

No Good Deed Should Go Unpunished: Managing Paradoxes of Public Work Arising from COVID-19

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The global COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on some stark realities about public work. Many of the most demanding jobs in our societies gravitate to government or quasi-government auspices because the enterprises in which they are situated are not sustainable by free markets. In ordinary times, these jobs are attractive to individuals seeking to make a difference with their specialized knowledge for their fellow citizens, communities and societies. A global pandemic, however, is extraordinary—especially if it is a 100-year event. This policy brief reflects on consequences for public work and workers driven by the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic of the last two years. The brief identifies consequences and offers ideas for how public leaders and authorities can manage and mitigate the challenges these consequences create.

This policy brief considers four questions to inform how we think about the pandemic's consequences and its implications for public workers and public services. I begin by inquiring what we are hearing from people on the frontlines of the pandemic, the workers who are most directly affected by the pandemic. Given what we are hearing from frontline workers, what differences has the pandemic made for public workers? In answering this second question, I identify two paradoxes involving the pandemic and public work. The third question calls for an evaluation of the paradoxes, i.e., should we be concerned about these paradoxes? The brief concludes by answering a fourth question: How can we better manage the public workforce given what we know from the pandemic?

What stories do we hear from the frontlines of the pandemic?

This policy brief begins with three stories about workers on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic. Three stories cannot capture the range of experiences and emotions of public workers during the two-year pandemic. They are helpful, however, for vividly illustrating what drives many public workers and the stresses and strains they have experienced during the pandemic.

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Nyembezi Gausi

Ms. Gausi works in the theatre department at the Bwaila Bottom hospital in Lilongwe, Malawi (Kakhobwe, 2022). She volunteered her services to assist with COVID-19 patients in the hospital, picking up extra duties in addition to her primary responsibilities.

My job is very stressful as I am basically handling two tasks: that of COVID-19 and the workload from my department. The hours are not reasonable, and I am currently using my leave days to contribute to the fight against COVID-19 in Malawi.

I am lucky that I drive to work as I have heard of instances where my colleagues are abused on public transport by fellow passengers who fear they might get infected by sharing a vehicle with them. Before COVID-19, nurses could easily answer their phones while on public transport to advise on a medical issue that was happening back at the hospital. But these days, it is safer to speak through headsets and have the person call you later where you are in a safe space to give medical advice, which is sad as sometimes some of the inquiries are urgent.

I still face stigma in my community, but I am fortunate enough to be staying at my own house. I have heard terrible stories of my colleagues being asked to vacate their places since COVID-19 hit Malawi.

Dennis Canale

Mr. Canale is a physician assistant at Staten Island University Hospital Northwell and New York Police Department detective second grade (Time Magazine, 2020).

I've been through several terrorist events here in the city, unfortunately, I've been through 9/11, I worked down at Ground Zero for several months. I worked out here in Hurricane Sandy. I've watched my colleagues as first responders dive right in, no regard for their own safety, just for the wellbeing of others. I can remember pulling into Ground Zero the night of the towers and thinking I'm on a movie set. And the same thing here, it feels like a Hollywood movie with people in protective gear that you would never dream of in a hospital setting.

Our hospital asked for volunteers of personnel who would like to go help out at the COVID-19 testing tents, so I put in for it. I watched one lady pull up and she saw us come to the car all dressed up and she just started crying. And I looked at the people around me, all the professionals, and I'm like, it looks like a horror movie.



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The most impressive thing that I see is the staff I work with. People who didn't sign up in the medical field: the physician assistants, the doctors, the nurses, and most importantly the people that clean and repair, the people that are clerical, the people that help all the medical professionals. They didn't take that job thinking, 'Hey, I'm going to go out today and put my life on the line.' I know that as a law enforcement officer I am going to run the risk of death. I know it every day. They don't. But they're all there doing it. It's amazing to watch.

You keep saying to yourself, eh, tomorrow it'll be over. Tomorrow it'll be over, tomorrow it'll be over. But the estimation right now is tomorrow it will be worse.

Scott Gray

Mr. Gray is a client center manager at St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance in Phoenix, Arizona (Time Magazine, 2020).

We went from serving 500-600 people per day to, on average, 1,200 a day in the last two weeks. We did 1,500 people yesterday. The days start off with us coming in at 7:00 and the line is already going down the sidewalk with people waiting in line for food. And to see the elderly out there with their carts, and a mom with kids and they are standing in line at 7 in the morning... [I've] never seen anything like this. The first thing in my mind is what do we have available? How can I make it stretch?

