated with increased public service motivations in situations where the values of the leader and follower are aligned.²⁰⁵

Servant leadership

The phrase ‘servant leadership’ was first introduced by Robert Greenleaf in 1970,²⁰⁶ despite similar constructs existing in other cultures for hundreds of years.²⁰⁷ Greenleaf claims to have been inspired by Herman Hesse’s 1932 novel *Journey to the East*, itself a story about wisdom learned on a journey to Asia.²⁰⁸ Broadly, servant leaders achieve the mission of the organisation by supporting those who

do the work. They tend to the spirit of the group and aim to remove barriers to the work done by their team. In a review of various writings about servant leadership, Dirk Van Dierendonck described 6 dispositions of behaviours that were generally associated with being a servant leader:

- empowering and developing people,
- humility,
- authenticity,
- interpersonal acceptance,
- providing direction, and
- stewardship.²⁰⁹

Servant leadership has been aligned to the Samoan concept of *tautua*, expressed in popular Samoan alagāupu (adage/proverbs) such as ‘*o le ala i le pule o le tautua*’ (the pathway to leadership is through service), ‘*o le tautua o le ala lea i le fa’aeaina*’ (service is the path that leads to elevation), ‘*a fia matai, ia muamua tautua*’ (if you want to be a chief, you must first serve), and ‘*o le tagata e le’i tautua e lē malamalama i totonu o lona ‘āiga ae sili ona pogisa i tulaga o le nu’u*’ (a person who has not served will not be recognised inside their family but will be plunged into even further darkness with regards to their village).²¹⁰

Greenleaf was a manager, not an academic, and this may explain why servant leadership was not taken up by the research community.²¹¹ It is not directly associated with conceptual underpinnings and therefore it has not been possible for researchers to empirically or theoretically validate servant leadership. A few studies have explored the relationship between servant leadership and public service motivation. One study demonstrated that public service motivation mediates the influence that servant leadership has on followers’ job performance. and colleagues.²¹² A second found that servant leadership strongly influences affective and normative commitment, while having no impact on continuance commitment.²¹³ A third study reported that servant leadership increases organisational citizenship behaviour among followers.²¹⁴ Finally, a forthcoming paper found that both servant leadership and public service motivation positively influence job performance through innovative work behaviour.²¹⁵ While only attracting relatively recent attention in direct empirical studies, Perry described servant leadership as a potentially important lever for supporting public service motivation because the underlying normative model is well aligned to public service motivation theory.

Authentic leadership

Authentic leadership is a growing field of leadership research, despite having no formal definition.²¹⁶ Most definitions include leaders who: are self-aware; trust their thoughts, feelings, motives, and values; believe in self-inquiry and self-realisation; ask for feedback; and focus on the success of the organisation.²¹⁷ The authentic leadership literature is poorly organised and of generally poor quality, with several prominent studies now retracted due to significant errors.²¹⁸ There have been two small studies that relate authentic leadership to public service motivation, but in poorly ranked publications.^{219,220} There is better evidence to support the relationship between authenticity and organisational citizenship behaviour, which suggests a possible theoretical link to public service motivation.^{221,222} Despite first being described in the 1960s,²²³ the authentic leadership literature is not sufficiently mature to make a considerable contribution to designing tactics for preserving, protecting, and nurturing a spirit of service to the community.

Leadership models in New Zealand

In our discussions, Perry encouraged me to reflect on the dominant leadership model in the New Zealand public service. There has been little direct study on leadership practices on in the New Zealand

public service, with a few papers suggesting the most-valued competencies are political management²²⁴ and transactional risk-aversion.²²⁵ The New Zealand public service management model puts great emphasis on the chief executive, as the single point at which statutory and public accountability sit. In exchange for this accountability, the State Sector Act (1988) and Public Finance Act (1989) provided chief executives with greater autonomy than international equivalents.²²⁶ Other jurisdictions either provide for greater horizontal coordination between similar functions across the entire public service, or draw the distinction between chief executive and ministerial responsibilities less starkly. Thus, the New Zealand model sees chief executives become avatars for their organisation; in assessing the performance of chief executives, the Commission has at times equated the performance of the individual with that of the agency that they lead. This combination of accountability and autonomy, while useful in other respects, arguably creates the conditions that encourage ‘heroic’ leadership. In his original descriptions, Greenleaf positioned heroic and servant leadership as antithetical.²²⁷ We may wish to explore how the demands on chief executives in the New Zealand public service might support or discourage different leadership styles.

