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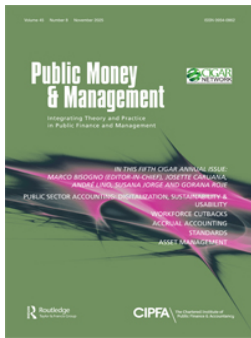
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Public service motivation and employee intention to stay in Lebanon: The case of NGOs

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Public service motivation and employee intention to stay in Lebanon: The case of NGOs

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IMPACT

This article is intended for public managers, policy advisors, and development practitioners working in crisis-affected, politically fragile, or institutionally weak public sectors, particularly in the Global South or post-crisis states. It offers practical insights into how performance management systems are adapted in the absence of political leadership and reliable institutional infrastructure. Based on evidence from Lebanon, it shows how managers adjust performance tools by relying on informal networks, social norms, and discretion, often in co-ordination with NGOs, to sustain service delivery and morale. These adaptations question the usefulness of standardized frameworks in fragile settings and demonstrate how local agency helps maintain functionality. The findings offer guidance for donor agencies, NGOs, international organizations, and reform consultants who support performance reforms in unstable environments. The article calls for moving beyond control-oriented approaches toward context-sensitive strategies that build resilience and flexibility in real world public management under conditions of disorder and disruption.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the debated relationship between public service motivation (PSM) and employee intention to stay (ITS), focusing on the mediating roles of job satisfaction and affective commitment (AC) to enhance the theoretical understanding of the underlying mechanism. Data were gathered through online surveys targeting employees of local and international NGOs in Lebanon. A total of 210 valid responses were analysed using structural equation modelling. The results indicate that job satisfaction and AC mediate the relationship between PSM and intention to stay, which is defined as employees' conscious and free will to remain with their current employer for an extended period. These findings may be influenced by the collective nature of Lebanese culture, which emphasizes communal values. NGOs in Lebanon play a crucial role in countering government inefficiencies and maintaining societal stability, enhancing employees' satisfaction, commitment, and intention to stay. The authors discuss the implications for theory and practice.

KEYWORDS

affective commitment; intention to stay; job satisfaction; Lebanon; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); person–organization fit; public service motivation (PSM)

Introduction

Perry and Wise (1990), pioneers of public service motivation (PSM) theory, posited that employees driven by a sense of public service are likely to excel in their roles compared to those lacking such motivation. Subsequently, scholars have emphasized the symbiotic relationship between PSM and job-related performance (Tu et al., 2024). Numerous studies have illuminated this nexus, revealing that individuals with heightened PSM exhibit enhanced job satisfaction and commitment levels (Lu & Chen, 2022). However, divergent perspectives exist, suggesting that PSM's impact on work outcomes may be contingent upon mediating factors. Notably, Vandenabeele (2009) demonstrated that PSM exerts an indirect influence on job-related outcomes, particularly when variables like person–organization fit (P–O fit) are considered. These different viewpoints highlight a significant gap in the PSM literature (Lu & Chen, 2022).

Knowing that PSM improves job-related outcomes and individual performance, this concept has become a main tool to explain job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention (Coursey et al., 2012). While some

scholars have examined the positive association between PSM and employee intention to stay (ITS), which refers to employees' conscious and free will to remain with their current employer for an extended period (for example Gan et al., 2020), the role of mediating variables has not been adequately explored. These mediating variables offer important theoretical explanations for the relationship between PSM and job-related outcomes. Hence, this work adds value and important insights to the relationship between PSM and intention to stay by incorporating two mediators, job satisfaction and affective commitment (AC), into one model. Therefore, this study provides new theoretical insights regarding this relationship by focusing on the work-related behaviour of employees in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Lebanon.

Given the unique context of Lebanon, with its fluid and underdeveloped institutional arrangements, this article fills an important gap in the literature. While most previous research on PSM has been conducted in Western nations (Gan et al., 2020), Lebanon presents a distinctive national

context, characterised by significant socio-economic challenges, including a severe economic collapse and the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis. These challenges have placed immense pressure on public sector employees, exacerbating corruption, unethical behaviour, and government inefficiency. In this context, NGOs have become crucial actors in service delivery, addressing the needs of refugees and marginalized Lebanese citizens. Thus, our main research question was:

How does PSM influence intention to stay among employees in NGOs operating in Lebanon, and what role do job satisfaction and AC play as mediators in this relationship?

The article is structured as follows: first, we explore the Lebanese context, shedding light on its socio-economic challenges and other relevant institutional factors. Next, we discuss existing literature on PSM and job-related outcomes and present the main variables to propose our hypotheses. We then present the research methodology, followed by the findings. Lastly, we discuss our findings and draw out the implications for theory and practice.

Research context

Lebanon, officially the Republic of Lebanon, is a small Arab country located in the Middle East. It has a diverse population and a unique political system known as consociational democracy, which ensures power-sharing among different religious sects to maintain political stability (Aoun & Zahar, 2017). For over half a century, Lebanon has endured significant shocks to its socio-economic infrastructure, from wars and mass population displacement to economic crises and political instability (Ammar et al., 2016). Alongside persistent economic and political turmoil, Lebanon has hosted approximately half a million Palestinian refugees since 1948 (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Furthermore, in the wake of the recent war in Syria, Lebanon has grappled with a large influx of refugees, with almost 1.5 million Syrians seeking refuge within its borders (Mawad & Makki, 2023). Consequently, Lebanon now hosts the highest refugee density of any country worldwide since 1980, with refugees comprising almost 30% of the Lebanese population (Ammar et al., 2016).

