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**Double Bind: professionals coping with contrasting demands  
and conflicting values**

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## **Abstract**

This theoretical paper<sup>1</sup> addresses the question what determines the decision-making and behavior of public service professionals in situations of conflicting values and contrasting demands from an institutional perspective while supplementing this perspective with ideas from social identity and identity theory. These theories have added value since the concept of identities sheds light on the question how institutional values are transmitted from an institutional level of analysis to an individual level of behavior. In this study, we will focus on two types of identity, namely professional identity and public service identity and their interrelatedness because they are of particular importance within the context of this study. Moreover, attention will be paid to the impact of the context on the relation between public service motivation, professionalism and behavior.

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## 1.0 Introduction

The call for more business-like management in the public sector from the late 1970s on, has instituted far-reaching mechanisms of control such as rigorous performance measurement and output control. This has produced more compliant professionals as the power of management has encroached on professional practice. Reasons for the increased number of rules and regulations are grounded in the political desire to reduce escalating costs of the public sector, to empower consumers, increase quality but maybe more important to reduce the risk of (wrong) individual decision-making and provide equal treatment for all. However, rules cannot completely cover all situations, so there will always be situations in which professionals have to balance different demands, values and outcomes. Especially, in such situations professionals have discretionary space.

For this reason, this theoretical paper addresses the question *what determines the decision-making and behavior of public service professionals in situations of conflicting values and demands?*

In this study, we focus on two concepts which have been argued to effect behavior of professionals. The first one is *public service motivation* (PSM) or *public service identity*, which can be addressed as a motive that explains why some individuals are more motivated to work in the public sector and shape the well-being of a society than others (Perry and Hondeghem 2008a). The other, *professionalism*, operates at two levels: an occupational and individual level. The former level can be referred to as a shared identity (Evetts 2003) and the latter as an (individual) role identity (Moynihan and Pandey 2007). Even though it is widely accepted that professionalism and PSM influence behavior, little is known about their interrelated effect (Bøgh Andersen 2009). Can we expect public service motivation and professionalism to be in line, or do they hold a potential for clashing?

In addition, there is a lack of knowledge concerning the impact of the environment on the relation between PSM, professionalism and behavior. It is widely held that context of public organizations is highly complex because it is characterized by conflicting values and contrasting demands (Van der Wal, De Graaf and Lawton 2011). As it is not possible to realize all values and demand, trade-offs have to be made (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004).

In this paper, a conceptual model is developed explaining how institutions influence the decisions and behavior of professionals. It starts from an institutional perspective. By combining insights from (social) identity theory, professionalism and PSM, a better understanding of how PSM and professionalism influence behavior is gained.

In paragraph two, we first discuss (the background of) institutionalism. Paragraph three presents two distinct approaches, both dealing with the relation between institutions and individual behavior mediated by the (social) self. Paragraph four and five elaborate on the concepts of professionalism and public service motivation and combine them with identity theory. Paragraph six elucidates the limitations of current research. The details of the public context are discussed in paragraph seven and a framework for analyzing coping behaviors is elaborated in paragraph eight. In the conclusion, the complete model is summarized.

## **2.0 Institutionalism**

According to (Koelble 1995), the basic problem in social science deals with the question 'how do we explain the things people do? What role do institutions, organizations, and the calculation of utility play in decision making?' (p. 231). In social science two basic streams of literature can be distinguished which explain behavior from two fundamentally different points of view: rational choice theory and institutionalism.

Proponents of the rational choice theory argue that individuals ought to be addressed as utility-maximizers whose primary source of motivation is self-interest. Central to all forms of rational choice theory is the assumption that complex social phenomena can be explained in terms of the elementary individual actions of which they are composed (Scott 2000). For example, Elster (1989) points out that 'the elementary unit of social life is the individual human action. To explain social institutions and social change is to show how they arise as the result of the action and interaction of individuals' (p.13). However, opponents of this theory validly criticize that especially in highly complex decision-making settings, public servants' ability to follow rational procedures is limited since human rationality is constricted or 'bounded' (Simon 1991, March and Olsen 1989)

Institutionalism provides an alternative explanation to the rational choice paradigm. Instead of focusing on atomized individuals, all forms of institutionalism examine the impact of external institutions on individual's choices and actions (Koelble 1995). Another central aspect of institutionalism is the premise that institutions, which can be understood as social structures infused with values and rules which are embedded across societies (Perry and Vandenabeele 2008), are the organizing principles that furnish guidelines to individuals as to how to behave (Friedland and Alford 1991, Rao, Monin and Durand 2003). Following Francois and Vlassopoulos (2008) and March and Olsen (1989), the reason why institutions serve as guidelines of behaviour is based on the fact they give legitimacy to certain rules of conduct. In other words, institutional logics define behaviours because they answer the question: What is the most appropriate thing to do within this given situation regarding my position and responsibilities?

In the literature on institutionalism, various approaches of research can be found. While all of them share their concern for the role of institutions, they strongly differ in their degree of impact they ascribe to institutions on individual behaviour (Koelble

1995). For example Koelble (1995) and Hall and Taylor (1996) differentiate three schools of thought which are labelled: *sociological institutionalism*, *rational choice institutionalism*, and *historical institutionalism*.