Leadership tactics

Despite the overall relationship between leadership models and public service motivation being unclear, several specific leadership tactics have been demonstrated to improve public service motivation:

- “clearly articulating mission and vision,
- strengthening employee mission valence, and
- developing lines of sight to ultimate aspirations.”²²⁸

Several studies on mission valence^{229,230,231} have reported similar conclusions, with mission valence supported by:

- “leaders (who) find ways to clarify and reinforce organisational and tasks goals;
- leaders who foster a sense of organisational pride;” and
- (leaders who find) “ways to put employees in closer touch with the impact of their work, like beneficiary contact and exposure to the end results of mission accomplishment.”²³²

Similarly, Perry’s contention that public service motivation is supported by developing lines of sight between an individual’s work and the organisations ultimate aspirations, is well supported by a number of studies.^{233,234,235,236,237,238}

Wendy Boswell and John Boudreau describe several ways in which managers can improve public servants’ ability to identify line of sight:

- Regular communication about mission, goals and results.
- Ensuring that conversations about goals and line of sight are incorporated into all human resource management practices (e.g., onboarding, mentoring, performance management, development planning).
- Involving employees in conversations about goals and how to the achieve them.
- “In unionised settings, developing collaborative labour–management relationships can increase the likelihood of everyone pulling in the same direction.”^{239,240}

Communicate to inspire and build means-ends awareness

Perry describes communication as an integral part of leadership that preserves, protects, and nurtures a spirit of service to the community. He drew particular attention to two communication tasks that are

likely to be particularly impactful: acknowledging followers worth and collective efficacy; and telling stories about the service of public servants in making a difference for New Zealanders.

Recognition can take many forms, from verbal acknowledgements to praise texts to occasions for celebration to awards and ceremonies. Perry notes that “in situations involving the production of public or collective goods, the best forms of recognition may be nonpecuniary.”²⁴¹ Awards programmes can have either positive or negative effects on motivation.²⁴² When employees agree that the winners were deserving, awards programmes tend to have a positive effect on motivation of both the award winners and other employees. However, when winners were not seen as deserving, this has a strong demotivating effect. Perry noted that ‘deserving’ depends on where you stand: senior leaders versus junior public servants, and frontline versus back office, often have different perspectives on who is ‘deserving’ of awards. Therefore, if the awards programmes are intended to promote a spirit of service among the broadest number of public servants, we may wish to consider how different voices are included in the judging process.

Mirco Tonin and Michael Vlassopoulos conducted an interesting experiment that directly related praise with altruism: participants were much more likely to engage in further altruism when they had been recognised for prior efficacy; and that there was a considerable sex difference in responses, with women being much more affected by recognition than men.²⁴³ Gratitude may be even more important than praise. Adam Grant and Francesca Gino conducted experiments into the relationship between expressions of gratitude, recognition of competence, and prosocial behaviour, observing that “(the) findings suggest that when helpers are thanked for their efforts, the resulting sense of being socially valued, more than the feelings of competence they experience, are critical in encouraging them to provide more help in the future.”²⁴⁴ This finding provides indirect evidence to support the Commissioner’s practice of thanking people for their service.

Storytelling

Storytelling has been studied extensively in organisational studies,^{245,246} but the relationship between storytelling and public service motivation is based on anecdotes and inference from related fields. Nonetheless, Perry highlighted several case studies where storytelling appears to have supported high public service motivation in difficult circumstances.^{247,248} Other studies explore how storytelling is an important part of agency leadership,^{249,250,251} with Perry summarising the key benefits as:

- “Stories have a capacity to cut across professional or departmental boundaries and engage people with a shared sense of context and purpose.” ... “The ability of stories to break down boundaries speaks to the capacity of stories to prompt cognitive shifts and influence naming and shaping identity.”
- “Stories invite an emotional connection and commitment to public service helpful for motivating and influencing staff.”
- “Stories can help challenge and reframe practices and assumptions.” ... “Reframing practices and assumptions begins with the power of stories to prompt cognitive shifts, engaging dialog about difference and weaving multiple worlds together through interpersonal relationships.”
- “Stories lend themselves to talking about the public mission of organisations.” ... “Engaging dialog about difference sets the stage for conversations about uniqueness, about the publicness of the mission.”²⁵²