Donations have increased a lot, it's by the truckloads. Most people who show up have never been to a food bank, they think we're a soup kitchen. People are shocked when they realize they are getting a basket to take home of supplies for the whole family. They see the basket and say, "This is all for me?" Not only am I feeding my family by working, but the families that are in line are feeding theirs. It's an awesome feeling.

I'm worried that this will become the norm, dealing with this many people. Will the food bank become a place we have to shut down because of social distancing? Or because it gets out of control? What are we getting in tomorrow? Will that donation be enough? But right now I don't see that being a problem for what we're doing and the way we're doing it. If I get sick it would have been for a good cause.

What differences has the pandemic made for public workers?

These three stories provide a window to more general phenomena about how the pandemic has affected public workers and public work. Many similar stories are reported in the popular press (Time, 2020).

and scholarly journals (Berry, Trochmann and Millesen, 2022). Based upon this extensive literature, two paradoxes associated with COVID-19 and public work can be identified.

Paradox 1: The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed work that attracted job seekers into work with potential for threatening their very existence.

This paradox is grounded in several streams of research prominent during the last three decades. One stream is research about public service motivation that Lois Wise and I (Perry and Wise, 1990) initiated in 1990. We defined public service motivation as “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations” (1990, 368). The concept of public service motivation originates from the idea that public organizations offer distinctive incentives compared to the private organizations that are attractive to individuals motivated by the common good (Perry and Ritz, 2022).

One of our predictions in Perry and Wise (1990) was: The greater an individual’s public service motivation, the more likely the individual will seek membership in a public organization. Although we concluded in a twenty-year retrospective about this proposition (Perry, Hondeghem and Wise, 2010) that subsequent research painted a more nuanced picture about the relationship between attraction-selection-retention and public service motivation, the results were nonetheless promising. As Sciepora and Linos (2022) observe in a recent study of burnout and compassion fatigue in government: “...a rich literature reports high values congruence between public servants and public sector organizations: public servants are more likely to be attracted to public policy making, show a strong commitment to the public interest, be willing to self-sacrifice to serve others and make a difference in society...” (p. 6).

Other social and behavioral science fields study-related constructs that illuminate and reinforce research on public service motivation. Altruism, defined as “consideration of another’s needs rather than one’s own” (Piliavin & Charng 1990, 30) is a more general concept, but it is often invoked in research about public service motivation. Similarly, prosocial motivation, with a distinct focus on identified beneficiaries rather than society at large (Ritz, Schott, Nitzl and Alfes, 2020), is another concept frequently invoked in public service motivation research. Setting boundaries with regard to these related but different concepts, Perry, Hondeghem and Wise (2010) note: “The most prominent area of convergence is the emphasis on other orientation—represented by notions of self-sacrifice, altruism, and prosocial—across the motivation definitions.... The boundaries placed on the scope of PSM suggest that it is a particular form of altruism or prosocial motivation that is animated by specific dispositions and values arising from public institutions and missions” (p. 682).

A source of evidence about whether public institutions are at an advantage for creating meaningful work comes from research about socially useless jobs. A socially useless job is defined by Robert Dur and Max van Lent (2019) as one that makes no or a negative contribution to society. Dur and van Lent's (2019) study of socially useless jobs used a large representative dataset, the International Social Survey Program, Work Orientations Waves, covering more than 100,000 workers from 47 countries in 1989, 1997, 2005, and 2015. Their study employed the 2015 wave only, which included 27,000 workers from 37 countries. They operationalized socially useless jobs with a subjective assessment, using a respondent's disagreement or strong disagreement with the survey item: My job is useful to society.

Overall, Dur and van Lent found about 75% of workers agreeing or strongly agreeing with the survey item. A relatively large portion of the sample, 17%, neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting ambivalence about the usefulness of their jobs. Public sector workers were much less likely to report having a socially useless job than workers in the private sector. The average for private sector workers was 8 percent. The average for the public sector was 6 percent lower than the private sector. For some public sector occupations—firefighters, police officers, social benefits officials, health workers, and teachers—the proportion of socially useless work is close to or equal to zero. The public sector advantage was not universal. Dur and van Lent report that government clerks and armed forces members, for instance, were closer to the sample average.

Although Dur and van Lent's research relies on subjective assessments of work, they discover that government workers are far less likely to perceive their work as useless than their private sector counterparts. The difference reflects one type of systematic sorting between sectors. The takeaway is that public managers, and probably nonprofit managers, too, have an edge when seeking to leverage the meaningfulness of work.