Koelble (1995) points out that in the sociological strand of the institutional approach, institutions are themselves assumed to be dependent upon larger 'macro level' variables such as society and culture. In comparison with institutions, the individual is largely dependent and a rather unimportant variable. In contrast, rational choice institutionalists regard institutions as intervening variables capable of affecting individuals but not able to determining them. The historical approach balances between these two views: 'Institutions play a determined role since they shape the actions of individuals, but are at times affected by collective and individual choices (p.232).

In this study, we affiliate to the idea of institutionalism that it is important to consider both, the individual and the institutions, because in practice you see that individuals - even though they share a lot of characteristics, such as the profession, the religion, and the organization they work for - behave differently within the same situation. Following this, just like the historical approach to institutionalism we assume, that behavior is determined by both, institutional values and norms and the individual self. Perry and Vandenabeele (2008) validly comment that we need to consider the question how institutional values are transmitted from an institutional level of analysis to an individual level of behavior and decision making. The authors argue that the concept of identity is an important mediating variable between institutions and individual behavior. Their argument is based upon two assumptions: First, identities can be defined in terms of institutional elements. Second, individuals behave according to their identities depending on their degree of saliency. This is in line with Rao et al. (2003), while referring to Stryker (1993), Tajfel and Turner (1979), Deaux and Martin (2000), point out that 'one link between institutional logic and the behavior of individual actors is social identity, or the self image derived by actors, when they categorize themselves as members of a collectivity or occupants of a role'.

In the following section, we discuss two theories which shed light on the relation between institutions (social structures) and individual behavior, namely identity theory and social identity. As such, these theories provide added value since they give us deeper insights in how institutional values are transmitted to individual behavior.

After a short discussion of both theories, we develop an argument for the use of identity theory.

### **3.0 Institutions, behavior, and the social self: an identity or social identity approach?**

In literature, the term *identity* is used in three distinctive ways. First, identity is used to refer to an individual's cultural background. Secondly, it is used referring to an individual's identification with a certain social category. Finally, it can be used to refer to the different meanings attached to the multiple roles of an individual in society. In this study, we are interested in the last two meanings of identity, since they are used in two quite similar, though at the same time different, theoretical approaches: identity theory and social identity theory (Hogg, Terry and White 1995, Stets and Burke 2000, Stryker and Burke 2000, Stets and Burke 2003).

Both theories state that the social environment influences individual behavior, through what is called the (social) self. The main differences between the two theoretical approaches originate from the fact that these theories were developed in two different, separated fields of research, namely: micro sociological theory (identity theory) and social psychological theory (social identity theory) (Hogg et al. 1995, Stets and Burke 2000). As far as we know, Hoggs et al. (1995) and Stets and Burke (2000) have been the only scholars so far who attempted to compare these two theoretical approaches systematically (Hogg et al. 1995, Stets and Burke 2000).

Interestingly, the authors did not agree on the question whether it is possible to integrate both theoretical approaches or not. According to Hogg et al. (1995), these theories should not be integrated but instead of this, it should be tested empirically which approach is most valid. In contrast, the article of Stets and Burke (2000) argues that these theories can fundamentally be linked, though in their article they claim to only show how such a merger could be possible. In their chapter in the *handbook of self and identity* both authors take a more firm position and claim to have integrated both theories. However, Hogg et al. (1995) and Stets and Burke (2000) do agree on the fact that the existence of two such similar theoretical frameworks in social science can be problematic, as they give different explanations for the same phenomena.

In next part of this paragraph, identity theory and social identity theory are briefly discussed. In section 3.3, we argue that though most differences between both theories are semantic, there is a fundamental difference in the underlying mechanisms of both approaches. Based on that the choice is made for using identity theory.

### 3.1 Identity theory

Identity theory is embedded in symbolic interactionist role theory, one of the several fundamentally different perspectives on role theory (Biddle 1986, Stryker and Burke 2000). In the symbolic interactionist perspective, the focus is on the roles of individual actors, how roles change due to social interaction and the ways actors understand and interpret their own behavior and that of others. In this perspective, shared norms are linked to social positions. These norms can be seen as guidelines through which roles can be shaped. An important notion from this perspective is that *“actual roles are thought to reflect norms, attitudes, contextual demands, negotiation, and the evolving definition of the situation as understood by actors (Biddle 1986)”*.

The main idea on which identity theory is based is that society is complex and differentiated, but organized. The self is created in interaction with this differentiated society, and because of that the self is a multifaceted, organized construct. To be more specific, in identity theory these different parts of the self emerge from the different roles people occupy in society. So, the self consists of multiple role identities (Stryker and Burke 2000, Stryker 1980, Stets and Burke 2000).

Role identities are defined as *“self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions, or self-definitions that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions they occupy, and through a process of labeling or self-definition as a member of a particular social category (Hogg et al. 1995).”* Roles, in this context, refer to *sets of expectations prescribing behavior that is considered appropriate by others*. Identities, however, refer to *the unique interpretations individuals bring to their roles*. Following from this, these role identities provide guidelines for behavior of individuals (Stets & Burke, 2003).

Identity theory has been developed in two different streams of literature, both focusing on a different aspect of the relation between social structures and individual behavior mediated by the social self (Stryker and Burke 2000, Stets and Burke 2003). In their article, Stryker and Burke (2000) bring these two streams together. One of the streams focuses on how social structures affect the self, and how this self, in turn,



influences social behavior (external mechanisms). The other stream, however, mainly focuses on how self-processes affect social behavior (internal mechanisms).