Perry points to the work of Mark Bevir in explaining that stories help construct ‘meaning holism’, which places behaviour, beliefs, and values into context and history.²⁵³ An earlier research collaboration supported the efficacy of storytelling in perpetuating ideas in organisations.^{254,255,256}

8. Leveraging the Meaningfulness of Public Work

- Design work to allow for direct contact between employees and service beneficiaries.
- Use self-persuasion or other self-administered interventions.
- Engage in storytelling.
- Incorporate job crafting to increase meaningfulness.
- Offer career counselling to maximise mission valence.

Subjective wellbeing is often divided into three components: experiential (pleasure and comfort), evaluative (satisfaction with life), and eudemonic (having a sense of purpose). Meaningful work is the largest contributor to eudaimonia wellbeing, and all the jobs that score highest in meaningfulness are public-sector dominated occupations like health professionals, teachers, and social workers.²⁵⁷

Meaningful work is the public service's key competitive advantage when attracting New Zealanders to work in public agencies. Many jobs make no or a negative contribution to society.²⁵⁸ Large scale surveys have demonstrated that private sector employees are much more likely than the public sector to rate their role as socially useless.²⁵⁹ However, this finding did not apply universally across the public service – almost all frontline public servants perceived their jobs as socially useful, whereas back-office roles were close to the private sector average.

Despite the overall advantage of the public service in providing meaningful missions, it can be difficult to relate individual job tasks to overarching missions of the organisation. 'Personal significance reinforcement', originally described by Bruce Buchanan in the 1970s, refers to the extent to which employees feel they make contributions to the organisation's mission.²⁶⁰ Buchanan argued that it is often difficult for public agencies to cultivate personal significance because the aims of public agencies are to make a difference in society, and it is often difficult to directly attribute changes in those end outcomes with work performed in an office building in a capital city. The public service is vast, and outcomes for New Zealanders are the emergent properties of a complex system. Like the (possibly apocryphal) story of the janitor at NASA who described their role as helping to put a man on the moon, our contributions are incremental and indirect. However, the line of sight between the janitor and the moon gives some hope that even Wellington office jobs can be perceived as meaningful.²⁶¹

Perry provides four tactics for leveraging the meaningfulness of public work:

- “designing work for contact between employees and beneficiaries;
- using self-persuasion to enhance meaningfulness;
- facilitating job crafting by employees; and
- providing career counselling to strengthen meaningfulness.”²⁶²

Designing work for contact between employees and beneficiaries

Meaningfulness is strongly associated with the extent to which public servants can perceive links between their work and outcomes for society. Relational job design focuses on the structures that “shape employees’ opportunities to connect and interact with people.”²⁶³ Research by Adam Grant found that direct contact with the people they were helping had an enormous impact on those public servants’ spirit of service to the community, and this result has now been supported by studies across a wide range of public services in different jurisdictions.²⁶⁴ Perry therefore suggested agencies build opportunities for all staff to connect with the front line.

However, he acknowledged that it is not always practical for all public servants to have regular and direct contact with beneficiaries. Perry suggests that a substitute may be to share stories and case studies within the organisation that tie the work of public servants to specific beneficiaries, although there has been less study in this area. Some of the most compelling Public Service Day Award and Spirit of Service Award citations provide these sorts of stories. Another alternative means to support back-office staff to feel a stronger (if indirect) connection to beneficiaries, may be through intentional and mission-oriented interaction with front-line staff (see ‘storytelling’ and ‘line of sight’, in chapter 7).

