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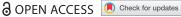
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Reality Shock and Public Service Motivation: A Longitudinal, Qualitative Study Among Dutch Veterinary Inspectors

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ABSTRACT

To this day little is known about the mechanisms that help explain the mixed findings of longitudinal public service motivation (PSM) research. This study aims to deepen our understanding of post-entry PSM dynamics by focusing on the role of the often cited "reality shock" as a potential explanation for the decrease in PSM also found here. The results of this longitudinal, small-scale qualitative study of a specific cohort of newcomers who just started work as veterinary inspectors at the Dutch food safety authority suggest that a loss of PSM is not due to a generic shock effect, but is linked to having unclear job expectations and individual differences in coping behaviour.

Introduction

The motivation to contribute to society and the public interest is called "public service motivation" (PSM) (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008). Causes and outcomes of PSM have been analyzed in earlier studies (e.g., Brewer, 2008; Bright, 2008; Jacobson, 2011; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Schott and Pronk 2014). However, in spite of what is now a large body of research, Bozeman and Su (2014) argue that "only limited progress (e.g., Perry & Vandenabeele, 2008) has been made in providing an adequate set of explanations or hypotheses about how PSM develops and why" (p. 6). To this day, the dynamics of PSM have been investigated in only a small albeit growing number of longitudinal studies. The results of these studies are mixed. PSM is found to increase over time (e.g., Georgellis, Iossa, & Tabvuma, 2011); to remain stable (e.g., Vogel & Kroll, 2016); to decrease (e.g., Choi & Chung, 2017; Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013; Ward, 2014); or different patterns for different PSM dimensions are identified (e.g., Brænder & Andersen, 2013).

From an institutional perspective, increases in PSM may be explained by the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model and the concept of organizational socialization (e.g., Kjeldsen, 2013; Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013). However, when it comes to explaining stable and decreasing levels of PSM our knowledge is much more limited. Bakker (2015) states "we still know little about the mechanisms that make PSM work. [...] When do public servants manage to sustain their

PSM? What factors undermine PSM?" (p. 1). Some scholars have argued that PSM is a stable predisposition (e.g., Bakker, 2015; Prebble, 2016). However, this argument cannot explain the decrease often found in PSM. A frequently cited theoretical explanation for a negative change in PSM is the "reality shock" (e.g., Brænder & Andersen, 2013; Kjeldsen, 2013; Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013): newcomers who were initially motivated by their desire to contribute to the common good become frustrated and disillusioned when they experience unwilling clients, and bureaucratic rules and procedures. Because of this frustration they eventually lose their PSM.

To the best of our knowledge, there is no research in which this phenomenon/reality shock is analyzed empirically. The aim of this study is to fill this gap by focusing on the function of the "reality shock" as a potential explanation for the decrease in PSM. Unlike the quantitative methods used in previous longitudinal PSM research, in this study a qualitative approach is used, since this is well-suited to describing complex phenomena and studying a small number of cases in-depth (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Thus, this study responds to the call by Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2013) for qualitative research on PSM, which should enable us "to get closer to the causal mechanism underlying individual adaption processes" (p. 22). An additional strength of qualitative research is that its flexible character can lead to unanticipated but revealing insights (Mason, 2002). This means that the application of

qualitative methods did not restrict this investigation to understanding the effect of the reality shock on PSM dynamics, but could also be used to explore possibilities to inductively develop initial explanations for the mixed findings of previous longitudinal PSM research. In other words, this study aims to answer two central questions: Is the "reality shock" a useful concept to explain decreasing levels of PSM over time? And what can be learned from qualitative data to explain the mixed findings of previous longitudinal studies?

This study is based on longitudinal data gained from semi-structured interviews with a complete cohort of veterinary inspectors who entered the Dutch Food Safety Service in 2012. The second round of interviews followed on average 15 months later, when the inspectors had completed their training and started to perform inspections on their own. In the context of this study this group of public service professionals presents a critical case; their working context is tough since they are often confronted with resistance from inspectees.

By answering the research questions this article aims to offer two main contributions, both related to the vast literature on PSM (Ritz, Brewer, & Neumann, 2016). As far as we know, this is the first study to investigate empirically whether the "reality shock" is indeed a useful concept to explain changes in PSM over time. Theoretical insights from psychology are used to discuss whether individual differences may help explain the mixed findings found in this and previous longitudinal studies on PSM, and so open new research avenues related to longitudinal PSM research. Also, the study has practical relevance. A deeper understanding of post-entry PSM dynamics is useful to identify specific HR activities that can help public servants to sustain their PSM, with the underlying assumption that high levels of PSM are beneficial for the individual and the organization.

In this article, first an overview of previous longitudinal research is provided, followed by a discussion of the mechanisms explaining why PSM increases or remains stable over time. Next, the "reality shock" and related theoretical considerations are scrutinized in detail in order to assess their suitability to explain a potential decrease in PSM. A description of the research design and method is followed by the presentation of the results. Finally, the empirical findings and limitations of this study are discussed and conclusions are drawn for theory and practice.

Theoretical background

What do we know about the development of PSM over time?