### *External mechanisms*

The point of departure in identity theory is that people live in networks of social relationships in which they occupy roles and participate. When an individual identifies himself as an owner of a certain role, interpreting and incorporating the meanings and expectations belonging to that role, that is when a role identity is formed (Stets and Burke, 2003). Central to the theory is the question what determines the choice for a certain identity? And following from this, what will determine behavior, if an individual has more than one identity?

The choice for a certain identity is influenced by the salience of that identity (Stryker and Burke 2000). As people can have different roles in society, they will organize their different identities in a hierarchical way. The position of identities in this hierarchy determines whether they influence one's actual behavior. This is called identity salience (the likelihood that the identity will be invoked in diverse situations). This identity salience can differ for individuals and this is the reason why even people with similar role identities behave differently (Hogg et al. 1995).

The salience of an identity is influenced by the commitment to a certain role. Commitment can be defined as "*the degree to which the individual's relationships to particular others are dependent on being a given kind of person (Sheldon and Burke 2000)*". The concept of commitment has two dimensions (Stets and Burke, 2003): First, 'quantitative commitment', referring to the number of persons one is connected to through a specific identity. Secondly, 'qualitative commitment' is the strength and deepness of these connections. That means, commitment to a certain identity will be higher if many important relations would be lost by not 'acting out' certain roles anymore.

### *Internal mechanisms*

In the second stream of literature, the focus is on the relation between identity salience and role behavior. This stream deals with the question in which ways identities produce behaviors (that show these identities). Seeing identities as "*the meaning which one attributes to the self in a social situation or social role (Burke and Tully 1977)*" emphasizes that individuals enact upon their interpretation of that specific

role. These role identities (interpretation) can be seen as a reference category, which is used in a feedback-loop. This feedback-loop (identity control system) describes the self-verification process which can be defined as *“bringing situationally perceived self-relevant meanings into agreement with the identity standard”*.

The self-verification consist of four different parts (Burke 1991). The first part is the identity standard which defines the role identity an individuals should have in a certain situation. The second part consists of the perceptions of individuals within the situations (actual roles). The third part compares part one and part two. Next, any discrepancy between these two parts will influence an individual to behave in ways that converge them again (part four). Burke (1991) compares it with the functioning of a thermostat, which also will react if input from the environment does not meet the standard.

### 3.2 Social identity theory

The concept of *social identity* has been introduced by Tajfel almost 40 years ago. *Social identity* can be defined as *“The individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership (Tajfel 1972)”*. These social groups provide definitions of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of these social groups. Since, individuals can have the idea that they belong to multiple groups and these memberships can all have value to them, persons can have multiple identities. It is this whole set of social identities of a person that can be referred to as the social self.

Hogg and Terry (2000) distinguish between two socio-cognitive processes which form the basis of social identity theory:

#### 1. Categorization

The process of categorization causes groups to develop as distinct entities. In this context, the concept of prototype is an important one. Prototypes can be defined as *“cognitive representations of features that describe and prescribe attributes of the group (Hogg and Terry 2000)”*. Their function is to maximize the differences between groups and minimize the differences within groups, because people will act in accordance with the prototype of their group. This process of depersonalization is described in detail in self-categorization theory, which is a recent development of social identity theory.

## 2. Self-enhancement

The process of self-enhancement will lead people to make comparisons between the in-group and out-groups that makes the in-group look more positive. This also guides social categorization, in the sense that stereotypes and norms are also in favor of the in-group. In other words, groups develop an positive image of their own group, and a negative image of other groups (*Hogg and Terry 2000*).

Also, in social identity theory identity salience is an important issue. The process of determining one's identity is called self categorization, in which people categorize themselves in specific groups. Important in this process is the concept of fit, which can be divided in a comparative and normative fit. Fit can be defined as "*the degree to which a social categorization matches subjectively relevant features of reality so that the category appears to be a sensible way of organizing and making sense of social stimuli (Haslam, Powell and Turner 2000)*"

In this case, comparative fit refers "*to the extent to which the categorization provides a good reflection of similarities and differences between people (van Knippenberg, De Dreu and Homan 2004)*". This means that a social categorization is more likely to become salient if the similarities within and the differences between groups are strong. In contrast, normative fit refers "*to the extent to which the categorization makes sense in relation to the individual's cognitive frame of reference (van Knippenberg et al. 2004)*". So, normative fit refers to an individual's judgment about the meaningfulness of a certain categorization. These judgments are context dependent.

When one perceives a distinction as more meaningful, it is more likely that a social categorization becomes salient.

Another important principle with respect to category salience is what Haslam et al. (2000) call 'perceiver readiness', and what Van Knippenberg et al. (2004) have labeled as the 'cognitive accessibility' of a social categorization. Both state that the cognitive accessibility of a categorization depends on prior experience, beliefs and expectations. A useful definition is that cognitive accessibility refers to "*the ease with which the categorization comes to mind and the readiness of the perceiver to use the categorization (van Knippenberg et al. 2004)*".

### 3.3 Balancing identity theory and social identity theory: towards identity theory

Hogg et al. (1995) warn for the danger of integrating different theories. They suggest to 'pit' both theories against each other, and to test which one is better. Stets and Burke (2000) in contrast argue that these two theories can be linked in fundamental ways. For that, they focus on important similarities, though, also noticing differences in language, orientation and coverage of the two theories as they currently exist.