Over the past decade, Lebanon has faced significant economic downturns, culminating in a severe economic crisis. Since 2019, the Lebanese currency has plummeted by over 98%. This drastic depreciation has coincided with soaring inflation rates, historic highs in inflation, a sharp decline in GDP, a steep rise in unemployment rates, and a skyrocketing national debt. As a result, poverty has reached alarming levels, pushing millions of citizens into poverty. Many individuals now struggle to afford essential goods and services, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the country (Human Rights Watch, 2022). These unprecedented challenges to the socio-economic situation in Lebanon have imposed a significant burden on the Lebanese government, society, and economy, amplifying existing challenges.

Lebanon has faced successive waves of political paralysis, during which the government struggled to address mounting crises, leading to an unprecedented two-year period without a president (Ammar et al., 2016). The latter, along with the substantial impact of severe shocks on the Lebanese public sector has severely limited the government's ability to

finance effectively the increasing needs of the population amid stagnant economic growth (Helal et al., 2023). Efforts by the Lebanese civil service to address these socio-economic challenges have been largely unsuccessful. Deep-seated corruption within the public sector has rendered the Lebanese civil service inefficient and ineffectual in driving socio-economic development. These challenges have inflicted lasting damage on the country, resulting in persistent failures in essential public service delivery (Helal et al., 2023), as well as a surge in unemployment and corruption rates.

The long-term misuse of the public sector has eroded the morale and motivation of civil servants and diminished citizens' trust in public institutions, further weakening the country's administrative apparatus (Abi Rached et al., 2023). On top of that, Lebanese public sector employees have been highly affected by the economic crisis. Civil servants have faced salary cuts, despite already earning lower wages than their counterparts in the private sector and NGOs. This has resulted in reduced productivity, low morale, and an increase in corruption, disorder, and unethical behaviour. Civil servants have been at the forefront of strikes, refusing to work and provide services to the public, thus, exacerbating governmental paralysis and leading to heightened citizen alienation, mistrust, and suspicion (Azhari, 2021).

This paralysis of the public sector, coupled with the influx of refugees, has created an unprecedented demand for NGOs to compensate for governmental shortfalls. Lebanon boasts an active NGO sector with roots dating back to the 19th century. NGOs have traditionally played central roles in service delivery and various aspects of public life, particularly during challenging periods (AbouAssi, 2015). In Lebanon, both local and international NGOs have actively participated in public affairs and service provision. These organizations play a critical role in addressing a wide range of basic needs for refugees and vulnerable citizens, including food, water, sanitation, shelter, healthcare, and education (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Given the country's reliance on foreign aid to address its economic and humanitarian challenges, Lebanon receives substantial international assistance due to its significant role in promoting stability and peace in the region. The role of NGOs has been more pivotal following the influx of refugees, with a significant portion of international humanitarian aid directed towards them (AbouAssi, 2015). International donors often prefer to work with and provide direct assistance to NGOs because they have doubts and suspicions regarding the Lebanese public sector. For instance, aid formerly provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) are significantly larger than the budgets of several Lebanese public agencies (AbouAssi, 2015).

On the other side of corruption, the culture in Lebanon is collectivist, characterised by social cohesiveness and communitarianism. Consequently, the broader culture emphasizes strong social bonds, mutual trust, reciprocity, and cooperation within society (Melhem et al., 2024). While *wasta* (informal networking), has indeed been found to corrupt the public sector, it has another face that enhances sociability and belonging. While it can have a corruptive influence when misused for personal gain or to bypass

formal procedures (Melhem et al., 2025), *wasta* can reduce transaction costs for organizations, curb opportunism, and inhibit free-riding behaviours. In cases of networking for the greater good, *wasta* can help encourage actors to take responsibility in their interactions with the wider community (Melhem et al., 2024). A recent study by Helal et al. (2023) has demonstrated that *wasta* could be employed for humanitarian causes in Lebanon. This study shows that *wasta* can be leveraged to obtain and grant assistance when formal support mechanisms (for example from the public sector) are lacking and insufficient. Therefore, it could be argued that the situation in the context of NGOs is drastically different from that in the public sector. To this end, the extraordinary situation in Lebanon, marked by recurring shocks and public sector paralysis compensated for by NGOs, provides a unique setting to study PSM.

Theory development and hypotheses

PSM and intention to stay

Perry (1996) stands as a seminal figure, pioneering the development of a multi-dimensional scale to quantify PSM, comprising four key elements: attraction to policy-making, compassion, self-sacrifice, and commitment to the public interest. His work laid the groundwork for subsequent contributions to the PSM literature. For example, Vandenberg (2009) characterizes PSM as a constellation of values and ethical convictions, where individuals prioritize communal welfare over personal interests. Perry and Hondeghem (2008) further delineate PSM as an individual's inclination toward public service, driven by a desire to benefit others and society as a whole. Similarly, Tu et al. (2024) assert that PSM reflects employees' dual motivation stemming from both duty and commitment to serving the public. Building on empirical research on PSM from the past decade, O'Leary (2022) offered a critique of PSM theory and explored why some employees choose to work in pro-social sectors despite having low PSM scores. According to O'Leary (2022), employees consistently seek to align their work with their values and identity.

Generally speaking, intention to stay encapsulates employees' deliberate and voluntary commitment to remain with their current employer over an extended period. Existing literature underlines the detrimental impacts of high turnover rates on organizational reputation, performance, and inter-institutional relations (Darwish et al., 2013). Various factors contribute to employee attrition, including insufficient support from leadership, inequitable financial compensation, limited avenues for career advancement, unsatisfactory intention to stay, excessive workload, diminished motivation, and poor communication between employees and senior management (Inalhan et al., 2021). Qian and Balwi (2024) argue that ITS is a multifaceted concept shaped by individual characteristics, the organizational environment, and external market conditions, with an emphasis on fostering positive connections and long-term commitments to the employer.

