




Public service motivation in Vietnam: Insights from a Q-methodology approach

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores Public Service Motivation (PSM) in Vietnam, a developing country, to address the limited research on PSM in such contexts. It examines individual perspectives on PSM and identifies its key dimensions within public higher education institutions. Using Q-methodology, the study collects and analyzes data from 28 public employees in Vietnamese higher education institutions. Data were gathered between July and September 2021, employing a structured approach to capture diverse viewpoints on PSM. The analysis identifies four distinct dimensions of PSM: Activistic Patriotism, Egoistic Patriotism, Realistic Humanitarianism, and Detached Communitarianism. These dimensions reflect varying motivations among public employees in Vietnam. The study expands the theoretical understanding of PSM by contextualizing its dimensions in a developing country setting. It highlights the importance of considering cultural and institutional factors when examining public service motivation. The findings underscore the need for tailored human resource strategies that align organizational objectives with employee motivations. By integrating these insights into recruitment, training, and retention policies, public sector organizations can enhance employee engagement and long-term commitment.

Contribution/Originality: This study applies Q-methodology to explore Public Service Motivation (PSM) in Vietnam, a developing country, uncovering four distinct dimensions. Unlike previous studies, it provides a nuanced, context-specific understanding of PSM, highlighting cultural influences and offering practical insights for enhancing public sector human resource strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public service motivation (PSM) has emerged as a key area of inquiry in public administration (Behn, 1995), focusing on the motives that drive individuals to serve the public good. While extensively studied in Western contexts, research on PSM in developing countries remains limited, necessitating further exploration of how cultural and institutional factors shape the PSM of public employees. Perry and Wise (1990) categorized PSM into rational, norm-based, and affective motives. Perry (1996) later developed a measurement scale capturing attraction to public policymaking, commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice. Numerous studies have examined PSM beyond the United States, highlighting the need to explore it across diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts (Bozeman & Su, 2015; Kim, Vandenabeele, & Wright, 2013; Perry, 2014; Ritz, Brewer, & Neumann, 2016; Vandenabeele, 2008).

Vietnam's transition following the 1986 Renovation (Doi Moi) has significantly influenced its public sector, reshaping governance structures and ethical values. The emphasis on human resources as a driver of national development makes it crucial to understand the motivations of public employees. However, empirical studies on Public Service Motivation (PSM) in Vietnam, particularly within public higher education institutions (HEIs), are underexplored. Hence, investigating PSM perspectives of faculty members and public employees in Vietnamese HEIs is essential for effectively prescribing policies and managing human resources.

This study addresses this gap by using the Q methodology, a mixed method in which participants rank statements based on their level of agreement (Brown, 1993) to examine how public employees in Vietnam perceive PSM. Previous studies applying this approach have provided insights into measuring the PSM construct in both Western and non-Western contexts (Brewer, Selden, & Facer Ii, 2000; Lin, 2014). Brewer et al. (2000) identified distinct PSM dimensions, namely Samaritan, Communitarian, Patriot, and Humanitarian, whereas Lin (2014) identified four specific factors of PSM, including Righteousness, Practitioner, Realism, and Opposition. This study offers inclusive insights into PSM in a developing Asian country and details how cultural and institutional factors influence individuals' views of PSM. Specifically, the study explores various aspects of PSM in Vietnamese higher education institutions and compares the findings with previously established frameworks. The results contribute valuable insights to policymakers and managers to develop effective human resource strategies in the public sector.

This study offers a comprehensive exploration of individuals' perspectives on PSM. The introduction outlines the state of the problem and the context of the study. The following section reviews the PSM literature, providing a solid foundation for our empirical investigation. The third section details our research design, highlighting the innovative use of Q-methodology. Finally, the fourth section presents and discusses our findings on the conceptual framework of PSM in the Vietnamese context.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1. Public Service Motivation

Public Service Motivation (PSM) has been a topic since Rainey (1982) seminal work, which explored the concept of meaningful public service in contrast to private sector motivations. Generally, PSM is not only an overarching and multifaceted concept but also an empirical and behavioral one (Rainey (1982)). Scholars have widely examined PSM across disciplines as an overarching, multifaceted, and behavioral construct. Perry and Wise (1990) defined PSM as “an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions” (p. 386), while Brewer and Selden (2000) characterized it as “the motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful public service.” Vandenabeele (2007) provided a broader perspective, emphasizing belief systems and values that transcend self-interest and organizational interests to serve larger political entities. This definition was later refined as “the motivation to perform meaningful public service and to unselfishly defend the public interest” (Vandenabeele, 2008). Other scholars have framed PSM as a commitment to the common good rather than personal gain (Houston, 2006) or as motivation to contribute to societal well-being (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008). Briefly, PSM refers to the behavior of performing public service for people and communities with less attention to reward preferences.

2.2. Grounding on the theory of Public Service Motivation and its Dimensions

Building on foundational definitions, Public Service Motivation has evolved through interdisciplinary discourse, drawing from public administration, institutional theory, and motivational psychology. Perry and Wise (1990) categorized PSM into rational, norm-based, and affective motives, recognizing that these categories are not mutually exclusive, as individuals may be influenced by multiple motives simultaneously.