Lea Cassar and Stephan Meier (2018), summarizing evidence about the meaningfulness of work, point to interesting results from another study that, like Dur and van Lent's (2019) research, gives public-sector jobs and occupations an edge for meaningfulness. Andrew Bryce (2018) analyzed eudaimonic well-being, the extent to which certain jobs or types of work foster meaning and purpose for an individual. Bryce used two major data sets from two countries, the Time Use Survey from the U.S. and the United Kingdom's Annual Population Survey. Two findings are particularly relevant here. First, Bryce found that work was more meaningful than many other uses of time, specifically consumer purchases, socializing, relaxing, and leisure, suggesting that work is one of the primary ways people find meaning in their lives. Second, the most meaningful jobs were those high on personal autonomy and pro-social impact, among them health professionals, therapists, nurses, teachers and social workers. Although Bryce presents no evidence about the sector-locus of these jobs, simple inspection indicates that most or all of them are likely public-sector dominated occupations (e.g., health professionals, nurses, teachers and social workers).

To summarize, extensive research points to the attractiveness of public work because of its appeal to individuals seeking to fulfill their motivations associated with compassion, civic duty, and doing social good. The COVID-19 pandemic altered the very nature of public work, adding new and extraordinary risk to the jobs of many public workers. Regardless of the prosocial nature of their original commitment to public work, COVID-19 forces public workers to confront a new situation, which makes real the idea in this brief's title, "no good deed should go unpunished."

Paradox 2: COVID-19 surfaced and magnified latent conflicts and resource constraints in public work that ordinarily are imperceptible, inconsequential or manageable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has focused attention on many latent conflicts in public work (Berry, Trochmann and Millesen, 2022; Sciepure and Linos, 2022). Two of these latent conflicts are work-life balance and social stigma. Although many public workers cope with work-life conflicts during their tenure, the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified many of these conflicts and made them more difficult with which to cope. Many public workers exposed to COVID-19 have been forced to confront the well-being of their families. Dennis Canale, the physician assistant and detective, describes his fears and response:

When I leave there and you're alone for the drive home you think about well what if I get sick? What if I end up in the hospital or if I end up on that ventilator? What happens to your family? That's when it starts devastating your mind. When I get outside the house it's basically disrobing into a bag. It goes into a washing machine, and you take a shower. At my parents' house, we talk to them from outside. I won't even go in the same room with them because they're older. Around my family, I wear a mask.

Another conflict that arose during the pandemic is the stigma identified by Nyembezi Gausi (Kakhobwe, 2022). The stigma did not exist prior to the pandemic. Furthermore, it extends beyond just answering calls on public transit. "It is common for people to shout out 'corona, corona' when they see a nurse. Thus, most nurses prefer to wear civilian clothes and carry their uniforms in their bags when out in public for fear of attacks and reprisals from people who don't understand that by sitting next to a nurse, they will not contract COVID-19."

The two examples, work-life conflict and stigma, involve social relationships, and the pandemic has reversed the affect often associated with these social relationships. For instance, public workers, such as nurses, may have originally been attracted to their work because of the esteem accorded to their work in the community, but during the pandemic esteem turned to stigma.

These two paradoxes are not the only to arise from the COVID-19 pandemic, but they illustrate severe disruptions triggered by the pandemic and associated fundamental shifts in the nature of public work. But how concerned do we need to be about these disruptions? I address this question next.

Should we be concerned about these paradoxes?

Benefit-cost data are not available to calculate an answer to whether we should be concerned about these paradoxes. Even if we could calculate a benefit-cost balance sheet, there are legitimate alternatives to framing the challenges the paradoxes represent. In this policy brief, I propose framing the obligations of actors and institutions in accordance with the logic of appropriateness rather than a logic of consequence. March and Olsen (2013), in defining the logic of appropriateness, comment about its longevity: "A vision of actors following internalized prescriptions of what is socially defined as normal, true, right, or good, without, or in spite of calculation of consequences and expected utility, is of ancient origin" (p. 479).

Relying on the logic of appropriateness, my answer to the question is firm: yes, we should be concerned about these paradoxes. My affirmative answer to the question rests on an understanding of the rules of appropriate or exemplary behavior associated with the public institutions providing the services and in which public work resides. Citizens rely on essential public services for their health, safety, and connectedness to the broader community. The state therefore has an obligation to fulfill these essential services. Applying a similar logic, the state also has an obligation to the agents—public servants—who animate public institutions by working on behalf of their neighbors to maintain some semblance of order despite their personal risk and sacrifice (Berry, Trochmann and Millesen, 2022).

How can we better manage the public workforce given what we know from the pandemic?

Given the analysis above, the COVID-19 pandemic has created significant challenges for public work and public workers. Fortunately, scholars have given us frameworks that help us to think about the challenges and how to cope with them. Theory and research I find helpful is associated with the job demands—resources model, which developed from research in the late 1970s about the effects of job demands and job decision latitude on mental strain (Karasek, 1979). The model was subsequently developed into the job demands—resources model by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli (2001) and Bakker and Demerouti (2007). Bakker (2015) later extended the model to include public service motivation.