Consequently, numerous studies have examined the dynamics of employees' intention to stay, seeking to cultivate a nuanced comprehension of this phenomenon. One such avenue of inquiry is the relationship between intention to stay and PSM. Gan et al. (2020) highlighted a

scarcity of studies within the PSM literature that demonstrate a negative correlation between PSM and employees' intention to stay within public sector institutions. Similarly, according to Choi and Chun (2018), scant attention has been devoted to investigating the direct impact of PSM on turnover intention. However, recent scholarly endeavors have begun shedding light on this relationship, predominantly through the exploration of intermediary variables to enhance the theoretical understanding of the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between PSM and retention intention. Within the Middle East, the wider context of this study, research has demonstrated that PSM significantly influences employees' intention to stay by fostering a sense of fulfillment and alignment with societal values. Employees with high PSM are more likely to remain with their organizations despite challenging working conditions, especially in collectivist cultures where social obligations and loyalty play a crucial role in career decisions (Gould-Williams et al., 2015). In Jordan, for example, employees prioritize intrinsic motivators, such as personal growth and contribution to society, over extrinsic rewards when deciding to stay in their roles (Nimri et al., 2015; Darwish et al., 2016). Similarly, findings from the Egyptian public sector highlight that PSM enhances employees' commitment and job satisfaction, which are critical mediators of their intention to stay (Mostafa & Gould-Williams, 2014).

It is clear from the theoretical underpinnings in the literature that the relationship between intention to stay and PSM has not been fully explored. This article seeks to develop a theoretical framework that will serve as a basis for future work. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: PSM has a significant positive effect on intention to stay (ITS).

PSM and AC

Like other constructs in the scholarly management literature, organizational commitment has been defined, conceptualized and measured differently or inconsistently. Allen and Meyer (1990) were the first to develop the three-component model of commitment, which includes: AC, normative commitment, and continuance commitment. They defined AC as an 'emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in and enjoys membership in the organization' (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 2). Thus, employees with strong AC will stay in the same organization because they desire to. In this context, Xu et al. (2023) emphasize that AC offers numerous benefits for both organizations and their employees. Other researchers, such as Tóth-Király et al. (2023) highlight the social dimension of AC, which extends to colleagues, supervisors, and even customers, positioning the organization as a significant social arena. Kim (2006) was among the first scholars to explore the relationship between PSM and organizational commitment. He found that Korean civil servants with strong AC (those who find that their values and beliefs are met in the organization) placed a higher value on intrinsic rewards and exerted extra efforts beyond their official duties and responsibilities. Rajagukguk and Desiana (2021) found the relationship between AC and PSM to be significant,

however, others believe that this association between the two variables is insignificant and weak. For instance, Sun (2021) found that AC has a joint reverse effect on the association between PSM and turnover intention. Hence, temporary Chinese civil servants with low AC and PSM had lower intention to stay in the public sector; whereas other employees with strong AC and PSM had strong intention to stay (Sun, 2021). Charbonneau and Wood (2018), in turn, concluded that strong AC among workers in the Canadian Army mediates the association between unit cohesion and their intention to leave the organization, but it partially mediates the relationship between unit cohesion and prosocial and altruistic behaviours. This is particularly relevant for PSM studies in collectivist cultures, where social obligations and cultural expectations play a crucial role in shaping commitment. Employees in collectivist cultures may feel a heightened sense of responsibility to remain with an organization due to cultural values that emphasize harmony, respect, and social ties over individual career aspirations (Shahda, 2016). In societies such as Lebanon and Jordan, where collectivism is deeply ingrained, employees may develop a sense of loyalty and commitment not only due to their alignment with organizational goals but also because of societal pressures and obligations to maintain relationships within their professional and social networks (Melhem et al., 2024). Employees in such environments may prioritize job security and organizational stability to fulfill their social roles and contribute to their communities, reinforcing their affective and normative commitment to their organizations. In light of these insights, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: PSM has a significant positive effect on AC.

Job satisfaction and ITS

A multitude of studies have emphasized the robust and positive impact of job satisfaction on employee intention to remain within an organization (Choi & Chun, 2018). Contented employees typically exhibit a strong inclination to continue their tenure with the same employer. Job satisfaction not only fosters employee commitment to their organizations but also cultivates a sense of alignment with organizational goals and values, thereby bolstering retention rates. Recognizing the criticality of comprehending the underlying drivers of job satisfaction, Kim et al. (2021) advocated for a deeper exploration to facilitate the retention of skilled personnel. Moreover, Schmidt (2007) raised pertinent critiques of existing research on job satisfaction, particularly the oversight of job training satisfaction as a vital component of overall job satisfaction. Schmidt argued that the relationship between job satisfaction and employee intention to stay can be more accurately explained by accounting for satisfaction with workplace training. Thus, acknowledging the importance of satisfaction with workplace training contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of job satisfaction's influence on employee retention (Schmidt, 2007). Firdaus et al. (2022) argue that employees feel satisfied and committed when organizations provide attractive salaries, bonuses, and financial rewards, fostering positive attitudes toward their workplace. Supporting this, Kim et al. (2021) observed that only satisfied healthcare

providers in Uganda and Zambia demonstrated strong intention to remain with their organization.

