

## **VALUE AND MOTIVATION AT THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN INTERNATIONAL-LEVEL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract:** Disinterested attitude is an important characteristic of civil services. In public administration, public service motivation and similar concepts are becoming increasingly important in explaining this kind of behavior. In this article, we propose as an objective to determine the nature of public service motivation by examining the original concept as developed by Perry and compare it to the French and the Dutch ideas. We will also try to fit public service motivation into a larger framework (integrating it into Public Administration).

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**Key words:** motivation, performance, public administration, comparative analysis, public service

Public service motivation represents the beliefs, values and attitudes that are above personal interest or organizational interest, that concern the interest of a wider political entity and that induce, by political interaction, motivation for the proposed actions.

At present, the rational choice theory and that of public choice occupy an important position within public administration. They are frequently applied within nowadays public administration. These theories are mainly focused on explaining the different behaviors of employees at their workplaces. The type of behavior is equally characteristic both to the public sector, and to the private one. Therefore, the theories based on public choice are just as applicable to private sector, having the same importance for public administration.

However, the explanatory power of the mentioned theories when analyzing specific 'public' or government-related behavior remains limited. In spite of the fact that it is widely described by public administration, behavior like self-sacrifice, realizing the public interest and altruism is very hard to explain in terms of rational choice. In trying to explain this kind of actions, the concept of public service motivation was developed as a counterweight to the self-interested motivation of rational choice theories. This concept should provide more openings to explain the disinterested (not self-interested) behavior often displayed by public servants. Perry offered the most complete operationalization of this concept, subsequently developing a measurement scale of public service motivation and the framework for a theory on public service motivation.

When discussing public service motivation, two remarks have to be made. First, it is important to note the fact that the definition of public service motivation is not as widely accepted. Second, the content of the previously presented concepts differs

according to nation or region. In a study comparing five international regions, Norris (2003) finds a different motivational impact of public service values according to region (some have no impact at all).

Next, we shall enterprise a comparative analysis on public service motivation, on the purpose to put into evidence the differences with regard to its contents. The states taken into consideration are France and the Netherlands, not omitting, at the same time, to report ourselves to the original American concept developed by Perry as this is dominant in the international literature of public administration, a reason for which it cannot be excluded from any comparative analysis of public service motivation. The American model is however used just as a framework of analysis that enables us to structure the French and the Dutch case. The Dutch variant is brought into the analysis because an important feature of Dutch public administration is that it tries to 'normalize' itself as much as possible. 'Normalization' in this context is the alignment of the public and private sector, creating as little differences as possible. The French, then again, have a distinctive view on public administration and on the role of the state and the public servant in particular. In France there is a huge difference between government and the private sector.

By relying on 'beliefs, values and attitudes', we have broadened our horizon to every value-laden behavioral determinant. All of these determinants can act in a motivational fashion whenever an apt opportunity presents itself. By studying 'public' value-laden determinants, we can obtain a clear image of what may be the content of public service motivation in these countries.

Perry describes public service motivation as 'an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions'. The motives should be understood as psychological deficiencies or needs. Perry summed up six such motives. A first motive is the attraction to public policy making. A second motive is the commitment to the public interest. A third motive is a sense of civic duty. Fourth is a sense of social justice. The fifth motive is compassion, referring to the patriotism of benevolence. The final motive is self-sacrifice, the willingness to substitute service to others for tangible personal rewards. When operationalizing his measurement scale, Perry's conception of public service motivation is reduced to four dimensions instead of six. There remain only: 1) **attraction to public policy making**; 2) **commitment to the public interest**; 3) **compassion** and 4) **self-sacrifice**. Perry's measurement scale is considered the general accepted model of public service motivation within the United States.

With regard to case description, in our search for administrative values, we must rely on the specificity of the state and the role and expectations of public servants. The value pattern in which they are embedded might act in a motivational manner and thus provide us with information about the content of public service motivation.

With regard to the French state, almost all conceivable types of government have been adopted since the revolution of 1789. In this rapid succession of governments, often not separated by more than a decade, the civil service was the only constant factor on the political horizon. The relative vacuum in which the French civil service operated, enabled it to build a strong position within the French society and thus constitute a binding factor of the French nation. It also enabled another important feature of the French civil service fully to develop: the *administrative and technical corps*. These corps gather the senior civil servants of the most important administrative bodies to protect their position and their privileges. Due to educational selection, within

## Economic Theories – International Economic Relations

the senior positions of the government entered only the elites. Persons situated on the lower levels of government find it very hard to infiltrate these corps. This causes a vault line in the public service and in the replication of public service values, that has to be kept in mind when analyzing the French case. However, with regards to the corps, especially the grand corps, they occupy such an important position, so as the influence of the lower hierarchical levels afferent to public service upon public service in entirety is insignificant.