Using self-persuasion to enhance meaningfulness

Instead of managers trying to convince public servants of the meaningfulness of their work, ‘self-persuasion’ involves setting public servants the task of connecting their work to outcomes for New Zealanders.²⁶⁵ Employers may ask employees to reflect on the importance of public service, or their organisation, or their work, and then advocate (either in writing or in person) for that position. The 2017 Leaders Summit included self-persuasion, when public servants were asked to reflect on the moment when they understood what it means to be a public servant. Public servants who undertook self-persuasion were more likely to subsequently report high levels of public service motivation,²⁶⁶ and for this change to persist over time.²⁶⁷ Self-persuasion may sensitise public servants to notice the societal impact of their work.²⁶⁸ Self-persuasion may also induce cognitive dissonance, by drawing attention to when they may not have acted in accordance with the ideas they have espoused. Such cognitive dissonance has been shown to influence subsequent behaviour.²⁶⁹

Job crafting

Job crafting involved changes to that are initiated by the employee to infuse meaning into work. Literature on front-line roles suggests that the exercising of macro-level job crafting and case-specific discretion were important mediators of public service motivation,^{270,271} as predicted by self-determination theory. In New Zealand, Children’s Teams, Social Sector Trials, and Place-Based Initiatives have each explored how frontline staff may be afforded greater discretion, including acknowledging the barriers of current settings in the New Zealand public service.

Through applying relevant private sector literature,^{272,273} Perry suggested three avenues through which all public servants could engage in job crafting: task crafting, changing the type of activities and how they are performed; relationship crafting, focusing on who they interact with and how; and cognitive crafting, involving altering their own perceptions of the purpose of their work.²⁷⁴ Further guidance on how to undertake job crafting can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Arnold Bakker suggests that not only should public servants be afforded the opportunity for job crafting, attentive managers can also usefully prompt public servants on how their roles should change.²⁷⁵

Perry’s research focused on how job crafting at an individual level can improve meaningfulness; however, others may prefer to advocate for change as part of a collective. For example, employee led networks (‘ELN’s) could theoretically provide an outlet for public servants to collectively advocate for changes that improve meaningfulness.

Providing career counselling to strengthen meaningfulness

There has been relatively little direct study on the application of career counselling on public service motivation, but there has been more study on how career counselling can more broadly improve a sense of a ‘professional calling.’²⁷⁶ Perry suggested various resources including guidance on calling and vocation in career counselling²⁷⁷ and how to create a simple ‘Work and Meaning Inventory’:

- Positive meaning

- I have found a meaningful career.
- I understand how my work contributes to my life's meaning.
- I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful.
- Meaning making through work
 - I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose.
 - I view my work as contributing to my personal growth.
 - My work helps me better understand myself.
 - My work helps me make sense of the world around me.
- Greater good motivations
 - I know my work makes a positive difference.
 - The work I do serves a greater purpose.²⁷⁸

Perry noted that career counselling for supporting public service motivation is a relatively new area of exploration but suggested that it is one that likely warrants further attention.²⁷⁹

Risks associated with meaningful work.

One critique of public service motivation as a management tool is that over-leveraging meaningfulness may contribute to a public servant's emotional labour, fatigue, and burnout. Emotional labour is the effort of displaying emotions or behaviours in the workplace.²⁸⁰ Having a strong spirit of service can cause people to care deeply about their work and this might increase the labour associated with emotions. Conversely, a work environment that promotes a spirit of service may create an expectation of performative emotions to convey that spirit.

Meaningful work is associated with increased discretionary effort. In management literature, this is generally assumed to be a good thing, as it generates increased value for the employer. However, excessive effort can be associated with fatigue, which does not benefit either the employee or the employer in the long run.²⁸¹ The expectation that care workers, in particular, contribute additional (unpaid) time and effort due to their prosocial motivation has been criticised as labour exploitation.²⁸²

Burnout refers to physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress.²⁸³ Some studies link public service motivation with burnout, but the evidence is mixed; caring passionately about one's work can alternately result in that work being both more or less tiring (or being more mentally and less physically tiring, or vice versa).^{284,285,286} A spirit of service causes individuals to care deeply about their work – such individuals may work excessive hours, or feel excessive stress about ensuring that their work is instrumental in making a difference. This sentiment was famously expressed by Bertrand Russell as “one of the symptoms of an approaching nervous breakdown is the belief that one's work is terribly important.”²⁸⁷