Several studies have explored the relationship between AC and ITS. For example, Vandenberghe and Bentein (2009) found that both affective organizational commitment and AC to supervisors independently reduced employee intention to leave their organization. They also noted that the impact of AC to supervisors on intention to leave was stronger when affective organizational commitment was low. Similarly, Charbonneau and Wood (2018) observed that Canadian army personnel with high levels of AC tended to demonstrate dedication to their work, assist their colleagues, and engage in extra-role behaviours, leading to stronger intention to remain with their employer. However, research on PSM and ITS in collectivist cultures suggests that job satisfaction is influenced not only by job conditions but also by intrinsic motivation derived from cultural values that emphasize community service and social responsibility (for example Nimri et al., 2015). Hence the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Job satisfaction (JS) has a significant positive effect on intention to stay.

Hypothesis 4: Affective commitment has a significant positive effect on intention to stay.

Job satisfaction and PSM

In recent years, there has been growing interest in exploring the relationship between PSM and job satisfaction (Choi & Chun, 2018). PSM has been posited as a predictor of job satisfaction (Lu & Chen, 2022). Perry (1996), for example, was among the pioneers to suggest that public service-motivated employees experience higher levels of job satisfaction compared to those with lower PSM levels. Similarly, other researchers have found direct and positive associations between PSM and work-related behaviours, including job satisfaction (Chen et al., 2021). However, the strength of this relationship varies across the four dimensions of the PSM construct. PSM is also closely tied to intrinsic rewards derived from the satisfaction employees derive from their work (Kim, 2006).

While some researchers hypothesize a positive influence of PSM on job satisfaction, other studies present mixed findings. For example, Rayner et al. (2018) found no notable association between PSM and job satisfaction among Australian council workers, while other studies have even suggested a negative link between PSM and job satisfaction when considering P-O fit as a mediator (Khuram et al., 2020). Similarly, Kim (2012) concluded that P-O fit mediates the relationship between PSM and both work satisfaction and organizational commitment among Korean civil servants. However, it is worth noting that in collectivist contexts, job satisfaction in public organizations is not solely dependent on material incentives but is reinforced by a cultural commitment to public service. In summary, job satisfaction, defined as the feeling of pleasure, contentment, and achievement derived from a job, is strongly influenced by PSM. However, the strength of this relationship varies significantly across the dimensions of PSM:

Hypothesis 5: PSM has a significant positive effect on job satisfaction.

The mediating roles of job satisfaction and AC

Vandenabeele (2009) highlighted job satisfaction as a significant factor in examining the relationship between PSM and employee intention to stay. It was found that satisfied employees with high levels of PSM tend to exhibit strong intention to remain with their organization for an extended duration, aligning with Kim's (2006) assertion that satisfied public sector employees are inclined to stay in their current organization. These contented employees not only demonstrate loyalty but also show a strong commitment to achieving organizational objectives (Kim, 2006).

Affective commitment often manifests as an emotional attachment to one's organization or a sense of alignment with its goals and values, fostering a willingness to remain with the institution long-term. This commitment can be particularly strong when organizations help employees feel emotionally connected to the broader society, especially in contexts marked by humanitarian crises and the importance of social cohesion. Robbins and Judge (2007) concluded that AC emerges when employees perceive alignment between their personal beliefs, such as those related to communal values, and organizational goals. Similarly, Perry (2004) acknowledged that various definitions of AC highlight the deep bond between employees and their organizations, as well as their desire to maintain long-term employment. Our sixth and seventh hypotheses were based on these observations (and see Figure 1):

Hypothesis 6: Job satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between PSM and ITS.

Hypothesis 7: Affective commitment mediates the positive relationship between PSM and ITS.

Methodology

Data collection and measurement

In this study, a questionnaire was used as the data collection tool. Data collection in the Lebanese context proved particularly challenging due to the numerous changes, barriers, and difficulties outlined earlier in the article, further exacerbated by ongoing political unrest and economic instability. From January to April 2023, the questionnaires were electronically distributed to employees in local and international NGOs operating in Lebanon. Out of the 393 responses obtained, only 240 met the study's criteria. After data cleaning procedures, 210 questionnaires were deemed usable for analysis. Respondents provided their answers on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' (1) to 'strongly disagree' (5). Regarding demographics, the survey revealed a higher proportion of male respondents (55%) compared to female respondents (45%). Respondents aged 43 to 64 comprised nearly 45.5% of the total, suggesting that NGOs operating in Lebanon are effective in retaining experienced employees. This also indicates that respondents generally exhibit strong intention to remain with their current organizations. Additionally, the salaries offered by many NGOs appear competitive, even attractive, when compared to the lower wages provided by the public sector and banks in Lebanon.

Measuring PSM has often posed challenges; following the works of Perry (1996), Kim (2009), and others, PSM has consistently been regarded as a multi-dimensional conceptual framework since its inception. Accordingly, PSM was assessed using Kim's (2009) multidimensional scale, comprising 14 items measuring four dimensions: attraction to policy-making (two items), commitment to the public