As mentioned before, the small albeit growing number of quantitative, longitudinal studies investigating individuals'

dynamics in PSM have shown mixed results. Georgellis et al. (2011) found that after starting work in the public sector employees show an increased level of PSM for a period of at least 5 years. Ward (2014) and Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2013) found that although PSM declines after people join the labor market, this drop may be mitigated by positive (public) socialization. A study by Waterhouse, French, and Puchala (2014) suggests that individuals' PSM levels vary across the first year of employment: after an initial decrease PSM returns to almost starting levels. Vogel and Kroll (2016) found stable levels of PSM. Similarly, Oberfield (2014) found individuals' motivation upon entering an organization to be the strongest predictor of entrants' motivation over a period of 2 years. Brænder and Andersen (2013) included work characteristics and Danish soldiers' "deployment to war", respectively, in their analysis to obtain a more complete picture of post-entry PSM dynamics. They found that different PSM dimensions (attraction to policy making, commitment to civic duty, self-sacrifice, and compassion) either change in different directions or remain stable across time. Interestingly, results from cross-sectional studies are in line with the mixed findings of longitudinal PSM research. For example, Moynihan and Pandey (2007) and Camilleri (2007a, 2007b) found that PSM significantly decreased with increased organizational tenure, while Ritz (2009) found a positive relationship between organizational tenure and the PSM dimensions "attraction to policy making" and "commitment to the public interest." In a recent meta-analysis by Harari, Herst, Parola, and Carmona (2017), a non-significant relationship between tenure and PSM was found. This does not come as a surprise; the different effects pointing into opposite directions may cancel each other out.

It could be argued that the mixed findings of the studies mentioned here can be attributed to different empirical contexts. Han (2016), for example, refers to goal-setting theory and argues that it is reasonable to assume that PSM can be either cultivated or suppressed by organizational institutions. This study aims to explore whether there are alternative—or at last additional—causes for different patterns in PSM dynamics, pushing individuals' PSM in different directions.

Explaining increasing and stable levels of PSM

To explain increases in PSM Schneider's (1987) ASA model and the concept of organizational socialization are helpful. The assumption is that public service-motivated individuals are attracted by public sector work because of the opportunity it offers to contribute to the public interest and provide meaningful public services. This establishes a person-environment fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005), which makes public service-motivated professionals

want to stay in the organization. Following the logic of organizational socialization, Vandenabeele (2011) argues that individuals "will be public service motivated because they have internalized public values that can be found within the institutions to which they belong" (p. 90). This in turn implies an institutional approach to PSM: the level of PSM increases by means of socialization. Several studies have empirically investigated the impact of the ASA model and organizational socialization on PSM dynamics (e.g., Kjeldsen, 2013; Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013).

However, PSM can also be studied in a dispositional approach. Actually, this is the approach suggested by Perry and Wise's (1990) groundbreaking definition of PSM, as it views PSM as "a predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public organizations" (p. 368). From this perspective PSM seems to reflect a *trait* (Han, 2018; Vogel & Kroll, 2016), which psychologists define as underlying attributes "that predispose one toward patterns of thinking and behavior that are essentially consistent over time and across situations" (Gleitman, Fidlund, & Reisberg, 2004, p. B23). The idea that PSM is unchangeable across time also fits with the continuity approach, in which certain psychological characteristics, such as motivations and identities, are expected to remain stable throughout life (Hampson & Goldberg, 2006). In line with this, Maynard-Moody and Musheno's (2003) work on street-level bureaucrats suggests that the identities people bring to their employing organization are likely to remain salient after job entry.

The reality shock as a trigger for decreasing levels of PSM

As mentioned in the introduction, the reality shock individuals may experience after entering the labor market has been cited as an explanation for decreasing levels of PSM (e.g., Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013; Ward, 2014). However, PSM scholars do not analyze or test this reality shock, but rather derive their conclusions simply from finding that PSM drops after individuals entered the labor market.

The term "reality shock" goes back to the work of Hughes (1958) and is linked to unsuccessful organizational socialization, thus fitting institutional theory. PSM does not remain constant throughout life, but changes due to lack of organizational support and expectation management. The reality shock has been used to describe the discrepancy between how nursing graduates understand their professional nursing role on the basis of their training, and the working reality they are confronted with when entering the practice of healthcare services (e.g., Delaney, 2003;

Duchscher, 2001, 2008; Kramer, 1974). Reality shock has also been observed among social workers (Blau, 1960), police recruits (Van Maanen, 1975), and teachers (De Cooman et al., 2009). Dean, Ferris, and Konstans (1988) found that accountants who switch from one job to another can experience reality shock. Fisher (1986) argues that reality shock may even occur during an individual's career within the same organization, for example in response to a promotion that does not bring the expected improvements.

Wright and Pandey (2008) note that just because public agencies *can* provide individuals with opportunities to act upon their PSM, there is no guarantee that they actually *will*. Lipsky (1980) even goes a step further and argues that the very nature of work in the public sector prevents individuals from even coming close to the ideal conceptions of their jobs. Because of inadequate and limited resources, combined with unpredictable and often ungrateful clients, public servants experience inconsistencies between their organizational life on the one hand, and their own preferences and commitments to doing something socially useful on the other. This discrepancy can be further intensified by high levels of red tape (Boyne, 2003) and/or clashes between an organizational focus and the focus on the public interest at the core of PSM (Steen & Rutgers, 2011).