We argue that these different theories are an expression of the fact that for both disciplines (sociology and psychology) the own level of analysis is limited in explaining differences and similarities in individual's behavior. Paradoxically, that's why sociologists are more focusing on the 'individual level', in the sense that they see role identities as an individual interpretation of one's role, while psychologists are more focusing on the group level or the acting of individuals in accordance with the prototype (Hogg et al. 1995).

Where social identity theory is mainly concerned with intergroup relations, identity theory focuses on individual outcomes. As they are looking into each others field of study, though from their own perspective, this results in *differences in language, orientation and coverage*.

At first glance, most of these differences do not seem to be insuperable. For instance, the fact that a social identity is related to attributes (gender, race) and role identity to the role an individual occupies in his network seems problematic, for example, professionals according to this line of reasoning could not be a social category and males cannot take a male identity (Hogg et al.1995). Though, in their article Burke and Tully (1977) deal with this problem and show the place of gender role identity within the network of role identities. Burke and Tully (1977) see them as the most influential identities and for that they are placed at the top of the salient hierarchy. From this it follows, that both prototypes and roles can be described as guidelines guiding individual behavior.

Comparing the idea of self-categorization and self-verification, also shows interesting similarities. These ideas are similar in that they deal with the fact that people have to take up an identity, based on their context. In self-verification it is depended on the meaning people give to their role, while in self-categorization a certain categorization should make sense (normative fit). Both meaning giving to a role and determining the normative fit of a distinction have to do with how people interpret their environment.

Following from that, individuals determine themselves based on the context which identity they will take.

However, this leads us to the fundamental difference between identity and social identity theory: the underlying mechanisms. Social identity theory proposes a mechanism in which the individual adjusts to the identity (prototype) of a group and loses his individuality (process of depersonalization). In contrast, in identity theory the individual interprets his role, which is an identity standard (prototype), and for that we could say that he personalizes his role.

This difference in mechanisms underlying these theoretical approaches can be problematic. Especially since, as noted by Stets and Burke (2000), everyone always has at the same time a role and social identity. They note that these group identities cannot be disentangled from role identities and also not from what they call person identities. Person identities, in both theories, are more or less defined in the same way. In social identity theory, personal identity is defined as “*the categorization of the self as an unique entity, distinct from other individuals (Brewer 1991)*”. In identity theory, this definition is “*the set of meanings that are tied to and sustain the self as an individual (Stets and Burke 2000)*”. These three different identities are interrelated and influence each other (Stets and Burke 2000).

Because of these different mechanisms one could argue that one adjusts one’s self to the prototype of the social category or that one interprets the role (prototype) and individualizes it. Here, we agree with Hogg et al. (1995) that it won’t be possible to integrate these different theoretical approaches when they are seen as ‘equals’.

The choice for a certain model then should be based on the research question involved. If the main focus is on the question why people behave in accordance with a group, it is best to analyze from social identity theory perspective. On the other hand, if you are interested in why people behave different from there group roles/prototypes, one should start from an identity theory perspective. That is why we take identity theory as our starting point.

In this study, we focus on two different identities which are of particular importance within the context of this study and which ‘are potentially important motives of behavior’ (Bøgh Andersen 2009), namely *public service motivation* (PSM) and *professionalism*. Since our main question is how professionals align conflicting values and contrasting demands, we are mainly interested in why professionals deal in different ways with conflicting values and contrasting demands. Therefore, we start

from an identity theory approach and combine this with the literature on professionalism as an occupational and individual variable. This has added value, since it shows how professionalism on a occupational and individual level are related.

#### **4.0 Professionalism**

Many different definitions of professionalism can be found in the literature. However, most of them share their defining characteristics. For example, Andersen (2005) defines professionalism as ‘the degree of co-existence of specialized, theoretical knowledge and [socialized] professional norms, i.e. prescriptions for acceptable actions under given conditions applying to and sanctioned within a given group’ (p.25). An additional crucial aspect of professionalism – missing in Andersen’s definition- is the concept of autonomy or discretion which results from the application of specified theoretical knowledge (Freidson 1994, Steen and Van der Meer 2011, Rainey 2003, Evetts 2003).

Theoretical knowledge is less transferable, hard to codify and therefore almost uncontrollable. In detail, because others, for example supervisors, do not possess the theoretical knowledge of professionals, they are unable to evaluate whether the members of a certain occupation did the most appropriate thing with respect to the situation or not (Roberts and Dietrich 1999). However, next to this unwanted consequences, professional autonomy is also highly desirable and indispensable for two additional reasons. First, without discretion the administrative state would collapse under the weight of the countless rules, regulations, and laws that would otherwise be necessary to fit any individual case and situation which a professional eventually might be confronted with (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000). Second, professionals would be reduced to ‘mindless technocratic functionaries’ highly feared by critics of bureaucracy (Harmon and Mayer 1986).

##### **4.1 Professionalism as occupational variable: shared identity or ideal type**

Within the sociology of profession, two different alternatives and contrasting sociological interpretations can be found: the functionalistic and the neo-weberian approach. Next to this, a more balanced approach exists.