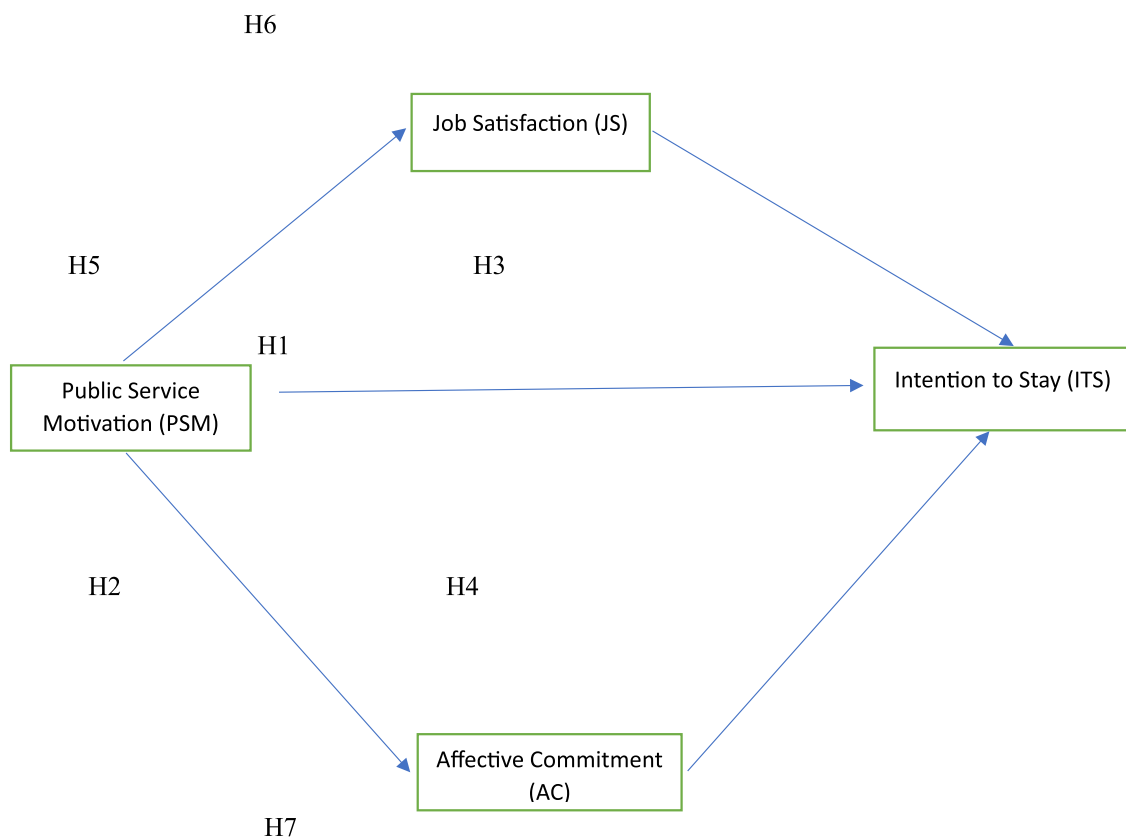


Figure 1. Conceptual framework and associated hypotheses.

Table 1. Measurements items and sources.

Variable	Number of items	Source
PSM	14	Kim (2009)
EITS	4	Radford, Shacklock and Bradley
Job satisfaction	10	Spector (1985, 1997)
Affective commitment	7	Meyer et al. (1993)

interest (four items), compassion (four items), and self-sacrifice (four items). Employees' intention to stay was gauged through the adoption of Radford et al. (2015) approach, which included questions such as 'there are a lot of job opportunities for me, but I intend to stay'. Job satisfaction was measured using Spector's (1985, 1997) scale, featuring 10 questions assessing satisfaction with pay, colleagues, supervision, promotion, and the nature of work. Finally, AC was measured based on the work of Meyer et al. (1993), with seven questions probing respondents' emotional attachment to their organization.

Analytical strategy

We used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Smart Partial Least Squares (PLS) for analysis. Smart PLS offers several advantages, including: (1) handling small samples and non-normal data, (2) supporting both reflective and formative latent variables, and (3) being particularly useful for complex models with numerous latent and manifest variables and small indicators per latent variable (for example Wold et al., 1987). In this study, Smart PLS was chosen because it: remains robust even with small sample sizes; it is effective for data that violate normality assumptions; and it outperforms regression analysis in assessing mediation (Hair et al., 2019).

Confirmatory factor analysis (convergent and discriminant validity)

Table 2 presents the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results for the constructs in this study. The factor loadings indicate the strength of the relationship between each item and its corresponding construct. Loadings greater than 0.6 are generally considered adequate, while those above 0.8 are regarded as high. Most factor loadings in this study are both acceptable and strong, ranging from 0.621 for JS10 to 0.977 for ITS2. This suggests that the CFA results demonstrate that most items are reliable estimators of their respective constructs. Figure 2 further illustrates the factor loadings for the items.

CFA was conducted to ensure the distinctiveness of all variables. The hypothesized model was first assessed through CFA. Next, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to verify whether the effect of PSM on employees' intention to stay was mediated by job satisfaction and AC. Initially, the direct effect of PSM on employees' intention to stay was examined by excluding the two mediators (job satisfaction and AC) from the structural equation model. Subsequently, the indirect and mediating effects were assessed using the standardized bootstrap mediation effect test.

Table 2 also reports the construct reliability (CA), rho_A values, and composite reliability (CR) scores for each construct in the study. The CR values are all greater than 0.7, indicating satisfactory reliability. A CA of 0.7 or higher is generally

considered satisfactory, suggesting that all constructs exhibit good internal consistency. The rho_A values exceed 0.7, further confirming a high level of internal consistency. Additionally, all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50. Taking these results, along with the factor loadings and reliabilities, they suggest that the constructs have good convergent validity, as they explain a significant proportion of the variance in the observed variables, confirming the validity of the measurement model. Overall, these results also indicate that the CFA is appropriate for estimating the results using structural equation modelling.