Building upon this, this study follows the line of argumentation by Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2013) and (Ward, 2014): it is assumed that public service-motivated individuals may experience a reality shock after job entry, resulting in a drop in PSM. Individuals who thought their job would enable them to make a difference to society may come to realize that the working reality looks different, and consequently lose their PSM. This line of arguments closely fits insights from identity work and identity theory. Beech et al. (2016) found evidence that individuals "do not always seek to arrive at an answer or strive for resolution in the face of disturbing tensions, but engage in 'self-questioning' rather than 'self-affirming' identity work" (p. 507). From identity theory we know that people constantly aim to reaffirm their salient identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). If people in general, or highly public service-motivated individuals in particular, are prevented from verifying who they are due to the very nature of their work, they are likely to experience negative feelings such as stress, tensions, and a desire to quit their job (Burke & Stets, 2009). One way to deal with these tensions is to readjust one's desire to contribute to society. Hence, PSM can be expected to decrease in the long term due to this mismatch—also called "reality shock."

Study design, case, and method

This study aims to explore the role of the "reality shock" in the development of PSM over time. For this purpose qualitative research is an appropriate research method, since it is well-suited to making inferences about causation in a limited number of cases (Coppedge, 1999), and developing theory by seeking out the complexity and variety of social contexts (Brower, Abolafia, & Carr, 2000). This study follows the approach by Van Loon, Leisink, and Vandenabeele (2014) and Kjeldsen (2012a), who were also interested in clarifying patterns of motives associated with the concept of PSM in relation to other complex variables.

The scene for this study was the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (*Nederlandse Voedsel en Warenautoriteit*, NVWA), for two reasons. First, this made it possible to collect data from a cohort of public service professionals—veterinary inspectors—at the very beginning of their job entry in 2012 and again 15 months later, when they had completed their training and started to perform inspections on their own. Although the sample size in this study was small ($N = 15$), it does reflect a complete cohort of newcomers working as veterinary inspectors in The Netherlands, because the NVWA is the only organization in The Netherlands employing these inspectors. Put differently, we interviewed the entire population of newly employed veterinary inspectors. Second, veterinary inspectors constitute a critical case for a study on the potential effect of the reality shock on PSM dynamics. They are trained veterinarians tasked with monitoring the food production chain, in which living animals are involved. The organizational context did not vary among the participants: all newly employed veterinary inspectors start working at slaughterhouses, where they monitor the arrival and slaughter process of animals. This working environment can be described as extremely harsh. The first shift often starts at 4 am, and the work itself involves extreme temperatures, high noise pollution, and stench. Also, veterinary inspectors are confronted with the rough manners and language of the employees working at the slaughter line. Slaughter house workers often receive minimum wages, and often try to defend the economic interests of the slaughterhouse by relying on resistance and aggression. Finally, veterinary inspectors work in an environment which is highly regulated at European level. This implies that their work is bound by many bureaucratic rules and regulations.

In this study two rounds of face-to-face interviews were conducted with all 15 newcomers.[1] The first round took place shortly after the respondents had been hired by the NVWA and had started their in-house training (October 2012). The second round followed on average 15 months later, when the participants had completed their training and started to perform inspections on their own (spring 2014). All interviewees share the same professional background of a university degree in veterinary medicine. Except for one, the interviewees had no prior working experience in the public sector. This means that the possibility of newcomers' PSM being caused by prior socialization in the public sector was controlled for. Table A1 provides an overview of the respondents' demographic characteristics including gender, age, and type of working experience.

The interviews were semi-structured, with a list of topics (see Appendix: Table A2) drawn up beforehand on the basis of the literature, and lasted on average 1 h. In the first round the interviewers introduced themselves and assured the inspectors that anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed. In order to learn more about the veterinary inspectors' PSM, the interviews started very broadly by asking the interviewees what motivated them in their work. Critics may argue that verbal descriptions of PSM as reactions to broad questions cannot be reliable indicators of actual levels of PSM. However, it is generally true that the more specific the questions, the higher the risk of receiving socially desirable answers. Kim and Kim (2016) recently found that social desirability is a serious problem in PSM research. Therefore, this study followed the approach used in previous studies (e.g., Schott, van Kleef & Steen 2015; Van Loon et al., 2014) and used an open question to assess PSM. Another topic addressed was work/organizational expectations, via questions such as "Did you have any (prior) expectations of the work of a veterinary inspector?." In the second-round interviewees were again questioned about their work motivation. The presence of any reality shock was assessed via the questions "Is the job any different from what you expected?," and "Did you encounter any problems?."

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, anonymized, and coded using MAXQDA. The coding scheme can be found in Table A3 in Appendix. All elements mentioned by a respondent as being motivating were coded "motivation." From the general code six subcodes could be derived, distinguishing PSM from public sector motivation (which can be seen as motivation grounded in job security), career tenure, retirement benefits (French & Emerson, 2014), and other types of motives. The subcodes for PSM were specified beforehand on the basis of the theoretical description of the construct. They reflect the four separate dimensions of PSM—commitment to public vales, compassion, attraction

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[1]For logistical reasons one of the second-round interviews was conducted by phone.

to public service, and self-sacrifice—as described by Kim et al. (2012). All other subcodes were developed in an exploratory way. All elements mentioned by respondents in the context of what they had initially expected from their job were coded "job/organizational expectations." Examples of subcodes here are "no expectations," "rule enforcement," and "resistance from inspectees." In the second round of interviews all elements that reflected how interviewees experienced their actual work and work environment were given the general code "working reality," with subcodes such as "unwieldy organization" and "lack of uniformity in enforcement." Performing axial coding in the second step of the analysis made it possible to explore within-person variation of PSM between the two rounds of interviews for all 15 employees. Next to this, it proved possible to investigate whether this variation could be linked to a discrepancy between newcomers' initial job expectations as measured in round 1, and actual working reality as measured in round 2.