While generally public service motivation is associated with improved integrity, there are some integrity risks associated with highly mission-focused individuals. A strong sense of mission may contribute to an individual ignoring instructions, failing to act in a politically neutral manner, or even to use illegal means to achieve their goals.²⁸⁸ They may perceive that the moral imperative of the mission may justify their actions. Conversely, public servants' attachment to charismatic leaders that they feel are achieving an important mission may lead to blind loyalty and ignoring unethical behaviours in others.²⁸⁹

Public servants face complex ethical choices every day, and often must trade off different values against each other. Experimental studies suggest that strong empathy with individual service beneficiaries can lead to public servants to ignore principles of justice and fairness.²⁹⁰ Perry notes that the preservation of public institutional integrity must transcend an individual's own sense of mission.²⁹¹

9. Creating a Supportive Work Environment

- Establish robust learning and growth opportunities.
- Where possible, provide employees with a choice of assignments.
- Promote subjective career success.
- Enable bounded employee autonomy, innovation, and play.
- Cultivate a sense of relatedness and team.

One basic assumption of the spirit of service clause of the Public Service Act 2020 is that leaders are able to promote a spirit of service; however, evidence suggests leadership promotion of the organisations mission is only associated with an increase in public service motivation when basic psychological needs are satisfied.²⁹² A supportive work environment, that fulfils a public servant's basic psychological needs (competence, autonomy, relatedness), is an important antecedent of public service motivation, as confirmed by over 30 studies.²⁹³

Competency

Perry explained that, within the public service, the most direct application of the need to demonstrate competence (the mastery of skills) is a system in which appointments are made on the basis of merit. In a large comparative study involving 52 countries, meritocratic recruitment and promotion was the best predictor of public service integrity and negatively correlated with corruption (other variables, like salary levels, had no significant influence on corruption). Perry has a forthcoming meta-analysis of 76 studies across 96 countries that demonstrates that merit-based selection also results in better public service performance.²⁹⁴

Perry suggested other tactics that improve self-conceptions of competency. Competency is supported by learning and development through the career and up and down the hierarchy. Most jurisdictions have focused learning and development at people leaders, but research demonstrates benefits to learning at all levels.²⁹⁵ Learning pacts (formal agreements between employers and employees) like those used by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, commit both parties to invest in training and development for current and future roles.²⁹⁶ Similarly, Perry noted that most jurisdictions provide career incentives to move into people management, even for individuals who are best able to contribute by being thought leaders, and this likely leads to worse outcomes in both career paths.²⁹⁷ Instead, for people whose psychological need for self-conceptions of competency depends on technical mastery, there should be tailored career paths for specialised skills. Career success can take many forms, and public service motivation may not be maximised by encouraging experts into people leadership. The 'Subjective Career Success Tool' emphasises how individuals perceive their own contributions and assessments.²⁹⁸ This aims to separate a sense of career success from the more tangible external markers of promotions and income.

Performance management systems can either reinforce or diminish a sense of competence. Perry noted that performance management systems are as often demotivational as motivational, and suggested modern, mission-focused, appraisal processes, with a focus on team/collective contributions as well as individual successes. Public service values, including a spirit of service to the community, should be explicitly considered in performance assessments. High performing teams often focused on developing performance appraisals with principled goals, like honesty, teamwork, commitment to service, and stewardship.²⁹⁹ ³⁰⁰ There is now a well-established literature on what works in public sector performance management systems.³⁰¹ Perry has also done significant work on

the relationship between job security and motivation, and on performance pay, but these were less relevant to the New Zealand employment context.

Autonomy

Perry aligns the psychological need for autonomy with the public service principle of political neutrality. Neutral competence has long been identified as one of the key characteristics of an ideal public service.^{302,303}

The separation of the state apparatus into two separate and distinct groups, political and bureaucratic, is a key component of a supportive public service work environment.³⁰⁴ Rules and systems should be in place that clearly delineate between the two groups, and Perry and I discussed potential challenges that may arise when career paths traverse this gap. Politicisation of bureaucratic positions “adversely affects work motivation, performance, and integrity of civil servants.”³⁰⁵ Political neutrality is understood differently in different jurisdictions; Paul Verkuil suggests these basic requirements:

- their selection for their office based on merit rather than attachments to political superiors;
- adherence to rules for their office with dedication and integrity;
- acting in accordance with the political and normative order in which bureaucracy is embedded; and
- serving as stewards for constitutional principles, the rule of law, and professional standards.³⁰⁶

Agency autonomy is also likely to be important. New Zealand’s reforms of the 1980s rhetorically offered “autonomy and accountability” by disestablishing most centralised bureaucratic rules. In most countries, agencies are not free to configure their operations in whatever way allows them to perform best. The most prominent empirical study of agency autonomy was a study of 29 agencies in 6 countries.³⁰⁷ This study concluded that “autonomy, as a facilitating condition, supported development of organisational cultures conducive to high performance,” and added “autonomy...does not necessarily assure good performance; rather it provides a facilitating context in which effective managers and management practices can encourage performance-oriented norms and behaviours.”

While New Zealand has afforded strong autonomy to individual agencies, autonomy within agencies is much more variable. That is, it is the chief executive that has autonomy, and many agencies run as strong vertical hierarchies. The lack of regional and local autonomy, and front-line discretion, has been identified as a barrier in several recent evaluations.^{308,309,310,311,312} While these evaluations focus on the effect that bureaucratic rules have on limiting the achievement of outcomes, Perry’s research (and emphasised in our conversations) suggests that such limitations also work against the protection of the spirit of service that these public servants bring to their work.³¹³ Another study suggested that risk aversion contributes to diminished autonomy and therefore dimmed the spirit of service.³¹⁴

The previous chapter explored job-crafting as a way to improve the meaningfulness of public sector work and to increase an employee’s sense of agency. Perry suggested that this sense of agency can be improved further by providing, where possible, opportunities for public servants to have input into how and where they contribute.³¹⁵

Relatedness

Perry linked the psychological need for relatedness with the concept of a unified public service. The reforms of the 1980s disaggregated the public service and managed agencies as individual islands rather than components of a broader whole. When different agencies work at cross-purposes, and the impediments to serving the community are perceived as internal to the public service, this can have a particularly damaging effect on a spirit of service to the community. While this is an area without

significant empirical evidence, Perry illustrated several examples, from the formation of European Space Agency to the US government response to Hurricane Katrina, where bureaucratic competition diminished a spirit of service, and cooperation subsequently strengthened a spirit of service.³¹⁶ Further, teams that exhibit altruism toward each other are more likely to demonstrate public service motivation.³¹⁷

Other research suggests that a supportive public service work environment is best understood as membership in a social identity defined by unity, coordination, loyalty, impartiality, and continuity more than as a series of individual principal-agent relationships.³¹⁸ These have been described as ‘common pool resources’ stewarded by public servants.³¹⁹ Stronger identification with these norms is typically associated with higher employee commitment.^{320,321}

Successive reviews of the New Zealand public service from 1991 until 2011 reported that fragmentation was a significant issue.^{322,323,324,325} For the past 30 years, public servants have been more likely to identify with their agency than with the public service as a whole. Then, much of the Public Service Act 2020 and associated reforms aimed to create a more unified public service, better able to address cross-cutting problems.³²⁶ Forums like the Public Service Leadership Team, and horizontal leadership forms like the ‘Interdepartmental Executive Board’ and ‘System Leads’, may both depend on and cultivate a sense of relatedness. The studies on relatedness referenced above suggests that efforts to support a unified public service and to promote a spirit of service to the community are likely to be mutually reinforcing.

10. Conclusion

- New Zealand’s focus on a spirit of service to the community is consistent with international trends, but the Public Service Act 2020 pushes us further than other jurisdictions.
- There is now good evidence on public service motivation, altruism, and prosocial motivation, that helps us understand what a spirit of service is, what causes it, how it can be preserved, protected, and nurtured.
- It may be possible to manage high public service motivation teams differently.
- Mixed-messages act as a barrier to the adoption of new models of public administration.
- New Zealand’s spirit of service initiatives are closely linked to the current Commissioner, and will need to be institutionalised in order to be sustainable.