To measure intrinsic motivation for public service, Perry and Wise (1990) developed a 40-item scale assessing six dimensions, including attraction to policymaking, commitment to policymaking, social justice, civic duty,

compassion, and self-sacrifice. Subsequently, Perry (1996) refined this measurement using confirmatory factor analysis, consolidating it into four factors: public policymaking, public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice. Expanding on this research, Perry (1997) further validated the PSM construct by identifying key antecedents and analyzing their correlations with the measurement scale.

Recognizing the limitations of Perry's framework in non-American contexts, Vandenabeele (2008) expanded the measurement scale by incorporating elements of democratic governance. Further refinement efforts were made by Sangmook Kim and Vandenabeele (2010), who developed a universal instrument incorporating self-sacrifice alongside instrumental, value-based, and identification motives. While international scholars have examined PSM measurement across various contexts, further investigation into its dimensions remains essential for broader cross-national and cultural applicability.

2.3. The Importance and Practical Implications of PSM in Reality

The interdisciplinary nature of PSM has called for scholars in economics and organizational behavior to examine its dimensions. From an economic perspective, PSM intersects with altruism, indicating a balance between pecuniary incentives and intrinsic motivation (Perry, 2014; Perry, Hondeghem, & Wise, 2010). Organizational behavior research has distinguished between altruism and prosocial motivation. Accordingly, PSM extends beyond altruistic tendencies to encompass broader prosocial behaviors (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008), highlighting the nuanced complexity of PSM and its interrelationships with other motivational constructs.

In addition to its theoretical significance, PSM has important implications for human resource management in public organizations. Empirical studies have shown that individuals with high PSM demonstrate greater organizational commitment and improved performance (Christensen, Paarlberg, & Perry, 2017; Perry & Wise, 1990). Therefore, recruitment strategies should prioritize candidates with strong PSM to align personal values with organizational goals. Furthermore, traditional pay-for-performance models may be less effective for these individuals, thus requiring alternative incentive mechanisms that emphasize intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation (Ritz et al., 2016). Understanding these behavioral drivers can support human resource policies to optimize employee motivation and engagement in the public sector.

2.4. Evolution of PSM Construct

Despite its theoretical and practical contributions, PSM remains controversial, especially in terms of measurement scale differences across different contexts. According to Perry (1996) measurement framework, it requires adaptation to different institutional and cultural contexts (Bozeman & Su, 2015). Sangmook Kim (2009) tested Perry's scale in Korea and found that rational motives were less important than normative and affective motives. In a society shaped by Confucian traditions and social homogeneity, public service is driven more by collectivist values than individual rationality. Similar cross-national studies have explored PSM in diverse governance contexts, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of its dimensions and applicability.

Perry (1996) approach represents a notable advancement over earlier studies that relied on proxy variables to assess PSM and sectoral comparisons to verify its presence (Crewson, 1997). However, his approach was not intended to account for variations in individual perceptions of PSM. Brewer et al. (2000) employed Q-methodology to extend the study of PSM using Perry's 40-item measurement scale as a cornerstone within the United States to understand PSM from the individual's point of view, identifying distinct motivational factors at both local and federal levels. Brewer et al. (2000) surveyed 69 public employees and public administration students from several states during the 1996-1997 period, suggesting that four motivational factors, including Samaritans, Communitarians, Patriots, and Humanitarians, each represent varying levels of commitment to public service. Their study demonstrated that motivations ranged from individual-level altruism to broader societal obligations.

In the same vein, Lin, (2014) applied a similar Q-methodology in Taiwan to retest Perry's 24-item measurement scale in Taiwan, a non-Western public sector in Asia with 15 participants, including five public employees, five private sector employees, and five from the non-profit sector. The study identified additional factors such as Righteousness, Practitioners, Realism, and Opposition. First, all individuals are righteous and agree to give feedback to society; however, some are willing to assist distressed people (but these individuals are not active in alleviating distress), while others are not. Second, practitioners opt for policy and politics and particularly sympathize with distressed people, yet are reluctant to dedicate themselves to the community. Third, realism emphasizes the importance of helping each other in society and shows less compassion for those who do not wish to alleviate their suffering. Finally, the opposition is the most dominant factor among these four factors. Remarkably, the opposition has public ethics but less trust in government systems. In sum, Taiwanese employees in this sample show their self-sacrificing spirit but do not avoid skepticism of authentic community and politics Lin, 2014). These findings underscore the influence of cultural and institutional environments on PSM, reinforcing the need for localized adaptations of existing measurement scales.

Building on these international insights, this study aims to reassess Perry (1996) 40-item measurement of the PSM scale within Vietnam's socio-cultural context. This research contributes to ongoing discussions on the universality and contextual specificity of PSM by examining the extent to which PSM dimensions align with or diverge from prior conceptualizations. The study seeks to address existing gaps in the literature by offering empirical evidence from a non-Western and developing setting, thereby enhancing the theoretical robustness and practical applicability of PSM in diverse governance frameworks.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Q-Methodology