The *functionalistic approach* addresses professionalism as a normative value system and is based upon the idea of socialization. Through professional socialization – for instance by means of shared educational backgrounds, professional trainings, membership of professional associations – professionals take in certain values and develop a shared professional identity (Evetts 2003, Evetts 2006). This shared identity could also be considered as idealized identity or prototype of the occupation (social category) in question. Resulting from the shared identity, it is assumed that professionals will perceive problems and their appropriate solutions in a common way and also develop shared ways of dealing with customers and clients. In other words, the normative value system of professionalism, which represents some form of ideal-professional, predicts the behavior of all members within the same profession at an occupational level. This is in line with the social identity theory as described in section 3. Next to this, functionalists assume that professionals primarily aim to work in the best interest of their clients (Parsons 1951, Goode 1969).

In contrast, the proponents of the *neo-weberian approach* address professionalism as an ideology of occupational powers. According to Andersen and Pedersen (2010), this approach focuses on the idea that distinct professions sought a monopoly in the market for their own services. This is in line with Evetts (2006) who points out that professions aim to increase their status and upward mobility within the social order at both, a collective and an individual level through controlling the license to practice and protecting their elite positions.

A more balanced approach of professionalism is called the *re-evaluation or reappraisal of professionalism as a normative value system* (Evetts 2003, Evetts 2006). In the 1990s, researchers began to realize that professionalism could have both positive and negative contributions for clients, practitioners, and for the social system as a whole (Evetts, 2006: 136). Next to protecting their own market shelters and helping individual clients, professionalism may also present a distinctive form of decentralized occupational control – to which Durkheim (1992) refers as ‘moral occupational community’ – which may play an important role in civil society. This idea is supported by others, for example, Freidson (2001) who points out that professionalism should be regarded as a unique form of occupational control, which he calls ‘third logic’. This logic has distinct advantages over market, organizational and bureaucratic forms of control, because unlike market and bureaucratic mechanisms of control, it does not impoverish and standardize the quality of services

to customers and clients and consequentially does not de-motivate or frustrate professionals. Next to this, Dingwall (1996) notes that professionalism might work to create and represent distinctive moral obligations and professional values that hinder exhaustive competition and encourage cooperation.

Regardless of the theoretical approach of the sociology of professionalism, what becomes clear from this brief review is the fact that (to a varying degree) the behavior of professionals seems to be affected by belonging a certain occupation. As will be demonstrated in the next section, this is different if professionalism is regarded as an individual variable or a role identity.

#### 4.2 Professionalism as an individual variable: an interpretation of the professional role

In contrast to professionalism as an occupational variable, a different stream of literature addresses professionalism as an individual characteristic. We argue that this approach to professionalism needs to be considered as well since it has the crucial advantage of being sensitive to individual differences among members within a single occupation. For example, Bucher and Selling (1977) point out that it is evident that not all psychiatrists have the same ideas about their field and how one should act as professional; nor do all of them share beliefs about the efficiency of competing treatments or therapeutic approaches. Consequentially, the behavior of different professionals is likely to vary depending on how individuals interpret their role as a professional and to which degree they identify with the idealtype (role) of a professional in a given situation. That means to which degree do they behave like a stereotypical professional? They might strongly identify with some professional values, while others might mean less to them. Put it differently, from an individualistic approach on professionalism, different professionals of the same occupation are not expected to always behave alike within a given situation based on socialized professional norms (as suggested by the functionalistic approach of professionalism) because their personal interpretation of their role as a professional matters, too.

In this study, we combine both approaches – professionalism as an individual and as an occupational variable - and investigate their interrelatedness. This is highly relevant because, based on the insight gained from identity theory, we assume that the



behavior of an individual is influenced by its interpretation of the role of professional, this role should be seen as describing the 'ideal-professional'. Moreover, considering both perspectives has the advantage of keep the option of influencing individual professionals open

## **5.0 Public service motivation**

The question what motivates public servants to work in the public sector and to shape the well-being of society has gained considerable attention among both, public administration scholars and practitioners (Perry and Hondeghem 2008b). One possible answer to this question is provided by the literature on public service motivation (PSM).

There are many different definitions of PSM. For example, Rainey and Steinbauer (1982, 1999) address PSM as 'a general, altruistic motivation to serve the interest of a community of people, a state, a nation or humankind' (p. 23). Vandenabeele's (2007) definition of PSM goes a step further; it refers to the origin of PSM, too. According to the author, PSM is 'the belief, the values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate' (p. 549).

However, the underlying element of all definitions of PSM is 'serving the public good'. This fact is closely linked to one of the most fundamental assumptions about PSM which claims: 'in public service organizations, public service motivation is positively related to individual performance'. Originally, this assumption has been made by Perry and Wise (1990) and by now it has been frequently repeated (Brewer 2004, Brewer and Selden 1998, Brewer, Selden and Facer 2000, Brewer and Selden 2000, Perry 2000, Rainey and Steinbauer 1999). Following Perry and Wise, the reason why (highly public service motivated) individuals perform well is based on the fact that they are working to provide services that they perceive as meaningful.

### **5.1 Traditional public service motivation research**

Within the literature on PSM, three broad streams of research can be found. A few authors tried to address the origin of the concept by placing it within an institutional perspective (Vandenabeele 2008, Perry and Vandenabeele 2008).