Findings

This section starts with a description of PSM and other types of work motivation among veterinary inspectors, and explores how PSM changes across time for each individual separately. Second, the discussion moves to the "reality shock" and the question whether this mechanism indeed triggers a potential drop in PSM. In a third step, the findings are related to the employees' demographic characteristics in order to explore whether these provide alternative or additional explanations for changes in PSM.[2]

Work motivation among veterinary inspectors, and changes in PSM over time

PSM plays an important role among newcomers at the NVWA. In the first interview round, almost all respondents (13 out of 15) mentioned that what motivated them in their work was the opportunity to safeguard the values of animal welfare and/or public health, or to change things for the better. Animal welfare and public health were sometimes mentioned in combination, but animal welfare was most frequently mentioned on its own (six times). Other aspects that can be related to PSM—such as the opportunity to banish abuse, to stand up for vulnerable people (compassion dimension), or elements of the PSM dimension of self-sacrifice—were not mentioned. Thus, PSM among veterinary inspector was primarily

expressed by referring to normative motives, linked to the dimension "commitment to public values."

> What I primarily like [about my work] is that I can make a difference with regard to public health in my role as a veterinary inspector. That's something I find very interesting. (…) I am very interested in public health from the point of view of doing preventive work; not from the point of view of making people better. (R8a[3])

> I like my work and it motivates me if things actually get better. (…) You're making things better together with the people from the abattoir (R1a)

> Public health and animal welfare are the two values of the NVWA I can identify with. That's why I have decided to work here. (R2a)

Comparing the statements referring to PSM in the two rounds of interviews revealed a decrease in the importance of PSM as a motivator. In the second round, five interviewees who had initially described themselves as public service motivated no longer mentioned any motivation that could be associated with PSM. Hence, in this study the term "loss" of PSM is used even if PSM level might just have decreased. Next to a loss of PSM among five interviewees, the data showed that none of the two respondents who had been coded as not being public service motivated at the time of joining the NVWA, 15 months later said they were motivated by the opportunity to contribute to the public interest or to safeguard values such as animal welfare and public health.

Next to PSM, in the first round of interviews public sector motivation (e.g., job security and retirement benefits), task variety, and interaction with different stakeholders were mentioned as motivating factors. Since all interviewees had just started an extensive training program at the NVWA it is not surprising that the newcomers also stressed the opportunity to develop their competencies as being motivating. In the second round, the opportunity to develop competencies was mentioned less frequently as a motivational factor, but this time "holding responsibilities" figured often. Again, this is not surprising. All respondents who mentioned "having responsibility" as a motivational work factor had received a promotion just before the second round of interviews took place. Public sector motivation, task diversity and interaction with different stakeholders remained important motivational factors.

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[2]The interview statements used in the study were translated from Dutch to English by the researchers. The original Dutch texts may be obtained from the corresponding author on request.
[3]"a" indicates that the statement is from the first round of interviews.

The role of the "reality shock"

For the empirical assessment of reality shock as a potential explanation for a drop in PSM, veterinary inspectors' expectations about their work and the NVWA prior to their actual working experience were analyzed.[4] Remarkably, all eight individuals who remained public service motivated over time expressed much clearer expectations with regard to their future work and employer than interviewees whose PSM had evaporated. They knew that working as a veterinary inspector requires a thorough knowledge of rules and regulations, and enforcing these, in order to safeguard animal welfare and public health. At the same time they realized that in much of their work they would be on their own and likely to encounter resistance: inspectees might work against them, or at least try to stretch and/or bend the rules.

> You hope that you don't encounter difficult situations. What you want most is that the operator of the abattoir follows the rules correctly. But people also want to make money and that's why they try to stretch the rules in order to sell a little more (…) On the one hand, I find such situations challenging. On the other hand, I am also a little anxious about whether I will be able to handle this. I hope I will have sufficient background through law and legislation and through trainings. (R6a)

> Actual surveillance at slaughterhouses. Not only ensuring that everybody follows the rules and animal welfare is not compromised, but I also expect it to be some kind of mentoring of the organization. Not mentoring at the level of management, but focused on animal health, public health, and animal welfare. (R8a)

> You work on your own. Especially if you work with living animals. Working with living animals will not be one of my tasks the upcoming period, but I do know that you are on your own there. (R7a)

In contrast, the five veterinary inspectors who "lost" their PSM did not have clear expectations of the work of veterinary inspectors when interviewed for the first time. Even though they could have consulted various information sources, none of these interviewees came up with concrete expectations concerning the content of their future work. One individual explained that she had watched an introduction video, while another mentioned that she had some general expectations because her father also worked at the NVWA, but that she was unfamiliar with the actual process.