This study applied the robust and intensive Q-methodology to examine perceptions of PSM in Vietnam. Q-methodology is an in-depth research technique in which individuals rank statements about a topic based on their level of agreement or disagreement (Stephenson, 1953). As one of the founders of the method, Stephenson (1953) developed Q-methodology to study individuals as complex wholes, rather than merely analyzing their characteristics, as is common in statistical methods. This technique asks participants to rank their responses, creating a final ranked Q-sort that explores their personal views and conceptual dimensions (Brown, 1993; Brown & Ungs, 1970; Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Nederhand & Molenveld, 2020). Q-methodology provides a systematic approach to developing new concepts and advancing existing literature (Nederhand & Molenveld, 2020) by identifying areas of consensus and divergence in individual views (Van Exel & de Graaf, 2005; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Most previous studies have used traditional surveys (R method), which look for correlations among variables (such as, but not limited to, responses to statements) across a set of people. In contrast, Q-methodology seeks to find correlations among people based on their responses to a set of statements (Danielson, 2009) to provide a comprehensive view of their overall attitudes (Brown & Ungs, 1970). The advantage of Q-methodology lies in its ability to generalize results to the universe of statements or ideas about the topic of study. Therefore, Q-methodology has been effectively applied to public administration research on a wide range of topics such as administrative roles, administrative ethics, governance strategy, neighborhood practitioners, public partnerships, policy advocacy organizations, institutions, government reforms, and respite care (Brewer et al., 2000; Brown, 1993; Durose et al., 2016; Gen & Wright, 2018; Leong & Lejano, 2016; Nederhand, Klijn, Van der Steen, & Van Twist, 2019; Van Exel, de Graaf, & Brouwer, 2007; Willis & Jeffares, 2012).

The study follows a five-step framework of Q-methodology. In Step 1, we selected statements relevant to the issue to form a Q-sample. In Step 2, we identified and selected key participants from a relevant population. In Step 3, these respondents expressed their subjective opinions by ranking the Q-sample statements through a Q-sort, ordering them based on a predetermined condition—usually from most to least characteristic of their views. Step 4 focuses on

loading significantly on a given factor sharing similar perceptions of PSM. The factor loading of each Q-sort indicates its correlation with the corresponding factor. Table 1 presents these factor loadings across the four identified factors, reflecting individuals' conceptions of PSM.

Factor interpretation is based on a “model” Q-sort for each factor, created by aggregating the significant loadings of individual Q-sorts. The magnitude of these loadings determines the degree of alignment between a Q-sort and a specific factor. Factor weights were calculated first, and these weights were then applied to the raw data from individual sorters to generate factor scores. The final four model Q-sorts, derived from this aggregation, are presented in Table 2.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis of 40 Q-statements identified four distinct factors. Each factor represents a unique typology of individuals and their perceptions of PSM within the Vietnamese cultural context. These factors account for variations in motivations shaped by cultural, institutional, and personal considerations. Table 1 presents the factor loadings for each Q-sort across the four identified factors. The model Q-sort for each factor was generated by aggregating individual Q-sorts with significant loadings. Factor scores were then computed by applying factor weights to the raw data collected from individual sorters.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of respondents and factor loadings.

Q-sort	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Gender	Age	Position
1	-0.017	0.074	0.533X	-0.038	Female	41	Lecturer
2	-0.185	0.204	0.272	0.646X	Female	32	Lecturer
3	0.325	0.331	0.153	0.115	Male	32	Lecturer
4	0.491X	-0.141	-0.357	-0.139	Male	34	Lecturer
5	0.034	0.117	0.423	0.533X	Female	34	Staff
6	-0.124	0.660X	0.284	0.343	Female	35	Staff
7	0.381	0.265	0.210	0.673X	Female	35	Staff
8	0.367	0.269	0.495	0.354	Male	35	Staff
9	0.636X	0.162	0.329	0.136	Male	30	Staff
10	0.503X	0.116	-0.054	-0.029	Female	41	Staff
11	-0.282	-0.021	0.446	0.401	Male	31	Lecturer
12	0.219	0.408	0.483	0.171	Female	35	Staff
13	0.756X	-0.129	0.097	-0.093	Male	28	Staff
14	0.116	0.135	0.678X	0.212	Female	32	Staff
15	0.149	0.689X	-0.080	0.129	Male	32	Staff
16	0.339	0.412	0.132	0.454	Female	32	Staff
17	0.555X	0.206	0.315	0.015	Male	34	Staff
18	0.305	0.150	0.586X	-0.099	Male	40	Staff
19	0.282	0.359	-0.167	0.635X	Male	34	Staff
20	0.048	0.182	0.092	0.636X	Male	41	Staff
21	0.507X	0.314	-0.126	0.304	Female	35	Staff
22	-0.003	0.802X	0.100	0.315	Male	40	Staff
23	0.758X	-0.028	0.042	0.460	Female	33	Staff
24	-0.042	0.608X	0.244	-0.543	Male	26	Lecturer
25	0.549X	-0.002	0.408	0.329	Female	30	Lecturer
26	0.484	0.008	0.057	0.594X	Male	33	Staff
27	0.101	-0.341	0.693X	0.194	Female	32	Lecturer
28	0.515X	0.022	0.192	0.342	Female	31	Lecturer

The four model Q-sorts, displayed in Table 2, reflect different patterns of PSM.

Table 2. List of Q-statements and factor scores.