In addition, Table 3 presents the discriminant validity scores. We compared the square roots of the AVE values with the correlations between the constructs. The results revealed that the square roots of the AVE values exceeded the correlations between any of the main constructs, indicating a robust level of discriminant validity (see Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

CFA and mediation analysis were conducted to examine the factorial validity of the measurement model, while structural modelling was used to assess the goodness of fit of the four-factor model. Three widely applied model fit indices in CFA were used in order to check model fitness. They are: root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) also known as the Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), and comparative fit index (CFI). According to Browne and Cudeck (1993), RMSEA values less than or equal to .05 are considered as a good fit or a close fit, values between 0.05 and 0.08 as an adequate fit, values between 0.08 and 0.1 as a mediocre fit, whereas values greater than 0.10 are poor, and hence are rejected. CFI and TLI are also important model fit indices that researchers cannot ignore. While CFI and TLI values can range between 0 and 1, values that are equal to or greater than 0.90 are considered as indicators of a good and acceptable model (Bentler, 1990). If CFI and TLI are less than one, then CFI is automatically greater than TLI. While the absolute fit index RMSEA was used to examine how far the hypothesized model is from a perfect model, the two incremental fit indices (CFI and TLI) were used in order to assess the goodness of fit for the model. Accordingly, this study aims at proposing five alternative model conceptualizations (Table 4).

The hypothesized four factor model fits well with the data (χ^2 (97) = 213.756, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.976, IFI = 0.976, TLI = 0.970, and RMSEA = 0.048) in comparison to the five alternative models. However, the fit is less adequate (χ^2 (105) = 24.268, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.691, IFI = 0.692, TLI = 0.643, and RMSEA = 0.161) when taking into consideration the one-factor model. Accordingly, the results of CFA demonstrated the distinctiveness of the proposed/ hypothesized four-factor model's construct.

Hypothesis testing

In order to test our hypotheses, the fit of the data was examined using a structural equation model (SEM). With χ^2 (101) = 374.638, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.943, TLI = 0.930, and RMSEA = 0.072, the proposed model demonstrated very good fit indices. Both TLI and CFI were higher than 0.9, and RMSEA was equal to or less than 0.08. As illustrated in Tables 4 and 5, PSM positively influenced ITS ($p < 0.001$, standard coefficient (SC) = 0.422), providing strong support

Table 2. CFA factor loading and reliability.

Variable names	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Affective commitment	AC1	0.783	0.910	0.912	0.910	0.591
	AC2	0.785				
	AC3	0.863				
	AC4	0.760				
	AC5	0.702				
	AC6	0.783				
	AC7	0.691				
Attraction to policy-making	ATT 1	0.717	0.787	0.823	0.791	0.565
	ATT2	0.910				
	ATT3	0.694				
Compassion	COM1	0.822	0.781	0.800	0.784	0.551
	COM2	0.699				
	COM3	0.696				
	COM4	0.764				
Commitment to the public interest	CPI1	0.651	0.834	0.838	0.834	0.558
	CPI2	0.698				
	CPI3	0.862				
Intention to stay	ITS2	0.977	0.795	0.851	0.793	0.573
	ITS3	0.656				
Job satisfaction	JS10	0.612	0.916	0.928	0.908	0.535
	JS2	0.670				
	JS3	0.695				
	JS4	0.903				
	JS5	0.914				
	JS6	0.926				
	JS7	0.647				
	JS8	0.671				
	JS9	0.677				
	JS1	0.677				
Self-sacrifice	SS1	0.758	0.803	0.805	0.802	0.504
	SS2	0.750				
	SS3	0.640				
	SS4	0.678				

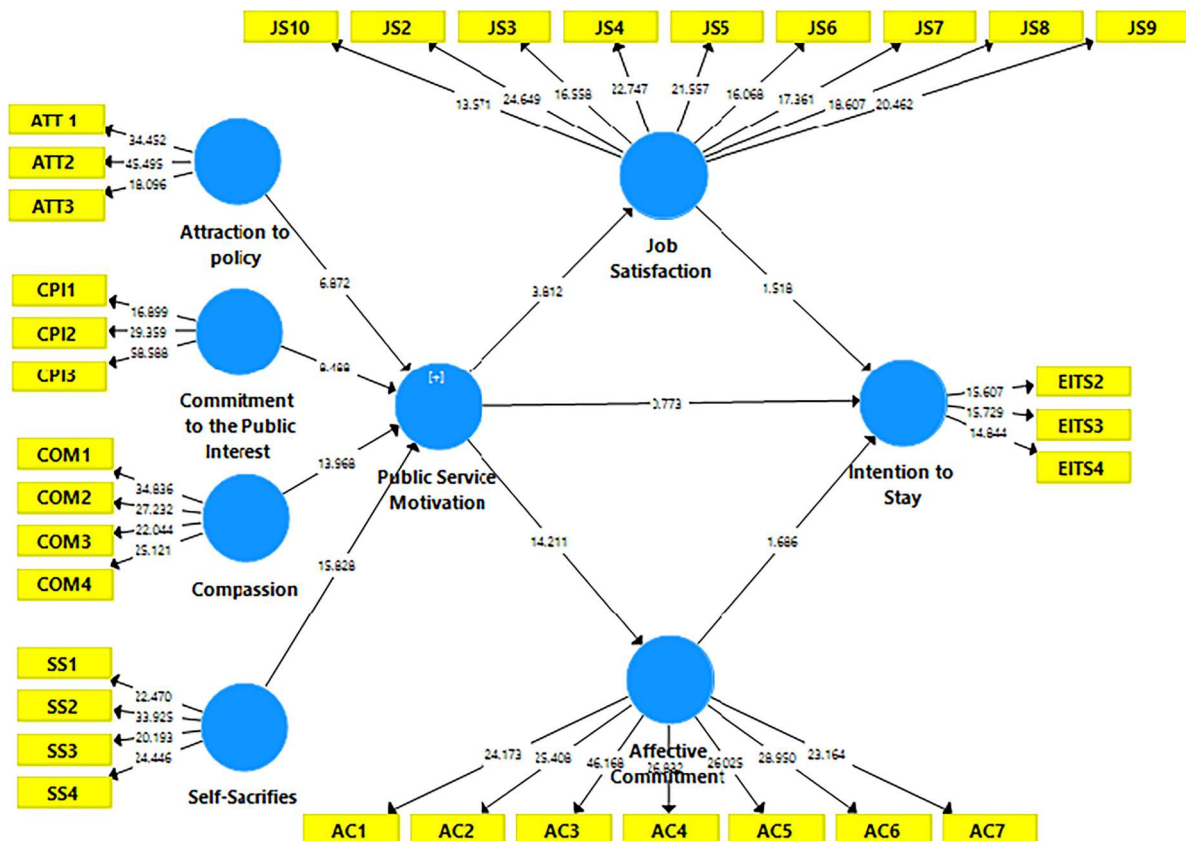
**Figure 2.** Confirmatory factor analysis.