Also, the establishment of the European Union has caused the civil service to rock on its foundations. The neo-liberal approach towards the civil service clashed with the dominant French approach. However, in spite of the many indictments that have been uttered, in the last decade, the classic civil service values seem to survive.

Contrary to French government, Dutch government has had a rather stable monarchy for the last century. Like most western countries, it showed a continuous increase in the size of government. Since the 1870s the Netherlands has evolved from a night watch man state to a welfare state. Social and religious movements contributed to the expansion of government authorities and by consequence to the number of public servants. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the succession of wars and other crises contributed to a further growth of government role. In spite of this fact, the coordination capacity of economic activity by ministries regressed. Moreover, ministries started to focus prioritarily on their own interests in order to cope with the less favorable situations, a reason for which coordination decreased even more. This also caused the public interest to split up between ministries. Although government occupies a prominent place in Dutch society, contemporary civil service practices are very similar to private sector practices. This is because of the stress and competition on the labor market. The government has to compete fiercely with private sector employers for potential employees. Dutch government tried to cope with this challenge by adopting private sector techniques, reaching what is called 'normalization'. In other order of ideas, public employees and unions tried to obtain an equal treatment with those in the private sector. This trend is called 'normalization', where private employment is regarded as being the standard for the public sector.

In spite of those mentioned, early and recent empirical evidence demonstrate that public service motivation still is a relevant concept in Dutch public administration. In the following tables there are evidenced the dimensions of Perry's model of public service motivation from a comparative perspective with the above mentioned states.

**Table no. 1 Attraction to Politics and Policymaking**

United States	France	The Netherlands
- Policy making	- Policy making	- Policy making
- Care of politicians	- Primacy of politics	- Primacy of politics
	- Contempt of politicians	- Loyalty to politicians

The first dimension of Perry's public service motivation model is the **attraction to policy making and politics**. He mainly refers to the impact and status of politics and policy-making on employee motivation. French public servants hold a rather important role within the political institutions from this country. At the same time, they are considered to be operating under the authority of elected politicians. There is a clear primacy of politics over administration. However, this political primacy does not translate itself into loyalty towards politicians, as long as there is a certain degree of contempt towards politicians. French public servants value politicians a lot less than they value their technocratic peers.

In the Netherlands, senior public servants are attracted to policy-making. Meanwhile, there is also considered that the newly hired in the system display a certain amount of reluctance towards policy making. Here, too, in spite of the attraction to policy making, the primacy of politics plays an important role. Contrary to France, this primacy generates a loyalty towards politicians, due to the compartmentalization of government. This applies particularly to the politician in charge of the ministry that the respective employee works in.

Table no. 2 puts into evidence the second dimension of the public sector motivation, that is **public interest**.

**Table no. 2 Public Interest**

United States	France	The Netherlands
- Community interest	- National interest	- National interest
- Meaningful public service	- Centralization	- Social commitment
- Civic duty	- Public welfare	- Civic culture, citizenship

The model Perry constructed is centered around three themes. First, the realization of the public interest is operationalized by delivering meaningful public service. Second, this public service is considered the civic duty of all of the citizens. Finally, the public interest refers to the level of the community, but not to national level.

This is different in France, where public interest refers clearly to the national level. Other levels are not even considered, as the centralization ensures that the state plays the most important role from the government perspective. Beside these aspects, it is considered that public interest takes care of the public welfare.

The story is the same in the Netherlands, with the national level as reference framework for the public interest and with civil servants socially committed to societal and public welfare. Just like in the United States, concern for the public interest is said to be an integral part of civic culture and the role of citizen. However, in France, the realization of the public interest seems to be more of a duty to government.

With regard to the third dimension - **compassion** (table no. 3) – this refers, in Perry’s case, to two levels of compassion. First there is the individual level of compassion, which is elaborated in a rather emotional, humanitarian way. Second, there is a level of more aggregate compassion, which refers more to government responsibility and social policy.

**Table no. 3 Compassion**

United States	France	The Netherlands
- Compassion (emotional)	- Societal solidarity	- Social commitment
- Need for social policy	- Socially progressive values	
	- Government employment	

The French civil service also incorporates some humanitarian values such as societal solidarity or other social values. However, compared to the United States, there is stronger focus on the role of government. The constitution already states that the French state should be an example of fraternity and the social dimension of government has long been an important dimension of the French state. Government commitment itself is seen as an important way of conducting social policy and access to public service is considered as a cardinal point to public welfare.

The humanitarian aspect of compassion has totally disappeared in the Dutch case. One can only refer to the social commitment (see also the preceding table) of the public service to demonstrate the importance of social policy. An individual level of

## Economic Theories – International Economic Relations

compassion is however absent.