No.	Statements	Factors			
		I	II	III	IV
1	Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievement.	4	1	-1	2
2	I am often moved by the plight of the underprivileged. (Reversed)	3	3	4	3
3	Most social programs are too vital to be without.	3	4	1	3
4	It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress.	1	0	3	2
5	I believe in putting duty before self.	5	0	-1	4
6	Doing well financially is definitely more important to me.	-5	2	-4	1
7	People may talk about the public interest, but they are really concerned only about their self-interest.	-3	-3	-2	0
8	To me, patriotism includes seeing to the welfare of others.	0	2	2	4
9	Much of what I do is for a cause bigger than myself.	1	-5	-4	0
10	I seldom think about the welfare of people whom I do not know personally.	-2	-1	-1	-2
11	Politics is a dirty word.	0	1	-2	5
12	Serving citizens would give me a good feeling even if no one paid me for it.	2	1	1	-2
13	I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.	0	-1	4	2
14	When public officials take an oath of office, I believe they accept obligations not expected of other citizens.	0	0	-2	0
15	I respect public officials who can turn a good idea into law.	3	4	0	5
16	It is hard for me to get intensely interested in what is going on in my community.	-5	2	-4	-1
17	I feel people should give back to society more than they get from it.	1	1	1	1
18	I believe that there are many public causes worth championing.	4	2	1	4
19	I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else.	-1	-5	-3	-4
20	I do not believe that the government can do much to make society fairer.	-1	0	3	1
21	I am willing to go great lengths to fulfill my obligation to my country.	4	-1	0	-1
22	Ethical behavior of public officials is as important as competence.	5	3	4	3
23	I unselfishly contribute to my community.	2	-4	1	-1
24	I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves.	1	3	5	1
25	Public service is one of the highest forms of citizenship.	0	-4	5	2
26	I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.	2	-4	0	-3
27	The give and take of public policy making does not appeal to me.	0	-2	0	-1
28	I believe everyone has a moral commitment to civic affairs, no matter how busy they are.	-3	1	-5	-3
29	I have an obligation to look after those less well off.	-4	-2	-3	-2
30	Meaningful public service is very important to me.	-1	5	-1	0
31	I do not care much for politicians.	-4	-3	2	0
32	If any group does not share in the prosperity of our society, then we are all worse off.	-1	-2	2	1
33	I am willing to use every ounce of my energy to make the world a more just place.	-1	-2	-2	-3
34	I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community, even if it harmed my interests.	1	-1	0	-4
35	To me, the phrase "duty, honor, and country" stirs deeply felt emotions.	-2	5	-1	0
36	It is my responsibility to help solve problems arising from interdependencies among people.	-2	0	-5	-4
37	An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors.	-2	4	2	-1
38	I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others, even if it means I will be ridiculed.	2	-3	-3	-2
39	I consider public service my civic duty.	-3	0	0	-5
40	There are a few public programs that I wholeheartedly support.	-4	-1	3	-5

4.1. Factor 1: Activistic Patriotism

Accounting for 15% of the variance, this factor reflects a deep commitment to national duty and community engagement (see [Appendix 2](#)). Activistic Patriots prioritize "duty, honor, and country" over personal interests (statement 5, +5; statement 35, -2), embracing public service as a cause beyond personal gain (statement 9, +1) while dismissing financial incentives (statement 6, -5). They show empathy for the underprivileged (statement 2, +3) and align personal sacrifices with societal goals (statements 12, +2; 34, +1). Though idealistic, they balance compassion with a belief in personal responsibility (statement 24, +1) and reject the idea of public service as solely a civic obligation (statements 39, -3; 28, -3). Their patriotism integrates traditional Communist Party values, respecting public officials (statement 15, +3) and expecting ethical governance (statement 22, +5). While loyal to superiors (statement 37, -2), they remain skeptical of politicians (statement 31, -4), emphasizing integrity and competence. Activistic Patriots exemplify a blend of idealism and pragmatism, contributing meaningfully to Vietnam's socio-political landscape through ethical, compassionate, and community-focused public service.

4.2. Factor 2: Egoistic Patriotism

This factor, accounting for 11% of the variance (see [Appendix 3](#)), reflects a mix of national pride and self-interest. Individuals in this group view private interests as intertwined with public concerns (statement 7, -3), believing that personal success contributes to society. They adopt a pragmatic approach to policymaking (statement 27, -2) and accept compromises in politics when aligned with personal benefits (statement 11, +1). Motivated by ideals of "duty, honor, and country" (statement 35, +5) and empathy for the underprivileged (statement 2, +3), their actions are more restrained. Egoistic Patriots value financial success (statement 6, +2) and engage minimally in community affairs (statement 16, +2). Unlike Activistic Patriots, they resist personal sacrifices for the collective good (statements 26, -4; 23, -4; 19, -5) and feel less obligated to help the less fortunate (statement 29, -2). While supporting public service and national contributions (statements 30, 35, 18, and 3), their patriotism is more verbal than actionable, with limited backing for public programs (statement 40, -1). They hold high expectations for public officials, emphasizing ethics and accountability (statements 15, 22, and 37), but remain reluctant to take on responsibilities themselves (statements 19, 29, and 36). Viewing public service as important but not paramount (statement 25, -4), they advocate for self-reliance (statement 24, +3) over interdependence (statements 32, -2; 13, -1). Overall, Egoistic Patriots blend national pride with pragmatism and self-interest, distinguishing themselves from more altruistic profiles.