> Not that much actually. I did not have any expectations. You can watch an introduction video on internet, where you see a little of what they [veterinary inspectors] do. But what they really do on a daily basis? I had no clue. This made the job application difficult too, because I had no clear idea. (R3a)

> What my expectations were? I had none, I was just going to wait and see. (R2a)

> Yes, that's difficult. Of course I knew my father's stories, but that's not the same as doing it yourself. I got a vague idea that you go and check that everybody does their work properly. But concerning the actual process I really had no clue. (R15a)

> Actually I did not have any clear picture. (…) Many [current] colleagues have a different background from mine. They have worked with farm animals, I worked with pets. It's a very different world. I did not remember all these diseases [of farm animals]. Okay, I had some very vague idea. Like that I've heard something many, many years ago. But what to look for… what to focus on… I really had no idea at all! (R11a)

Against all expectations the conclusion must be that the reality shock as traditionally defined cannot explain the second group's loss of PSM. Because these individuals did not have clear expectations regarding their work, there cannot be any discrepancy between their expectations and the working reality. What does seem to happen, however, is that a lack of clear expectations makes individuals experience the working reality—in particular, resistance and dishonesty from inspectees—as stressful, and this consequently impacts negatively on their PSM. Put differently, the data suggest that it is not the reality shock as traditionally defined but a shock on the basis of lacking clear organizational and job expectations that may explain the loss of PSM. Individuals who were not aware of negative aspects of their work are "shocked" because they did not see these coming. In contrast, individuals with clear expectations seem to have found ways to cope with stressors. This observation will be discussed below.

Most veterinary inspectors interviewed voiced the impression that inspectees in general cannot be trusted because they try to manipulate and stretch rules, which results in a working atmosphere that is often tense. Not all newcomers, however, experienced this negative working reality as frustrating and stressful to the same extent. Individuals who when entering the organization had clear expectations of what the job a of veterinary inspector implies—i.e., that resistance from inspectees can occur—experienced resistant behavior as less stressful and frustrating than individuals who had no prior expectations. These inspectors seem to have found ways to deal with resistance, such as framing it as a game, paying more attention to covering themselves, or accepting resistant behavior as a negative, yet unavoidable part of their job.

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[4]Remember, the reality shock describes the discrepancy between initial job expectations and actual working reality.

Well, sometimes things happen that should not happen and that means that you have to impose fines. That is not always fun to do, but it happens. But OK, that is what you expect and you just know that it's part of the job. (R4b[5])

There's one slaughterhouse where they're always glad to see the back of us, and I was not looking forward to going there. Well, it is not always easy that's for sure. But you just cover yourself even better. Three times better than at other places. (R13b)

We are a kind of policemen. But it matters how you approach inspectees. It influences how they treat you in return. OK, "having a good time" is not the right term to use, but it ensures that you can interact with the people you have to inspect in a nice way. (…) For example, if I have to go to the slaughterhouse in Amsterdam, I go there with pleasure. I actually like the people who work there. The interaction is also nice. (R7b)

In contrast, interviewees who started to work rather "unsuspectingly" indicated that they felt very uncomfortable about inspectees' attitudes, behavior and reactions to their work. They said they felt upset and had trouble getting used to a working reality in which inspectees are primarily driven by monetary self-interest, rather than a wish to improve matters with regard to public health and animal welfare.

I'd heard earlier: "you cannot trust them" [inspectees] (…) when it comes to the crunch they talk back to you. However, if you don't have anything on paper, you cannot achieve anything. For me, this was an eye-opener, or rather it was really a surprise. I hoped that they would be honest all the time. But no! If their own interests are at stake, that comes first and they start lying (…) At that moment, I was upset, very upset! (R1a)

What also disappointed me is that I just have to get used to working in the commercial sector. That people manipulate you and are dishonest. I have to get used to this. I tend to believe everybody, but they are just lying right in your face. (R15b)

There are also aspects of the working reality that seem to bother almost all newcomers regardless of how their PSM had developed. In the second round of interviews many newcomers criticized the NVWA for being a large and unwieldy organization. Interestingly, this did not seem to come as a surprise to any of them, including those individuals that had no clear organizational expectations when interviewed for the first time. Interviewees indicated that this was in line with what they had expected of a "large public organization." However, even if not unexpected the organization's unwieldy character proved frustrating. Interviewees complained, for

example, that when they wanted to take up a new task this could not be realized right away, because often it was not clear to them who should be involved or contacted in order to get things done.

What I don't like? The organization. Our head of team is a great guy (…) But if you go further up in the hierarchy and you want to get things done at that level, it's really a spineless public organization. It takes hours to achieve something—typical of government, I think. If you need something, you first have to fill in three applications and three people have to look at it. If you're lucky, you'll get it, but it is also possible that you have to wait for another three months. (R2b)

Well, I realize that the NVWA is a large organization. Sometimes this makes it hard to find the right people if you have a question. (…) Sometimes it takes quite a while before you get an answer. That's why everything works slowly and that's a pity. (R8b)

Another frequently cited source of frustration concerns lack of uniform rule enforcement. Both groups of interviewees—those losing and those sustaining their PSM—indicated they had a hard time dealing with inconsistent rule enforcement. In particular, they were not happy to find that some colleagues do not always enforce the law, in order to spare themselves trouble in their interaction with inspectees. These interviewees emphasized that it is very important for everybody to move in the same direction, because otherwise the inspectors' authority is put under pressure and future rule enforcement becomes even more difficult.