A second stream of research focused on the antecedents of PSM. Within this context we can think of Camilleri (2007) and DeHart-Davis et al. (2005) who focused on the demographic antecedents of PSM. Perry (1997) addressed the institutional effects on PSM, and Moynihan and Pandey (2007) place organizational antecedents in the centre of attention.

Third and most frequently, PSM has been treated as an independent variable where it has been linked to various desirable work outcomes<sup>2</sup>. For example, Frank and Lewis (2004), Leisink and Steijn (2009), Naff and Crum (1999), and Vandenabeele (2009) investigated the direct relationship between PSM and individual performance. However, the findings resulting from these studies were ambiguous. While the results of the first two studies supported the PSM-performance relation, the results of the latter were negative or mixed. Other scholars investigated the relation between PSM and daily work behaviors. Within this context, a study by Andersen (2009) found that professional norms are a stronger predictor of work behavior than public service motivation. Summing up, Perry and Wise's proposition 'in public service organizations, public service motivation is positively related to individual performance (1990:370)' seems difficult to be proved.

## 5.2 Public service motivation as public service identity

Following Vandenabeele and colleagues (Vandenabeele 2008, Perry and Vandenabeele 2008), we address PSM from an institutional approach. Central to this approach is that through transmission mechanisms, such as socialization, internalization, cultural preferences, and social learning, institutional values and norms are taken in by individuals. In other words a public service identity is formed.

Combining the literature on PSM from an institutional approach with the ideas from identity theory as described in the previous section, what follows from this is clear: Individuals engage in public service related behavior, because their public service identity serves as reference category used in the self-verification processes. In the next paragraph, we will focus on professionalism as part of one's identity

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<sup>2</sup> Notice, this is in line with the fundamental assumption about PSM discussed earlier in the text which claims a positive relation between PSM and performance

## **6.0 Limitations of current research**

In the following section three limitations of current literature will be introduced and discussed separately.

### **6.1 Public service motivation -behavior relation**

Relatively recently, scholar began to realize that the relation between PSM and performance is not that straightforward as originally suggested by Perry and Wise 20 years ago, but that the environment may play crucial role. For example, Perry et al. (2010) recognize ‘that the effects of public service motivation are more nuanced than Perry and Wise (1990) [originally] projected’. Next to this, Wright and Pendey (2008) criticize the fact that studies investigate the consequences of PSM under the assumption that public organizations always provide sufficient opportunities to satisfy the motivation of their employees to serve the public. The authors argue that just because public agencies have the possibility to provide individuals with the opportunities to satisfy PSM, there is no guarantee that they always do so. In line with this, Wright and Christensen (2007) concluded that instead of asking whether PSM affects employees’ attraction and retention, perhaps it might be more appropriate to ask when and under what conditions PSM affects employees’ behavior. More generally speaking, the awareness ascends that contextual factors may play a crucial role in the PSM – behavior relations. For this reason some attempts have been made to integrate the ideas of person-environment (PE) fit within the analysis of the PSM-behavior relation (Leisink and Steijn 2009, Bright 2007)

We strongly agree that the environment might be the missing variable in the traditional PSM-behavior research. In our study we argue that more attention should be paid to one of the most specific characteristics of the environment of public organizations public environment, namely conflicting values and demands discussed later in the text.

### **6.2 Professionalism-behavior relation**

While the awareness of the possible impact of contextual factors in the PSM-behavior relation slowly increases, for quite a while professional behaviors are known to be context-dependent (Rezler et al. 1992, Ginsburg et al. 2000). This assumption has mainly been tested within medical settings. For example, a study of Novack et al. (1989) had shown that, even though being honest and telling the truth is usually

considered as the best and most professional behavior, 87% of all physicians being surveyed indicated that deception is acceptable on rare occasions, for example in situations where the patient would be harmed by knowing the truth. Following this, depending on the given case and situation, telling a lie does not automatically mean that the person in charge is a dishonest and unprofessional employee. Outside the medical field, empirical studies investigating the behavioral consequences of professionalism while considering the contextual factors are limited.

### 6.3 The interrelatedness of public service motivation and professionalism

Another limitation of current literature is that very little attention has been paid to interrelated effects of PSM and professionalism on behavior. Professionalism at an occupational level and professionalism at an individual level are related, since professionalism at the latter level is an interpretation of the individual of 'the idealtypic' professional (occupational level). What follows from this is that professionalism as occupational variable can be used to say something about professionalism at an individual variable.

In this study we address professionalism (at an occupational level) what we earlier called a balanced point of view of professionalism (reappraisal of professionalism as a normative value system). We affiliate to this approach as it presents the most realistic reflection of daily practice. In detail, we assume that professionals are neither solely interested in protecting their own shelter position nor completely focused on helping individual clients but somewhere in between. As such, using a balanced approach to professionalism implies that the relation between professionalism and PSM is not clear cut.