4.3. Factor 3: Realistic Humanitarianism

Accounting for 12% of the variance (see [Appendix 4](#)), Realistic Humanitarians balance compassion and realism in their approach to public service. They value community welfare and societal interconnectedness (statements 13, +4; 8, +2) and show empathy for the underprivileged (statement 2, +4), though their involvement is guided by practicality. While they see public service as meaningful (statement 25, +5), it is not their priority (statement 30, -1), with personal interests often taking precedence (statement 1, -1). They are open to serving without financial incentives (statement 12, +1) but hesitate to endure personal losses or ridicule (statements 19, -3; 33, -2; 38, -3). They do not view civic engagement as a moral obligation (statement 28, -5) but are willing to help when it aligns with their self-interest (statements 9, +5). Realistic Humanitarians expect those in need to take the initiative (statement 24, +5) and believe individuals should contribute more than they receive (statement 17, +1). Skeptical of government equity efforts (statement 20, +3), they support public programs selectively (statement 40, +3) and prioritize integrity over competence in officials (statements 22, +4; 31, +2). This group combines empathy with pragmatism, shaping a distinctive, measured approach to public service.

4.4. Factor 4: Detached Communitarianism

Representing 14% of the total variance (see Appendix 5), Detached Communitarianism reflects a distinctive approach to public service and community engagement. These individuals are community-oriented, prioritizing societal welfare (statement 10, -2) and supporting essential public programs (statement 3, +3). Their commitment arises from recognizing mutual dependence and social interconnectedness (statements 13, 32), rather than a sense of duty or self-sacrifice (statements 39, 28, 36, 23, 6). They are motivated by public-spiritedness (statements 5, 25, 8) and a desire to support disadvantaged groups (statements 2, 4), viewing public service as a form of meaningful citizenship (statement 25, +2). Detached Communitarians are emotionally affected by distressing situations (statement 4, +2) but are cautious about personal sacrifices (statements 6, 12, 19, 33). They value making a difference (statement 1, +2) but balance this with personal priorities (statements 9, 0; 18, +4). Unlike Activistic Patriots, they are less action-oriented (statements 21, 33, 19) and do not see public service as an obligation (statements 39, -5; 28, -3). Their approach to policymaking is pragmatic, shaped by distrust of politics (statement 11, +5) and skepticism toward public officials prioritizing loyalty over public interest (statement 37, -1). However, they respect officials who enact effective policies (statement 15) and uphold ethical standards (statements 5, +4; 22, +3). This blend of advocacy and pragmatism defines their nuanced perspective.

Figure 2 further illustrates these factors, each reflecting a different balance between self-interest and a willingness to act for the public good, illustrating how PSM typologies vary based on personal incentives and proactive engagement. "Activistic Patriotism" represents the most altruistic and action-driven type, while "Egoistic Patriotism" reflects a more self-focused but nationally inclined stance. "Realistic Humanitarianism" and "Detached Communitarianism" fall in between, representing mixed motivations in the Vietnamese socio-cultural context.

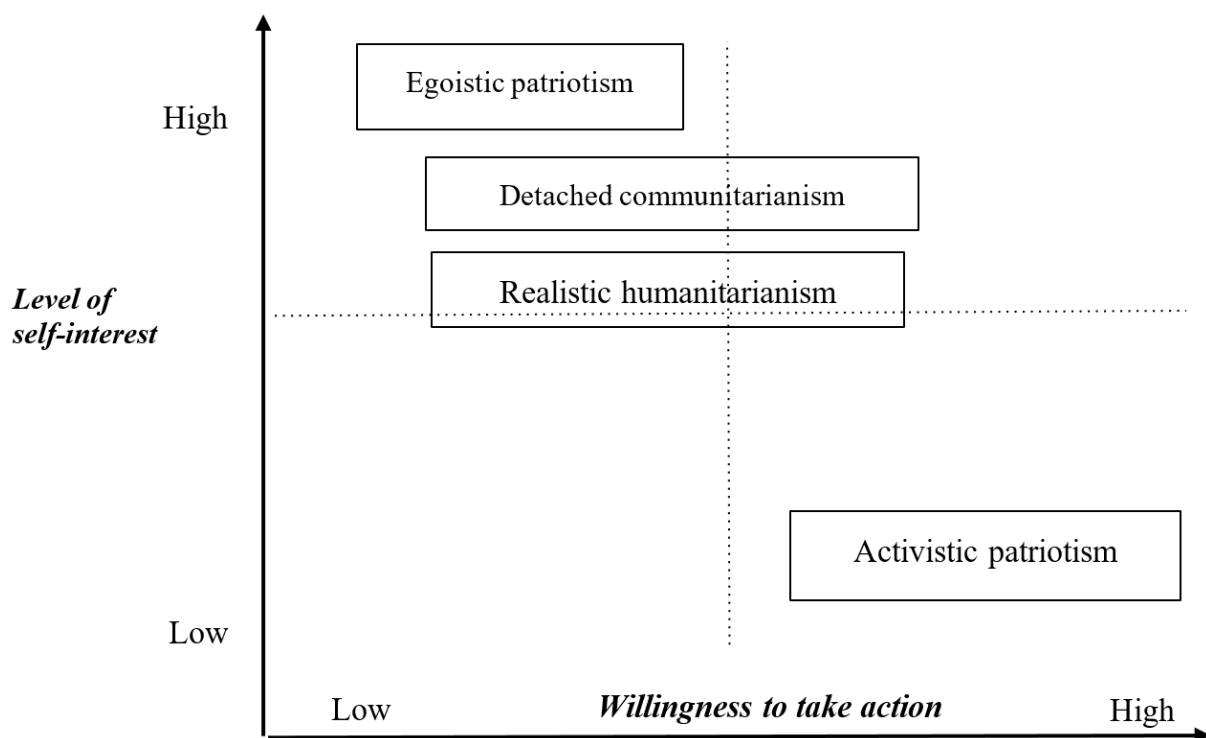


Figure 2. Four individual perspectives of PSM in Vietnam's public service context.