Table 3. Discriminant validity.

Constructs	Affective commitment	Attraction to policy-making	Compassion	Commitment to the public interest	Intention to stay	Job satisfaction	Self-sacrifice
Affective commitment	0.758						
Attraction to policy-making	0.770	0.864					
Compassion	0.693	0.749	0.784				
Commitment to the public interest	0.704	0.852	0.701	0.774			
Intention to stay	0.738	0.805	0.582	0.765	0.782		
Job satisfaction	0.759	0.854	0.565	0.642	0.644	0.845	
Self-sacrifice	0.768	0.862	0.522	0.702	0.654	0.642	0.762

Table 4. Comparison of measurement models for variables studied.

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
Hypothesized four factor model	213.756	98	2.220	0.976	0.976	0.970	0.048
Three-factor model							
PSM combined with JS	24.268	19	1.240	0.998	0.998	0.997	0.024
PSM combined with ITS	57.182	26	2.248	0.989	0.989	0.983	0.049
PSM combined with AC	55.090	25	2.255	0.990	0.990	0.984	0.048
One factor model (PSM, ITS, and AC combined)	160.668	62	2.617	0.976	0.976	0.968	0.055
One factor model (all constructs combined)	1562.840	105	15.018	0.691	0.692	0.643	0.161

Table 5. Path test.

Path	SC	NSC	SE	CR	P Hypothesis
PSM→ITS	0.422	0.466	0.044	10.858 ***	Supported
PSM→AC	0.434	0.405	0.037	11.219 ***	Supported
JS→ITS	0.428	0.434	0.034	11.650 ***	Supported
AC→ITS	0.492	0.513	0.033	15.879 ***	Supported
PSM→JS	0.458	0.405	0.028	14.859 ***	Supported

for Hypothesis 1. Similarly, PSM had a positive effect on AC ($p < 0.001$, $SC = 0.434$), which strongly supported the second hypothesis. The direct associations between job satisfaction and intention to stay ($p < 0.001$, non-standardized coefficient (NSC) = 0.434), and between AC and ITS ($p < 0.001$, $NSC = 0.513$), were both significant and positive, supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4, respectively. Furthermore, PSM positively influenced job satisfaction ($p < 0.001$, $NSC = 0.405$).

The indirect and mediating influences of job satisfaction and AC in the path structural equation model were examined using BC bootstrap testing methods. One of the primary advantages of using the bootstrap method is that it produces confidence intervals for statistical estimates, providing researchers with valuable information about the likely value of a parameter (Efron, 1979), as well as its high power in small samples.

Table 6 indicates that PSM has an indirect effect on ITS ($SE = 0.035$; $CI = 0.244$ and 0.351 , where the CI did not include zero), through the mediator JS ($PSM \rightarrow JS \rightarrow ITS$); hence, Hypothesis 6 is supported. In line with Hayes (2018) framework for mediation analysis, since the direct effect of PSM on ITS, and the indirect effect through the mediator JS ($PSM \rightarrow JS \rightarrow ITS$) are present and significant, then this indicates that JS partially mediates the relationship between PSM and ITS. In other words, JS explains only some of the relationship between PSM and ITS. Likewise, the indirect effect of PSM on ITS through AC ($PSM \rightarrow AC \rightarrow ITS$) is also strong and significant ($SE = 0.034$; $CI = 0.226$ and 0.336), underscoring the role of AC as a mediator between the two variables. Accordingly, Hypothesis 7 was supported. In line with Hayes (2018) framework for mediation analysis, since the direct effect of PSM on ITS, and the indirect effect

of PSM on ITS through AC ($PSM \rightarrow AC \rightarrow ITS$) are significant, then this indicates that AC partially explains the relationship between PSM and ITS.

Discussion and implications

Our study explored the mediating roles of job satisfaction and AC in the relationship between PSM and intention to stay among employees in local and international NGOs in Lebanon. By incorporating these two mediators into a single model, we provide new insights into the mechanisms driving the PSM–ITS relationship and enhances the theoretical understanding of retention dynamics in NGO settings.