A spirit of service to the community is the fundamental characteristic of the public service and is the central concept of our recent reforms. Similarly, Perry identifies public service motivation with “new foundations for civil service systems,”³²⁷ suggesting that our recent New Zealand focus on a spirit of service is at the vanguard of international practice. Public choice theory and purely rational and self-maximising conceptions of public service are out; service, citizenship, and the public interest are in.^{328,329,330,331,332}

Despite considerable empirical study, translating research into practice is an art as well as a science. Professor Perry has been the leading figure in public service motivation research since coining the term in 1990. His input was vital in preparing this report, which relies on public service motivation research but also makes judgements as to which research findings are most relevant.

While there has been a general awareness of the unique motivations of public servants for some time, public service motivation emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as the first serious attempt at understanding and testing related concepts. From a few early papers, public service motivation research has blossomed to over 400 studies. These confirm that, while people in the private sector can also demonstrate altruism and a sense of purpose, the motivations of public servants are demonstrably different. More recent research (including parallel streams under the rubric of ‘altruism’ or ‘prosocial motivation’) help us to understand the antecedents to public service motivation, how it can be supported, and the effects of public service motivation on organisational outcomes.

In his study on the biggest risks that face governments, Don Kettl noted that all the biggest risks to the future of government are rooted in human capital.³³³ The task of attracting the right people, equipping, and then supporting them to deliver outcomes for New Zealanders, while displaying the values and integrity expected of them, are the tasks of public service leaders. Preserving, protecting, and nurturing the spirit of service that public servants bring to their work is an important duty on chief executives, and one that is easier said than done.

This chapter explores the implications of public service motivation research for our role as system leaders. Several conversations with Professor Perry centred on our efforts to promote a spirit of service to the community can be accelerated and sustained.

Implications for system design

One topic that this paper does not address are the potential implications of a spirit of service to the community for the design of governance and institutions. There is now good empirical evidence that a spirit of service to the community improves effort, performance, innovation, and integrity. What

does this mean for the way we manage the public service? What would we do differently if we assumed public servants are primarily motivated by a spirit of service to the community?

In shifting from a self-interested view of public servant motivation to an altruistic one, it is important that we don't discard one simplistic view of human motivation (Hobbes' humanity-is-bad) for another (Rousseau's humanity-is-good).³³⁴ Public servants are humans, with a huge variety of values and motivations that impact on their behaviours. Famously, the philosopher David Hume acknowledged that all individuals possess knightly (good) and knavish (bad) characteristics, but since it was difficult to tell one from the other, the only way to regulate behaviour was to assume that all were knaves.³³⁵

Nonetheless, a public service with a strong spirit of service means that we may be able to do some things differently. How would we design the public service if we acknowledge the possible existence of knaves, but seek to take advantage of a workforce where most people are trying to do the right thing the vast majority of the time? For example, where front-line professionals have a strong association with helping clients, it may be possible to afford greater discretion to these professionals in the selection of services to meet individual needs.³³⁶ A public service workforce that is strongly committed to public service values may be more likely to meet our aspirations for public service integrity and conduct.³³⁷ Public service leaders with public service and prosocial motivations may be more committed to maintaining the health and capacity of public institutions to serve New Zealanders, and therefore voluntarily assume stewardship responsibilities.³³⁸ This is an area where the public service motivation literature offers fewer clear answers, but may represent an opportunity for further New Zealand innovation.

Accelerating change

Physicists Max Planck once cynically observed that science "advances one funeral at a time",³³⁹ due to the tenacity of ideas and the difficulty in changing long-held assumptions. Similarly, one barrier to fully embracing a model of altruistic motivations may be the decades long inculcation into previous administrative doctrines, that might only be reversed as the architects and acolytes of previous doctrines age out of the public service. It should be acknowledged that this is purely speculative – anecdotally, some of the strongest advocates for a spirit of service have been senior public servants who came up through the public service during New Public Management's heyday. Nonetheless, I asked Professor Perry if he had any suggestions for how to counter the cultural influence of previous reforms.