What I find disappointing is that everybody has their own opinion and their own way of doing things and it is very difficult to bring people into line a bit […]. For example, you say: "I have warned so-and-so a couple of times, shall we be a bit more strict next time?" Then somebody else says: "No, I don't want that! It would only make them turn against us and that's going to be difficult." […] You cannot expect everybody to do exactly the same, but uniformity is needed! (R3b)

The role of the newcomers' demographic characteristics

In the final step of the analysis the findings were related to the interviewees' demographic characteristics (age, gender, and working experience) to explore whether these provide alternative and/or additional explanations for the results. In this study only broad categories of age are reported in order to guarantee anonymity. Information on whether interviewees had prior working experience or not was available and

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[5]"b" indicates that the statement is from the second round of interviews.

if yes, in which sector they had worked. Unfortunately, the exact number of employees' years of work experience prior to joining the NVWA was unknown, but it is reasonable to assume a link between age and overall years of working experience.

The data do not suggest any systematic influences of respondents' age and working experience on changes in PSM, but gender may indeed be a factor in PSM dynamics. Of the six individuals under the age of 35, three remained public service motivated, two lost their PSM, and one did not mention any motives that could be related to PSM in either of the two rounds of interviews. In individuals aged between 45 and 55 a comparable distribution was found: two individuals retained their PSM, two lost it, and one person never mentioned being public service motivated. The sample contained only two individuals older than 55. However, the response pattern was again similar: one respondent remained public service motivated whereas the other did not. On the basis of these findings it is reasonable to assume that neither age, nor—as this can be assumed to be related—prior working experience affected changes in PSM. Older employees seem neither better nor worse at preserving their PSM by, for example, previous experience in dealing with working reality. Next, gender was included into the analysis. It is noticeable that only one out of the three men remained public service motivated. In contrast, the majority of women retained their PSM (six), three lost it, and two did not mention it in either of the two rounds of interviews.

Discussion

The body of longitudinal PSM research is growing. Nevertheless, still little is known about the mechanisms explaining a drop in PSM across time. The aim of this study was to empirically analyze "reality shock," a frequently cited theoretical explanation for an observed drop in PSM, and via a qualitative research design to gain insight into the question why previous longitudinal PSM studies found mixed results.

Public service motivation among veterinary inspectors

In this longitudinal study of veterinary inspectors PSM was found to be an important aspect of newcomers' motivation. Thirteen out of 15 newcomers mentioned PSM-related motives. However, we also need to be aware of the risk of socially desirable answers, which seem to present a serious problem in PSM research (Kim & Kim, 2016). When interviewed for the first time, all interviewees were still in the middle of an intensive training focusing on the relevance of

the core principles of the NVWA: public health, animal welfare, and animal health. This might have triggered people to state they had PSM. Like PSM among police officers in Van Loon's et al. (2013) qualitative study, veterinary inspectors express their PSM primarily in notions of normative motivation. This similarity is not surprising, as both groups of professionals provide negative and unwanted services to their users: they enforce compliance with rules and regulations directed at values such as—in the case of veterinary inspectors—protecting animal welfare or public health.

In the first round of interviews, public sector motivation, task variety, the interaction with different stakeholders, and the opportunity to develop competencies were mentioned next to PSM as motivating factors. In the second round, having responsibilities was added to the list of motives whereas the opportunity to develop competencies was no longer mentioned. This finding is in line with recent empirical research focusing on the co-existence of mixed motives (e.g., Park & Word, 2012; Van der Walle, Steijn, & Jilke, 2015; Weske & Schott, 2016).

Five individuals who in the first round of interviews indicated that they were public service motivated seemed to have lost their PSM 15 months later. This loss seems not to have been influenced by age or/and assumed working experience. In this study both respondents who kept their PSM and respondents who lost it were found among young employees with presumably little or no prior working experience, as well as among older workers with presumably much prior experience. Also, in this study professional background cannot have been a factor in the PSM dynamic, because all participants had the same professional background—a degree in veterinary medicine—as required by law. However, it was noticeable that relatively more men than women failed to mention being public service motivated in the second round of interviews, which indicates that gender might influence changes in PSM over time. Support for this finding is also provided by Ritz et al. (2016), who on the basis of aggregated cross-sectional data found that women tended to exhibit higher levels of PSM.

In this study, none of the respondents who were coded as not being public service motivated at the time of joining the NVWA described themselves as public service motivated in the second round of interview. This finding makes it all the more necessary to explore whether the often cited "reality shock" provides a suitable explanation for the drop in PSM. Do newcomers who initially were motivated by their desire to work for the common interest lose their motivation when they become disillusioned by the reality of their daily work?

The role of "reality shock"

The analysis of individuals' organizational and work expectations prior to their first "real" work experiences at the NVWA was interesting, because it showed clear differences between individuals who by the second round of the interviews had lost their PSM and individuals who were able to sustain their motivation over time. Compared to the former group, the latter group had a much clearer picture of what it means to work as a veterinary inspector at the start of their employment with the NVWA. They were better informed about not only the actual content of the work, but also about potential difficulties they were likely to encounter such as aggression from inspectees. At the same time, however, the results show that the "reality shock" or the lack of socialization, as traditionally defined by Hughes (1958), cannot properly explain the loss of PSM.