In line with the idea that professionals aim to protect their market shelters (neo-weberian approach), Willbern (1954) points out that professionalism comes along with the tendency to displace professional loyalty to larger portions of the population, and the privation of political control. According to Van Wart (1998), through the use of exclusive rights, professionals set their own standards and regulate their members in their occupational area and insulate themselves from democratic control. Next to this, the author claims that professionals use their professional power to improve their own working conditions

However, a complex relation between PSM and professionalism can also be expected if we lean towards more functionalistic ideas. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2000)

observe that some public employees see themselves as agents for the clients and not as a agent representing the interests of the state. That means that they are working for individual clients and not for the public organization which aims to serve the public good. Another example is Lipsky's (1980) classic study of street level bureaucrats. In this study the author claims that professionals often use their professional autonomy to perform contrary to objectives and rules of their organizations in situations where these are in conflict with their professional concerns and personal preferences. Next to this, Lipsky points out that professionals may experience conflicts between their professional concern for the (individual) client on the one hand, and the general social role of the agency or the need of the organization to process work quickly using the resources available, on the other hand (p.41-45).

Finally, if we address professionalism as a distinctive form of decentralized occupational control than a positive relation between PSM and professionalism becomes an additional option. This idea is in line with (Andersen and Serritzlew 2009) who expect that professional occupations are very important for the level and effects of PSM. An explanation for this anticipation is given by (Pandey and Stazyk 2008) who claim that professional organizations typically have ethical codes which promote the public interest. In the course of education, professionals are expected to become socialized to 'an ideology that asserts greater commitment to doing good work than to economic gain (Freidson 2001).

This brief overview of theoretical writings on the relationship between PSM and professionalism makes clear that there are no simple answers concerning their interrelatedness. A limited number of studies exists which address this relation empirically. While treating professionalism as an individual variable, Moynihan and Pandey (2007) and DeHart-Davis et al. (2005) found that PSM is positively related to professionalism. In contrast, Perry (1997) concluded that professional identification had no overall positive effect on PSM. In detail, he found that PSM was negatively related to attraction to policy making, positively associated with public interest and self-sacrifice, and that there was no relationship with compassion. More recently, Andersen and Pedersen (2010) encounter similar results while addressing professionalism as an occupational variable. They found that a negative relation between professionalism and the dimension compassion; a positive relation with attraction to policy making; and no relation with commitment to the public interest.

As demonstrated above, the relation between PSM and professionalism is not clear cut but possible clashing. In order to gain more insight what guides individual behavior of professionals, the inferred impact of PSM and professionalism on behavior needs to be investigated.

## **7.0 Context**

In the following section two aspects of the context of public organizations will be considered, namely conflicting values and contrasting demands. The reason for the consideration of the context is twofold. First, it has convincingly been argued that the context might have an impact on the relation between PSM, professionalism and behavior. Second, based on identity theory it can be expected that the context plays an important role in the determination of the hierarchy of different identities.

### **7.1 Conflicting Values and demands**

Conflicting values and contrasting demands are a defining characteristic of the environment of public organization (Van der Wal et al. 2011). Many decision-making processes and behaviors in the public sectors involve trade-offs and dilemmas<sup>3</sup>. In spite of this knowledge, it has recently been argued by Spicer (2009:537) that ‘with some exeptions (Wagenaar, 1999; Spicer, 2001; Nieuwenburg, 2004), public administration writers generally do not have devoted much attention to the idea of value pluralism or its implications for administrative practice’

We do not completely agree with Spice’s proposition (as a broad variety of strategies to manage tensions between competing public values – including his own works - do exist (for example, see (Thacher and Rein 2004, Stewart 2006, Koppenjan, Charles and Ryan 2008). However, we will elaborate on his proposition by arguing that there is little attention to the behavioral consequences that result from value tensions or moral dilemmas public servants experiencing at work. This limited attention is highly undesirable as experienced ‘tensions between competing public values [...] often lead to intentional or sometimes unintentional deviant behavior [such as short-sighted or misguided decisions], because pressures simply overwhelms managers and

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<sup>3</sup> (which are a special form of trade-offs characterized by the fact that the situations remains negative no matter which option is chosen (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004)

employees, or they see no other way to cut concerns to realize one value at the cost of acting with integrity' in reality (Van der Wal et al. 2011).

In this study, we consider three types of conflicts: The public interest holding different aspects, public value pluralism, and multiple principles problem:

One main distinction between public and private organizations is that public ones are in charge of the promotion of the public interest (Appleby 1952, Bozeman 2007, Flathman 1966). Bozeman (2004, 2007), following Fesler (1990), refers to the public interest as an ideal and defines it '*as the outcomes best serving the long-run survival and well-being of a social collective construed as a 'public' 'in a particular context (p.12).*' The problem with the public interest as an ideal is that it combines different aspects such as economy, public health, and education which cannot be realized at the same time.

Second, the public sector is required to comply with the principles of good governance which are fulfilled by sets of public values. Next to serving the public interest, public organizations are also required to follow the principles of good governance which implies the realization of classical governmental values such as integrity, neutrality and legality in combination with market-oriented values (Aguilera and Cuervo-Cazurra 2004). However, within this context the problem seems to be that there is no overriding good or common scale ranking the importance of these values (Spicer 2009, Berlin 1982, Hampshire 1983, Van der Wal et al. 2011) which makes the avoidance of conflicting values impossible; a condition that in moral philosophy is called value pluralism (Wagenaar 1999, Nieuwenberg 2004). This is in accordance with Kettel (1993) who notes that 'government's fundamental challenge in serving the public interest is balancing the pursuit of efficiency with other goals that have equal, sometimes greater, importance' (p.17).