In table no. 4 we present the synoptic table afferent to the dimension of **self-sacrifice**.

The self-sacrifice dimension of the public service motivation that Perry's model constructs is mainly focused on sacrificing personal interest for a greater good. In this respect, this dimension is also connected with the public interest dimension. This thing is demonstrated when studying the interfactor correlation between the two dimensions – coefficient 0.86.

Likewise, the most important theme of self-sacrifice in the French case is the refusal of self-interested behavior and the promotion of public interest. Defense of non-vested interest is highly regarded. Some of the corps even described the deaths of some members as they understood to make their duty as heroes.

This dimension is not as strong in the Netherlands, there was considered that public service is a calling, for which other interests have to be put aside. Given the correlation with public interest, it still remains an important dimension.

**Table no. 4 Self-sacrifice**

United States	France	The Netherlands
- Public interest	- Public interest	- Public interest
- Self-sacrifice	- Refusal of self-interest	- Public service as a calling
	- Defense of non-vested interests	
	- Heroism	

The American concept of public service motivation developed by Perry consists of only four dimensions. However, in looking for motivational values in public institutions in France and the Netherlands, other value laden determinants come to surface. Obviously, they cannot be compared to the Perry model. But a comparison between France and the Netherlands should yield extra information on the possible content of public service motivation in both environments. We think these aspects useful to think about next.

A first aspect that we wish to underline is constituted by the **religion** (table no. 5).

**Table no. 5 Religion**

France	The Netherlands
- Catholic morality	- Protestant work ethic

Thus, an important element prevails to the religious morality in both countries. This has been institutionalized within the public service. France traditionally has been a catholic country, whereas the Netherlands have been a protestant country. This thing translates itself into an entirely different morality, with France being focused on catholic values (deliverance, obedience and compassion), and the Netherlands focusing on a more individual, pre-destined protestant work ethic.

Another reason is **equality**, presented in table no. 6.

**Table no. 6 Equality**

France	The Netherlands
- Equality	- Free of values
- Laicism	- Democracy
- Democracy	- Neutrality
- Neutrality	- Objectivity

Thus, the French have a long tradition of equality, dating back to the revolution and even earlier. Crozier describes how France has always been an egalitarian society, already before the revolution. This thing was transferred to a large extent to the public service, with equality being one of the principles of public service. Another one of those principles, neutrality, contributes also to the development of an egalitarian society. The values of laicism (free of ecclesiastical values) and democracy in the constitution are also a testimony of this egalitarian view.

In the Netherlands, the focus on equality is not founded on an age-old tradition. The protestant theory of pre-destination, on the contrary, promotes individualism. But the insertion of democratic and bureaucratic values promoted objectivity, neutrality and a public service free of partisan values.

**Service delivery** is extremely important at the level of public institutions, as well (table 7).

**Table no. 7 Service delivery**

France	The Netherlands
- Tradition in service delivery	- Tradition in service delivery

Both France and the Netherlands have a strong tradition of delivering service to citizens, even before the new public management era. However, it should be noted that the content and the origin of this tradition differ substantially. In France, this tradition is preserved through socialization at the '*Ecole Nationale d'Administration*', where public servants are permeated with the importance of service delivery. The same is true for the '*Ecole Polytechnique*', a military school, which also educates members of the technical corps. Service delivery itself therefore is considered a motivational factor. In the Netherlands, this reason is thought to be one of the core elements of the role of public servants, as it provides a sense of legitimation for the special authorities they represent.

Another common theme in France and the Netherlands is the discussion of the **technical competences** that public servants should possess on the purpose to cast a value-laden shadow on the public service (table no. 8).

In the French public service, rationality is an important value. Besides, the focus of public servants on managerial techniques and knowledge is related to this thing. Apart from this, the intellectual capacities and the wisdom of public servants are highly regarded. This provides the public service with a somewhat elitist aura.

**Table no. 8 Technical Competences**

France	The Netherlands
- Rationality	- Focus on management
- Focus on management	- Knowledge
- Knowledge	- Focus on efficiency
- Intellectual capacities	

Although the Dutch have an equal focus on knowledge, their interest in managerial techniques has its origin in the new public management movement, by which, contrary to France, efficiency itself becomes a value in its own right.

**Bureaucratic values**, presented in table no. 9, represent the final common theme in France and the Netherlands. In France, the bureaucratic values are incorporated in continuity, equality, neutrality and adaptation, these being the most important principles of public service. If adding centralization and primacy of policies, there results a case-specific application of Weber's bureaucracy that fits France very well.