Since the individuals who lost their PSM did not have any clear expectations regarding their work, it seems unreasonable to speak of a discrepancy between these expectations and working reality. Rather than the traditional reality shock, the results suggest these inspectors' loss of PSM may be explained by a lack of strategies for dealing with the working reality. They also suggest that important preconditions for being able to deal with this sometimes harsh reality are clear organizational and work-related expectations. Individuals with clear expectations indicated that they accepted work-related difficulties as part of their job, framed it as a strategic game, or paid close attention to covering themselves by relying on rules and regulations. In contrast, individuals initially without clear picture of their future job experienced serious work-related stress by round 2 of the interviews. This is not surprising: if people do not know what to expect from their work they have a clear disadvantage in developing strategies for dealing with difficulties. This article argues that because this group of individuals experience the "dark side" of their work as more stressful, they become frustrated and are no longer motivated to contribute to society.

The empirical observation that clear expectations and subsequent behavioral strategies contribute to stable levels of PSM is explained in psychological literature on occupational stress. This type of research focuses on the relationship between stressful job conditions and adverse employee reactions (e.g., Beehr, 2014; Spector & Jex, 1998), and has found that *active coping strategies* can play a positive role in this relationship (Jex, Bliese, Buzzell, & Primeau, 2001). According to Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989, p. 268), active coping methods represent attempts to "remove or circumvent the stressor or to ameliorate its effects." An illustration of active coping in the workplace would be a

veterinary inspector who is not getting along with a specific inspectee, who then talks to that inspectee in order to resolve the conflict. Applied to the study of PSM this implies that individuals who know what the working reality looks like have an advantage over individuals without clear expectations, because they are able to actively find ways to deal with the high demands of their job. This in turn helps to explain why they do not lose their PSM. This means that differences in having clear organizational and job expectations and, related to this, active coping strategies might help to explain why previous longitudinal PSM studies have shown mixed results.

These findings are interesting because they contribute to different fields of research. Regarding the vast body of literature on identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) they show that an identity change in general, or a public service identity (Vandenabeele, 2007) change in particular, is not only the result of a disturbance to the identity triggered by external circumstances, but also that personal differences matter. Put differently, people with clear expectations seem to have better strategies verify who they are in the face of difficulties than people without a clear picture. This means that they do not have to change their (public service) identity in order to release stress resulting from the discrepancy between who they want to be and who the situation "forces" them to be.

Next to this, the empirical findings add to the discussion on whether PSM is a unchangeable motive which can be viewed as a predisposition, or a dynamic state which changes due to institutional influences or a lack of these (Wright & Grant, 2010). The fact that a group of individuals lost their PSM 15 months after job entry provides evidence that PSM is certainly not a stable trait or predisposition. However, the reason why some individuals experienced this loss seems to be not entirely the result of the working reality or lack of organizational socialization. Rather, it is individual differences in terms of how people deal with tensions between their initial job expectations and the working reality that seem to matter. This suggests that changes in PSM might be related to personality in ways that have not yet been fully understood (Van Witteloostuijn, Esteve, & Boyne, 2016).

Limitations and future research

The set of data on which this study was based offers a unique opportunity to study post-entry PSM dynamics in-depth. It makes it possible to follow over a period of 15 months a cohort of newcomers who, except for one respondent, had no prior experience with public sector work. However, because this study focused on newcomers from one specific profession in one

organization the size of the data set was limited. Although some may view this as a limitation affecting statistical generalizability it should be noted that any research strategy demands tradeoffs among generality, accuracy, and simplicity (Weick, 1979). The aim of this study was not to establish statistical generalization on the basis of a representative sample and to test existing theories. Rather, the intention was to explore one possible explanation for a drop in PSM—the so-called reality shock—in-depth, in a specific localized context (providing high accuracy), while also remaining open to emergent issues that help to explain the mixed findings of previous longitudinal PSM research.

Future in-depth research into the mechanisms explaining PSM dynamics should pay attention not only to reality shock but also to other characteristics of respondents' working situations, such as the role of the supervisor, as well as changes in organizational structures, rules, co-workers, and/or job content which have been found to play a role in post-entry PSM dynamics (Kjeldsen, 2012b; Vandenabeele, 2014; Wright & Moynihan, 2012). In addition, this study's findings call for a more nuanced approach to the reality shock in the context of PSM dynamics. Researchers should consider individual differences such as past experiences, self-efficacy, and expectations when analyzing how public service motivated newcomers react to the working reality across occupations.

Practical implications

The results of this study point to important practical implications for public managers. The findings suggest that HR managers should acknowledge that public servants can be motivated by different types of motives at the same time (e.g., PSM, need for growth, but also controlled types of motives), and thus be aware of the necessity to stimulate all of these. Also, on the basis of these findings HR managers could be advised to ensure that newcomers in an organization are provided with a clear and realistic picture of their tasks and of potential difficulties they might encounter at work. Doing so helps to ensure that individuals become strategic actors in the demanding working reality, and may provide a foundation for persistent PSM levels. A realistic picture of the daily work reality can be created by asking potential new employees specific questions during job interviews and including obligatory fieldwork as part of their assessment by employers. An alternative strategy to facilitate the retaining of PSM is to invest in training programs that focus on teaching (new) employees not only how to deal with work-related difficulties and stress, but also how to avoid such situations in the

first place. A similar result can be reached by assigning individuals to jointly perform a specific task or work on a specific case, because this enables employees who have not yet found ways to cope effectively with a stressful working reality to learn from their colleagues.