This analysis further refines the understanding of PSM in Vietnamese public higher education institutions by illustrating how each pattern shares both similarities and distinctions with existing frameworks, including Activistic Patriotism, Egoistic Patriotism, Realistic Humanitarianism, and Detached Communitarianism. Although all four factors reflect varying degrees of commitment to public service, their underlying motivations and approaches may differ.

Activistic Patriotism and Egoistic Patriotism are motivated by national identity and duty, but their motivations differ. Particularly, Activistic Patriots demonstrate a strong commitment to public service, actively participating in governance and policy implementation. They prioritize societal transformation and national progress, often taking on leadership roles to drive change. In contrast, Egoistic Patriotism incorporates personal aspirations into their public service. They not only support national development but also participate and align career advancement with institutional and societal contributions. Meanwhile, Realistic Humanitarians and Detached Communitarians express distinct orientations toward civic engagement. Similar to the Humanitarians described by [Brewer et al. \(2000\)](#), Realistic Humanitarians are socially conscious and committed to societal improvement. However, they prefer a pragmatic approach and achievable solutions rather than ideological activism. By contrast, Detached Communitarians primarily emphasize contributing to their organizations instead of broader societal change. They maintain a reserved attitude and focus on professional responsibilities, making them skeptical of political structures and large-scale reform efforts.

These four perspectives of PSM also have varying scopes of concern. Both Activistic and Egoistic Patriotism emphasize national development, albeit through different pathways. Specifically, the former aligns with direct engagement, whereas the latter focuses on strategic self-advancement. Realistic Humanitarians seek practical ways for change beyond current institutions by taking a broader societal perspective. Detached Communitarians, in contrast, tend to localize their contributions within their professional areas rather than through political or ideological commitments.

5. CONCLUSION

This study re-conceptualized the PSM notion by employing Q-methodology to investigate the individual perspectives of lecturers and academic staff in the unique context of Vietnam—a nation transitioning from a communist regime and planned economy to a more open government and market economy. Given this context, we took a social construction perspective and identified four factors representing different profiles of PSM in Vietnamese HEIs, including Activistic Patriotism, Egoistic Patriotism, Realistic Humanitarianism, and Detached Communitarianism. These dimensions reveal a dynamic interplay between the willingness to take action and varying degrees of self-interest. This research also provides new insights into the PSM notion in the Vietnam context, which is relatively unique in cultural, political, and economic circumstances across the globe. Specifically, we aim to examine how academic staff and faculty interpret PSM and weigh the importance of serving the state and society versus personal interests, as well as their willingness to forego and sacrifice self-interests for public service.

Furthermore, this study lays a foundation for more effective human resource strategies in Vietnamese public higher education institutions by enabling administrators to tailor engagement and incentive strategies to align with employees' diverse motivational drivers. Recognizing these distinct PSM profiles allows policymakers to adopt more targeted approaches for fostering commitment and effectiveness in public service. For instance, education reform initiatives or national recognition programs may be suitable for Activistic Patriots, while performance-based incentives and public acknowledgment of achievements could be appropriate for Egoistic Patriots. Realistic Humanitarians might be effectively engaged through outcome-focused policies, such as community service projects. Meanwhile, Detached Communitarians may be more motivated by collaborative, low-profile roles with team-based recognition.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample was limited to public employees within HEIs, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other public sector organizations in Vietnam. This focus may only partially capture the diverse PSM profiles across different sectors of public service. Secondly, the study utilized the widely recognized Perry's 40-item scale, which may not encompass the most recent developments in PSM measurement. In 2013, Kim and his colleagues introduced an updated universal scale for PSM research that could offer more refined insights. Future research should address these limitations by expanding the sample to include a

wider range of public organizations in Vietnam or other countries, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, adopting the updated PSM scale proposed by S. Kim et al. (2013) could provide a more contemporary assessment of PSM and potentially reveal new dimensions. Exploring these avenues will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of PSM across different public sectors and cultural contexts.

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Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Data Availability Statement: The corresponding author can provide the supporting data of this study upon a reasonable request.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Dimension statements and number of statements.

Dimension statements	Number of statements
Attraction to policymaking	11, 15, 22, 27, 31
Commitment to public interest	7, 16, 23, 30, 34, 37, 39
Social justice	18, 20, 32, 33, 38
Civic duty	14, 21, 25, 28, 29, 35, 36
Compassion	2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 13, 24, 40
Self-sacrifice	1, 5, 6, 9, 12, 17, 19, 26

Appendix 2. Factor 1 statements.