First, this study challenges the traditional view of PSM originally conceived by Perry and Wise (1990), which has predominantly been associated with the public sector. Our findings reveal that employees in NGOs also exhibit high levels of PSM, indicating that this motivation extends beyond governmental roles. This observation is particularly relevant in the Lebanese context, where NGOs play a vital role in social welfare and societal stability, particularly in light of Lebanon's challenges persistent governmental inefficiency and corruption. It is important to note that while Mawad and Makki's (2023) study, which focused on the Renee Mawad Foundation, presents a different perspective, their findings are limited in scope and cannot be generalized to the broader Lebanese NGO sector. In contrast, our study incorporates a wide range of NGOs, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the role of PSM within these organizations. NGOs in Lebanon serve as critical players in poverty alleviation, refugee support, and social cohesion, and their work resonates with individuals' emotional connections to societal values. This connection contributes to higher levels of job satisfaction and AC, which in turn increase employees' intention to stay.

Second, our results demonstrate that PSM is positively related to employees' intention to stay, aligning with previous studies such as Shim et al. (2015). Public service motivated employees in NGOs are drawn to the developmental opportunities these organizations provide, especially in the context of serving vulnerable populations, including both Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees. The

Table 6. Standardized bootstrap mediation effect test.

Path	Effect value	SE	Bias corrected 95% CI percentile 95%CI					
			Lower	Upper	<i>p</i>	Lower	Upper	<i>p</i>
PSM → JS → ITS	0.295	0.035	0.244	0.351	0.002	0.244	0.351	0.002
PSM → AC → ITS	0.280	0.034	0.226	0.336	0.002	0.223	0.334	0.002

pivotal role of NGOs in delivering social services in Lebanon, particularly after the influx of Syrian refugees in 2012 (Mawad & Makki, 2023), highlights the deep connection between employees' motivations and their intention to stay in these organizations.

Third, our study found that the relationship between PSM and ITS was partially mediated by both job satisfaction and AC. This suggests that PSM enhances job satisfaction and AC, which subsequently boosts employees' intention to stay. In NGOs, employees' AC increases as their work aligns with personal values related to public service, social welfare, and societal contribution. The contrast with the Lebanese civil service, marked by corruption and inefficiency (Azhari, 2021), underlines NGO work's appeal to public service-motivated employees. Moreover, the developmental role of NGOs in Lebanon—often surpassing that of the civil service (AbouAssi, 2015)—provides a meaningful environment that strengthens both job satisfaction and AC.

Beyond Western contexts, the findings of this study underscore the importance of contextualizing PSM within the socio-cultural and institutional frameworks of emerging and resource-constrained markets. The findings of this study echo research on PSM conducted in collectivist cultures which suggests that employees' motivation to stay in public service organizations is influenced not only by job conditions but also by intrinsic values such as community service and social responsibility, which are deeply embedded in social and cultural norms (for example, Nimri et al., 2015; Gould-Williams et al., 2015). In resource-constrained environments, where financial incentives and career advancement opportunities are limited, intrinsic motivators such as a sense of purpose, societal contribution, and job stability become even more significant in shaping employee retention (Mostafa & Gould-Williams, 2014). Therefore, organizations operating in such contexts must recognize the interplay of cultural and economic constraints with traditional HR practices to effectively sustain employee commitment and job satisfaction.

The findings also carry important practical implications for NGOs operating in Lebanon. Recognizing the significance of PSM, NGOs should create work environments that align organizational goals with employees' values, emphasizing the societal impact of their work. This approach can be further supported by initiatives aimed at enhancing job satisfaction and AC, such as professional development, recognition programs, and leadership support. These initiatives not only foster greater emotional attachment to the organization but also improve retention rates and organizational effectiveness.

Moreover, HR departments should consider incorporating PSM into their recruitment and training. This could be achieved through assessments that measure candidates' levels of PSM and through integrating PSM principles into training and development programs for both new hires and existing employees. By aligning HR practices with PSM, NGOs can build a workforce that is not only motivated by

the intrinsic rewards of public service but also committed to long-term organizational goals.

Limitations and future work

While this study highlights the significant role of job satisfaction and AC in the relationship between PSM and ITS, it has several limitations. A key limitation of this study is its cross-sectional design, which restricts our ability to make definitive causal claims about the relationships between the main variables. Future research employing a longitudinal design would be beneficial in establishing causal links and further exploring the relationship among the constructs. In addition, our sample was limited to one particular group, NGO employees only. It would be useful to explore the relationship between PSM and ITS with different samples, including employees working in non-profit and private sector organizations. Further, we employed a Western PSM scale, as most studies have been conducted in Western nations (Gan et al., 2020). However, there is a clear need to construct a novel PSM scale that reflects the socio-cultural complexities and fluid but underdeveloped institutional arrangements characteristic of a nation like Lebanon.

Conclusion

This study was conducted using data gathered through online surveys targeting 210 employees of local and international NGOs in Lebanon, with the analysis performed using structural equation modelling. Our research highlights the following key points:

- Employee intention to stay exhibits a significant and positive correlation with PSM.
- Employee intention to stay shows significant and positive associations with both job satisfaction and AC.
- Job satisfaction and AC serve as mediators in the positive relationship between PSM and ITS.

Our study has also shed light on the pivotal role played by the vibrant NGO sector in Lebanon's socio-economic development, providing uninterrupted services even during challenging times such as the 15-year Lebanese civil war (1975–1990). This sector's significance transcends and, in some cases, supersedes that of a corrupt, inefficient, and unaccountable civil service. Particularly noteworthy is the exponential growth of NGOs, especially international ones, following the influx of Syrian refugees beginning in 2012. While the Lebanese public service has been ineffectual in fulfilling its socio-economic developmental role, NGOs, along with a handful of charities and faith-based institutions, have stepped in to fill the void. Consequently, it is unsurprising that Lebanese citizens often distrust the government and its administrative apparatus and feel increasingly alienated as a result.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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