Conclusions

This article is intended to contribute to the current debate on individuals' changes in PSM over time—on the question whether PSM is a stable predisposition, or a dynamic state—(Ritz et al., 2016; Wright & Grant, 2010) in two important ways. First, this study increases our understanding of the usefulness of the concept of "reality shock" as a potential explanation for decreasing levels of PSM across time, which has not yet been assessed before but which makes sense from the point of view of identity work (Beech et al., 2016) and identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009). The findings of this study suggest that—contrary to common beliefs found in the literature (Brænder & Andersen, 2013; Kjeldsen, 2013; Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013)—a loss of PSM cannot be explained by a generic reality shock experienced by all newcomers to the NVWA. Even though the organizational context was similar for all 15 newcomers, some individuals were found to be more strongly affected by this type of shock than others, and this was reflected in the levels of PSM they expressed. This means that the answer to the first research question of this study—"Is the "reality shock" a useful concept to explain decreasing levels of PSM over time?" is not straightforward, and that it is particularly important to play close attention to the second research question: "what can be learned from qualitative data to explain the mixed findings of previous longitudinal studies?." The findings indicate that an inability to deal with daily work demands caused by a lack of clear expectations at the time of job entry might be a better, or at least additional, explanation for post-entry PSM dynamics than unsuccessful organizational socialization, also called "reality shock." This finding is in line with insights from psychological research on occupational stress, where active coping strategies have been found to play a crucial role in the relationship between stressful job conditions and adverse employee reactions (e.g., Beehr, 2014; Spector & Jex, 1998). Because these individual differences might help to explain the inconsistent findings of previous longitudinal PSM research (e.g., Choi & Chung, 2017; Georgellis et al., 2011; Vogel & Kroll, 2016), it can be recommended that researchers should consider these (and other) differences when investigating the impact of reality shock on newcomers' changing levels of PSM. Put differently,

future research on the dynamics of PSM is likely to benefit from studying the concept from an institutional as well as a dispositional approach.

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Appendix

Table A1. Respondents' characteristics.

Respondent	Gender	Age	Working experience	PSM
R1a	Female	<35	Private practice	X
R1b				
R2a	Male	≥45 <55	Private practice	X
R2b				
R3a	Female	<35	No	
R3b				
R4a	Male	≥45 <55	Private practice	X
R4b				X
R5a	Male	≥55 <65	Private practice	X
R5b				
R6a	Female	<35	Industry/government	X
R6b				X
R7a	Female	≥35 <45	Private practice	X
R7b				X
R8a	Female	<35	Private practice	X
R8b				X
R9a	Female	≥55 <65	Private practice	X
R9b				X
R10a	Female	≥45 <55	Private practice/industry	X
R10b				X
R11a	Female	≥45 <55	Private practice/industry	X
R11b				
R12a	Female	<35	No	X
R12b				X
R13a	Female	<35	No	X
R13b				X
R14	Female	≥45 <55	Private practice/family care	
R14b				
R15a	Female	<35	Private practice	X
R15b				

Table A2. Topics 1st and 2nd round of interviews.

Introduction[a,b]
 – Personal introduction of the researcher(s)
 – Content and goal of the study
 – Confidentiality, anonymity, recording
Work motivation[a,b]
 – Why did you study veterinary medicine/Why did you want to become a vet?
 – What are the things you find motivating in your work?
 – What do you like about your work?
Work/organizational expectations[a]
 – What did you expect from the NVWA as an employer?
 – Did you have any prior expectations of the work of a veterinary inspector? Please elaborate.
Working reality[b]
 – Is the job any different from what you expected?
 – Are there any problems you encountered?
Closing off[a,b]
 – Do you want to give us additional information we did not ask for?
 – Do you have any questions for us?

[a]1st round of interview; [b]2nd round of interviews.

Table A3. Codes and subcodes 1st 2nd round of interviews and.

Public service motivation[a,b]
 – Contributing to solving wrongs (APS)
 – Contributing to the public interest (CPV)
 – Contributing to specific public values (CPV)
 – Sympathy for underprivileged (COM)
 – Making sacrifices (SS)
Public sector motivation[a,b]
 – Regular working hours
 – Regular income
 – Regular periods of vacation
Motivation based on interaction[a,b]
 – With colleagues
 – With inspectees
Motivation based on task variety[a,b]
 – Different tasks
 – Different locations of work
Motivation based on responsibility[a,b]
 – Recent promotion
 – Management activities
Motivation based on development potentialities[a,b]
 – Trainings
 – Learning on the job
Organizational/work expectations[a]
 – No expectations
 – Rule enforcement
 – Safeguarding animal welfare and public health
 – Resistance
 – Solitary
Working reality[b]
 – Unwieldy organization
 – Lack of uniformity
 – Manipulation/Aggression: stressful
 – Manipulation/Aggression: acceptance of status quo, coping strategies

[a]1st round of interview; [b]2nd round of interviews.