Several of our conversations centred around the degree to which New Zealand's renewed focus on a spirit of service to the community, and indeed our recent reform programme, can be characterised as layered,³⁴⁰ hybridised,³⁴¹ or bricolaged³⁴² with other reform doctrines, particularly the New Public Management reforms introduced in the 1980s.³⁴³ The contents of the Public Service Act 2020, and associated reforms, vary in their relationship to past public administration settings: some changes reflect a renewal of traditional public administration principles and values; some changes aim to make New Public Management systems more suitable to addressing current problems; and other changes represent a shift to something new, often described as 'Post-New Public Management.'³⁴⁴ Perry pointed to cases of 'partial revolutions,' where new ideas competed with (rather than replaced) old ideas, and this lack of clarity impeded the pace of reform.³⁴⁵

It appears that the Commission has been careful not to explicitly criticise previous policies while explaining recent reforms to public servants. It is the role of public servants to explain government policy, but not to publicly express support or disapproval.³⁴⁶ This has limited the extent to which communication can signal an explicit break, or even refutation, of assumptions of the past. Public

servants inculcated in the previous era may now perceive mixed messages: should we care about the incentives we face to choose one action over another, or should we act out of altruism, prosocial behaviour, and organisational citizenship? The tension between not advocating for specific policies, and clearly communicating change, may influence the pace at which mindsets evolve.

The road ahead

The New Zealand public service has gone through an important conceptual shift, from extrinsic incentives to service. New obligations have been placed upon public service leaders to preserve, protect, and nurture the spirit of service the public servants bring to their work. A necessary step is to translate that obligation into tactics, actions, or behaviours that those leaders can perform. This paper canvasses some of those potential tactics, and some to avoid.

New Zealand public service discourse has focused on a spirit of service to the community since 2016. While Peter Hughes remains the public servant most closely associated with the concept, it is now championed by numerous public service leaders. Nonetheless, public service reform tends to lurch forward unevenly, taking advantage of discrete reform moments ('windows'³⁴⁷ or 'tides'³⁴⁸); and we should not assume that sustaining momentum on a spirit of service to the community will be inevitable, or even easy.

Christopher Hood observed that many public policies follow a tragic lifecycle of enthusiasm, cynicism, and venality.³⁴⁹ Enthusiasm and discourse is unlikely to be enough to sustain the momentum of a spirit of service to the community, and practices will need to be institutionalised if they are to endure. The question of sustainability takes on renewed urgency as the spirit of service's most prominent champion, Peter Hughes, steps down in 2024. This paper explores some potential steps to embed and institutionalise practices that preserve, protect, and nurture a spirit of service. A key question for public service leaders is which of these practices are feasible and desirable in the New Zealand public service.

11. Addendum

Perry shared this account from a social worker in Alabama that exemplifies meaningful work. The text was initially provided by Perry's daughter, herself a proud social worker:

A group of friends and I were sitting around one evening discussing life. One guy there (whom I had just recently gotten to know) decided to explain the problem with social services and how they help those who won't help themselves.... He argued, "How's a person going to benefit from someone who has decided their best option in life is to become a social worker?" He reminded everyone what they say about social workers – "bleeding heart liberals." To stress his point, he said to me, "You're a social worker, Karen. Be honest. What do you make?"

I, having a reputation for honesty and frankness, replied, "You want to know what I make?" I paused for a moment and began, "Well, I have made safe places for abused children. In the process, I did my best to make them feel that they didn't deserve the treatment they got, so they could go out and do better in their lives."

"I now make arrangements for the terminally ill to stay at home in their last days with exceptional end of life care. I see that caregivers don't burn out making the patient and caregivers last days comfortable and worry-free."

"When a young widow or single mother doesn't know where to turn, social workers make sure they know (whether people like it or not) what benefits they are eligible for. And we try to make sure she doesn't get lost in the bureaucracy. We make plans with clients so they can get jobs and homes.

This is only a start. "You want to know what social workers make?" I asked again. "We make visits in neighbourhoods that most people won't go to on a bet, because we know people there are in need, and we make friends there who invite us back to their weddings, cookouts, and openings of community centres we have campaigned for."

"We make time to listen to the elderly, the mentally ill, the lonely. And we have the knowledge and skills to help them make improvements in their lives." "We make appointments with officials and testify before legislature to get everyone in the community a fair shake."

"Some of us teach, to make the next generation's social workers."

"And sometimes, we make plans with our families and friends – only to break them because there is an accident, a fire, a disaster or death and a social worker is needed."

I then paused one last time and then continued. "So, when people want to judge me by what I make, I hold my head up high and say, "I make a difference... What do you make?"³⁵⁰

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