Third, the public sector is confronted with the multiple principles problem. This means that employees are likely to enter situations where one element of the political system emphasizes one aspect of the public interest more vigorously than others do (Pitt and Smith 1981). What follows is clear: public servants are confronted with multiple demands which are impossible to handle all at once. This is in line with (Hardy 1981) who points out that 'most administrative practice [...] is a compromise between conflicting values and forces within society' (vii).

If individuals are placed in situations where values are conflicting, based on self-verification processes, it can be expected that individuals will behave in ways that will confirm their identity (self-verification process). Following from this, it can be that people in different situations show different behaviors to confirm their identity. In other words, conflicts moderate the relation between identities and behavior. Since it is commonly hold that the environment of public organizations is characterized by conflicting values and demands, we argue that it is highly relevant investigate moderating impact of these environmental aspects in the relation between PSM, professionalism and behavior. .

In order to able to categorize the different types of behavior, in the following section coping strategies, which provide a framework of analysis of behavior, will be briefly introduced.

## **8.0 Coping Strategies**

Eventually, the public service and professional identity of an individual will influence the way in which he ‘copes’ with the difficult situation of conflicting values and contrasting demands. *Coping behavior* can be defined as “*a response to competing values that takes form in the actions and decisions (Steenhuizen 2009)*” From this definition, one can conclude that the decisions and actions professionals take in situations of conflicting values and contrasting demands, can be defined as *coping behavior*.

In his dissertation Steenhuizen (2009) reviews the literature on coping strategies. Based on this review he develops an useful framework, through which coping behaviors can be analyzed. This framework is based on a distinction between two different dichotomies of strategies of dealing with conflicting values: decoupling versus coupling coping strategies and deliberate versus emergent coping strategies.

In a strategy of decoupling, individuals deal with one value at the time, they ‘decouple’ the values in a certain context from each other. For example, people can deal with the different values from the context on different points in time. This behavior, also called *cycling*, postpones the dilemma to the future. In contrast, in a coupling strategy people deal with the different values at the same time, which eventually lead to over-complex tasks (Steenhuizen 2009)



The second dichotomy deals with the distinction between deliberate and emergent coping strategies. Is the coping behavior professionals show in situations of conflicting values well considered or is it a less explicit trade-off (Steenhuizen 2009)? Behaviors are not always fully deliberate or decoupled, because of that it is better to see these dichotomies as a continuum.

## **9.0 Conclusion**

To summarize, in this paper we developed a conceptual model based on the question what determines the (decision-making) behavior of public service officials in situations of conflicting values and contrasting demands. We started from an institutional perspective and combined insights from identity theory with the literature on professionalism and public service motivation. This combination gives us valuable insights in how institutions influence individual behavior

Institutional values and norms form roles or ideal types of how an individual should behave. If individuals categorize themselves as professionals, they will interpret these ideal types and give meaning to them. Since this interpreted role will form the standard for their behavior, it is obvious that not all professionals will act in the same way. Concerning PSM it is expected that through transmission mechanisms, such as socialization, internalization, cultural preferences, and social learning, institutional values and norms are taken in by individuals and serve as guidelines of behavior.

Finally, the relation how someone might act based on his or her identity is moderated by the context (conflicting values and contrasting demands). The complete model is represented in figure 1.

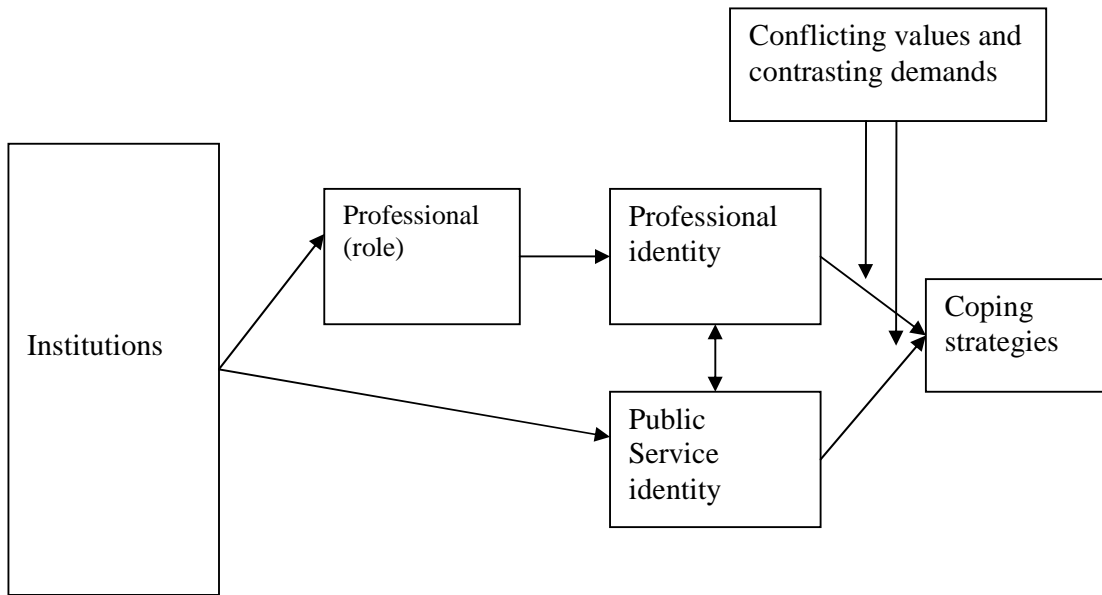


Figure 1 conceptual model

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