Attitude	No.	Statements	Factor 1 rank
Positive	5	I believe in putting duty before self.	5
	22	Ethical behavior of public officials is as important as competence.	5
	1	Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievement.	4
	18	I believe that there are many public causes worth championing.	4
	21	I am willing to go great lengths to fulfill my obligation to my country.	4
	2	I am often moved by the plight of the underprivileged. (Reversed)	3
	3	Most social programs are too vital to do without.	3
	15	I respect public officials who can turn a good idea into law.	3
	12	Serving citizens would give me a good feeling even if no one paid me for it.	2
	23	I unselfishly contribute to my community.	2
	26	I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.	2
	38	I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others, even if it means I will be ridiculed.	2
	4	It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress.	1
	9	Much of what I do is for a cause bigger than myself.	1
	17	I feel that people should give back to society more than they receive from it.	1
	24	I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves.	1
	34	I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community, even if it harms my interests.	1
Negative	19	I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else.	-1
	20	I do not believe that the government can do much to make society fairer.	-1
	30	Meaningful public service is very important to me.	-1
	32	If any group does not share in the prosperity of our society, then we are all worse off.	-1
	33	I am willing to use every ounce of my energy to make the world a more just place.	-1
	10	I seldom think about the welfare of people whom I do not know personally.	-2
	35	To me, the phrase "duty, honor, and country" stirs deeply felt emotions.	-2
	36	It is my responsibility to help solve problems arising from interdependencies among people.	-2
	37	An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors.	-2

Attitude	No.	Statements	Factor 1 rank
	7	People may talk about the public interest, but they are really concerned only about their self-interest.	-3
	28	I believe everyone has a moral commitment to civic affairs, no matter how busy they are.	-3
	39	I consider public service my civic duty.	-3
	29	I have an obligation to look after those less well off.	-4
	31	I do not care much for politicians.	-4
	40	There are a few public programs that I wholeheartedly support.	-4
	6	Doing well financially is definitely more important to me.	-5
	16	It is hard for me to get intensely interested in what is going on in my community.	-5
Distinguishing statements	1	Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievement.	4
	21	I am willing to go great lengths to fulfill my obligation to my country.	4
	15	I respect public officials who can turn a good idea into law.	3
	38	I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others, even if it means I will be ridiculed.	2
	26	I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.	2
	25	Public service is one of the highest forms of citizenship.	0
	19	I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else.	-1
	37	An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors.	-2
	39	I consider public service my civic duty.	-3
	40	There are a few public programs that I wholeheartedly support.	-4
	31	I do not care much for politicians.	-4

Appendix 3. Factor 2 statements.

Attitude	No.	Statements	Factor 1 rank
Positive	30	Meaningful public service is very important to me.	5
	35	To me, the phrase "duty, honor, and country" stirs deeply felt emotions.	5
	3	Most social programs are too vital to do without.	4
	15	I respect public officials who can turn a good idea into law.	4
	37	An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors.	4
	2	I am often moved by the plight of the underprivileged. (Reversed)	3
	22	Ethical behavior of public officials is as important as competence.	3
	24	I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves.	3
	6	Doing well financially is definitely more important to me.	2
	8	To me, patriotism includes seeing to the welfare of others.	2
	16	It is hard for me to get intensely interested in what is going on in my community.	2
	18	I believe that there are many public causes worth championing.	2
	1	Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievement.	1
	11	Politics is a dirty word.	1
	12	Serving citizens would give me a good feeling even if no one paid me for it.	1
	17	I feel people should give back to society more than they get from it.	1

	28	I believe everyone has a moral commitment to civic affairs, no matter how busy they are.	1
Negative	10	I seldom think about the welfare of people whom I do not know personally.	-1
	13	I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.	-1
	21	I am willing to go great lengths to fulfill my obligation to my country.	-1
	34	I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community, even if it harmed my interests.	-1
	40	There are a few public programs that I wholeheartedly support.	-1
	27	The give and take of public policy making does not appeal to me.	-2
	29	I have an obligation to look after those less well off.	-2
	32	If any group does not share in the prosperity of our society, then we are all worse off.	-2
	33	I am willing to use every ounce of my energy to make the world a more just place.	-2
	7	People may talk about the public interest, but they are really concerned only about their self-interest.	-3
	31	I do not care much for politicians.	-3
	38	I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others, even if it means I will be ridiculed.	-3
	23	I unselfishly contribute to my community.	-4
	25	Public service is one of the highest forms of citizenship.	-4
	26	I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.	-4
	9	Much of what I do is for a cause bigger than myself.	-5
	19	I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else.	-5
Distinguishing statements	30	Meaningful public service is very important to me.	5
	35	To me, the phrase "duty, honor, and country" stirs deeply felt emotions.	5
	37	An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors.	4
	16	It is hard for me to get intensely interested in what is going on in my community.	2
	28	I believe everyone has a moral commitment to civic affairs, no matter how busy they are.	1
	36	It is my responsibility to help solve problems arising from interdependencies among individuals.	0
	40	There are a few public programs that I wholeheartedly support.	-1
	13	I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.	-1
	27	The give and take of public policy making does not appeal to me.	-2
	31	I do not care much for politicians.	-3
	23	I unselfishly contribute to my community.	-4
	25	Public service is one of the highest forms of citizenship.	-4

Appendix 4. Factor 3 statements.