## Economic Theories – International Economic Relations

### Table no. 9 Bureaucracy

France	The Netherlands
- Continuity	- Continuity
- Equality	- Neutrality
- Neutrality	- Instrumentality
- Adaptation	- Primacy of politics
- Centralization	- Avoidance of conflict
- Primacy of politics	

The Netherlands has a slightly different application of Weber's bureaucracy. The principles of public service are not institutionalized as thoroughly as in France. Instead, they are more focused on practical arrangements and modes of operation, such as instrumentality, continuity, neutrality and primacy of politics (the public servants are loyal to the minister). Thus, it might be more similar to Weber's original conception of bureaucracy.

Next to these common themes, both France and the Netherlands have values that are (within bounds of this comparison) unique to their public service, as results from table no. 10.

### Table no. 10 Unique Administrative Values

France	The Netherlands
- Contempt of monetary rewards	- Flexibility
	- Rule of law

These constitute a major difference in the content of their respective public service motivation concepts. In France, the most striking observation in the civil service (and especially in the senior civil service) is the idea of money and profit. Little attention is devoted to monetary rewards as these only serve to live a life according to one's rank. Money constitute certainly no motivation to enter the civil service. The sense of merit and honor is related to this motive.

Recently the Netherlands adopted the value of flexibility, when applying new public management techniques. This was a reaction to the practical transposing of the bureaucratic model. Another feature is the huge significance of the rule of law in government (the rightful state). Responsibility, rules, legality, accuracy, punctuality, public image, all are important in this respect. This rule of law surpasses administrative and bureaucratic law and has become a value of its own.

Up to a certain extent, our comparison demonstrates that public service motivation is a universal concept. All four of Perry's dimensions can be found when describing the French and Dutch variants. However, on taking a closer look, several differences are revealed. For example, the esteem of politicians and, consequently, the loyalty to these, differ across all three models. Also, the reference level of public interest varies. Whereas the original - American - model focuses on the community, the French and the Dutch ones focus more on the national level. The role of the individual versus the government, the humanitarian compassion versus social policy differ in all three models. Perry (and implicitly the American case) focuses on the individual level, turning to government only in case of random vital needs. In the Netherlands, this individual level is absent in the civil service. It is up to the government to pursue a social policy to and answer to social needs. France takes some sort of a middle position in this debate, answering to both the individual and the government level with its social policy. Finally, the extent to which self-sacrifice is institutionalized is also a matter of difference. In France, there is a stronger heroic connotation to public service than it is in

the Netherlands.

A further comparison of the Dutch and the France case shows that public service motivation not only consists of the dimensions introduced by Perry. The comparison reveals several additional elements of public service motivation. First, religion has a major impact on a country's administrative values. In the United States, Gawthrop demonstrated the link between the United States' administrative values and the bible, and Perry confirmed it indirectly by declaring religious socialization one of the antecedents of public service motivation. However, as we observe in our comparison of France and the Netherlands, religion can have an entirely different impact. Second, democratic and bureaucratic values are an important element of public service motivation. Whenever these values are institutionalized, they determine how the business of government is run in a given environment. However, the above mentioned aspect is linked to other elements in the environment, resulting in a regional or national type of democracy and bureaucracy. Exemplary in this respect is the way the egalitarian structure of the French society shaped the mode in which its civil service operates. After all, by implementing bureaucratic values, the French society could cope more easily with submission to authority. Face-to-face dependence relationships are, indeed, perceived as difficult to bear in the French cultural setting. Instead of suffering from a personal and humiliating dependence relationship, an impersonal bureaucratic body offers the French a gentler way of coping with authority. Third, the service traditions of a civil service play an important part in public service motivation. The technical competences demanded from public servants play a similar role in France and the Netherlands. Due to the extremely high standards required, in France, civil service acquired an elitist image, compared to the Netherlands. Finally, public service motivation is determined by some unique features. In the Netherlands, the rule of law, and recently the new public management's flexibility changed the face of the Dutch public service, and therefore its motivational value. The contempt of profit on the other hand, gave the French civil service its distinct character.

All these elements point to the explanatory framework of new institutionalism. Institutions are defined as formal or informal, structural, societal or political phenomena that surpass the individual level and that are based more or less on normal values. They have a certain amount of stability and they influence behavior. Contrary to rational and public choice theory, new institutionalism considers motivational values not as exogenous but as endogenous. This means that if motivation in rational choice theories always is self-interested, it is shaped within the institutions according to new institutionalism theories. This aspect totally corresponds to our findings with regard to the varying conception related to the public service motivation depending on country or region. The institutions and the administrative history explain most of the features found in a specific public service motivation concept. This also explains the multidimensional appearance of public service motivation, as these institutions are structured in a systemic way and relate to one another. Whenever studying public service motivation, these institutions should be taken into account, because ignoring them would probably result in the irrelevance of the said concept.

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**Economic Theories – International Economic Relations**

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