Attitude	No.	Statements	Factor 1 rank
Positive	24	I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves.	5
	25	Public service is one of the highest forms of citizenship.	5
	2	I am often moved by the plight of the underprivileged. (Reversed)	4
	13	I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.	4
	22	Ethical behavior of public officials is as important as competence.	4
	4	It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress.	3
	20	I do not believe that the government can do much to make society fairer.	3
	40	There are a few public programs that I wholeheartedly support.	3
	8	To me, patriotism includes seeing to the welfare of others.	2
	31	I do not care much for politicians.	2
	32	If any group does not share in the prosperity of our society, then we are all worse off.	2
	37	An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors.	2
	3	Most social programs are too vital to do without.	1
	12	Serving citizens would give me a good feeling even if no one paid me for it.	1
	17	I feel people should give back to society more than they get from it.	1
	18	I believe that there are many public causes worth championing.	1
	23	I unselfishly contribute to my community.	1
Negative	1	Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievement.	-1
	5	I believe in putting duty before self.	-1
	10	I seldom think about the welfare of people whom I do not know personally.	-1
	30	Meaningful public service is very important to me.	-1
	35	To me, the phrase "duty, honor, and country" stirs deeply felt emotions.	-1
	7	People may talk about the public interest, but they are really concerned only about their self-interest.	-2
	11	Politics is a dirty word.	-2
	14	When public officials take an oath of office, I believe they accept obligations not expected of other citizens.	-2
	33	I am willing to use every ounce of my energy to make the world a more just place.	-2
	19	I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else.	-3
	29	I have an obligation to look after those less well-off.	-3
	38	I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others, even if it means I will be ridiculed.	-3
	6	Doing well financially is definitely more important to me.	-4
	9	Much of what I do is for a cause bigger than myself.	-4
	16	It is hard for me to get intensely interested in what is going on in my community.	-4
	28	I believe everyone has a moral commitment to civic affairs no matter how busy they are.	-5
	36	It is my responsibility to help solve problems arising from interdependencies among individuals.	-5
Distinguishing	24	I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves.	5

statements	25	Public service is one of the highest forms of citizenship.	5
	13	I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.	4
	40	There are a few public programs that I wholeheartedly support.	3
	37	An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors.	2
	31	I do not care much for politicians.	2
	3	Most social programs are too vital to do without.	1
	15	I respect public officials who can turn a good idea into law.	0
	26	I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.	0
	11	Politics is a dirty word.	-2
	19	I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else.	-3
	28	I believe everyone has a moral commitment to civic affairs no matter how busy they are.	-5

Appendix 5. Factor 4 statements.

Attitude	No.	Statements	Factor 1 rank
Positive	11	Politics is a dirty word.	5
	15	I respect public officials who can turn a good idea into law.	5
	5	I believe in putting duty before self.	4
	8	To me, patriotism includes seeing to the welfare of others.	4
	18	I believe that there are many public causes worth championing.	4
	2	I am often moved by the plight of the underprivileged. (Reversed)	3
	3	Most social programs are too vital to do without.	3
	22	Ethical behavior of public officials is as important as competence.	3
	1	Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievement.	2
	4	It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress.	2
	13	I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.	2
	25	Public service is one of the highest forms of citizenship.	2
	6	Doing well financially is definitely more important to me.	1
	17	I believe people should give back to society more than they receive from it.	1
	20	I do not believe that the government can do much to make society fairer.	1
	24	I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves.	1
	32	If any group does not share in the prosperity of our society, then we are all worse off.	1
Negative	16	It is hard for me to get intensely interested in what is going on in my community.	-1
	21	I am willing to go great lengths to fulfill my obligation to my country.	-1
	23	I unselfishly contribute to my community.	-1
	27	The give and take of public policy making does not appeal to me.	-1
	37	An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors.	-1
	10	I seldom think about the welfare of people whom I do not know personally.	-2
	12	Serving citizens would give me a good feeling even if no one paid me for it.	-2
	29	I have an obligation to look after those less well off.	-2

Attitude	No.	Statements	Factor 1 rank
	38	I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others, even if it means I will be ridiculed.	-2
	26	I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.	-3
	28	I believe everyone has a moral commitment to civic affairs, no matter how busy they are.	-3
	33	I am willing to use every ounce of my energy to make the world a more just place.	-3
	19	I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else.	-4
	34	I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community, even if it harms my interests.	-4
	36	It is my responsibility to help solve problems arising from interdependencies among individuals.	-4
	39	I consider public service my civic duty.	-5
	40	There are a few public programs that I wholeheartedly support.	-5
Distinguishing statements	11	Politics is a dirty word.	5
	25	Public service is one of the highest forms of citizenship.	2
	35	To me, the phrase "duty, honor, and country" stirs deeply felt emotions.	0
	31	I do not care much for politicians.	0
	37	An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors.	-1
	16	It is hard for me to become intensely interested in what is happening in my community.	-1
	23	I unselfishly contribute to my community.	-1
	12	Serving citizens would give me a good feeling even if no one paid me for it.	-2
	34	I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community, even if it harms my interests.	-4
	39	I consider public service my civic duty.	-5
	40	There are a few public programs that I wholeheartedly support.	-5

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