What follows is a brief presentation of the general model, integration of public service motivation, and ways in which public leaders and managers can address imbalances of demands and resources associated with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Job demands—resources model

The logic behind the job demands—resources model is depicted in Figure 1. The figure illustrates that work situations can be conceived around two sets of influences, job demands and job resources. Job demands are the physical, cognitive and emotional aspects of work that require energy. Job resources involve the many aspects of work context, including social support, autonomy and feedback, that help employees cope with job demands (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli, 2001; Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Bakker, 2015). Job demands and resources influence unique aspects of employee well-being, affecting two different processes. Bakker (2015) describes these processes:

Job demands initiate a health impairment process and may lead to fatigue and health problems. If job demands such as high work pressure and severe conflicts persist over time, health problems may become chronic and undermine job performance. In contrast, job resources are the initiators of a motivational process, and they are the most important predictors of employee work engagement and organizational commitment.

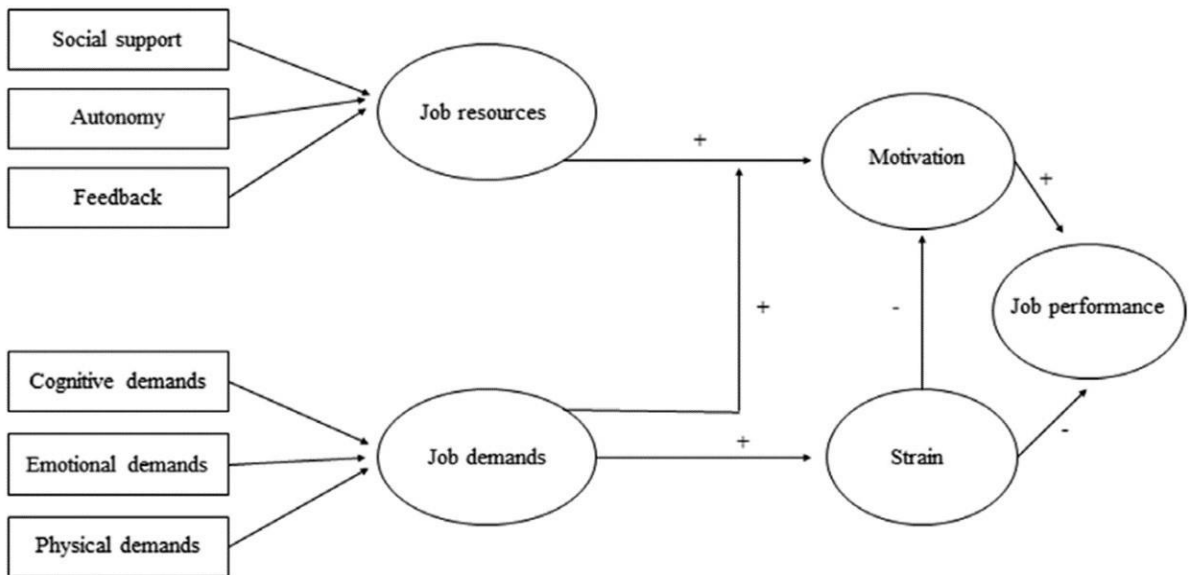
Although job demands and resources involve two different processes, they interact to affect employee well-being. Job resources can help to mitigate the negative impacts of job demands on strain. In turn, job demands, especially work challenges (Hackman and Oldham, 1980) and relationships with beneficiaries (Grant, 2007), may strengthen the positive influences of work engagement.

Public service motivation as an individual resource. Another factor influencing the results of these two different processes is an employees' personal resources that employees can use to deal with their job demands. Among these personal resources is an employee's public service motivation, which is among the self-beliefs that affect individual resiliency and their ability to control their environment. Bakker (2015) projects some implications of how this individual resource comes into play:

I have argued that public servants are highly motivated when they enter their profession. This public service motivation then determines how public servants deal with their daily job demands and resources. Because of their persistence and productivity, they are able to deal well with their job demands and prevent exhaustion. In addition, because of their sense of calling, they are motivated to mobilize their job resources in order to stay engaged and perform well. However, if job demands are consistently high and job resources are consistently low, highly motivated public servants can lose their psychological resources, resulting in lower PSM. Reduced PSM, as a consequence, may strengthen the loss cycle of job demands, exhaustion, and self-undermining and weaken the gain cycle of job resources, engagement, and proactive behavior. Public service managers and employees should use this information to optimize their job demands and resources on a day-to-day basis (p. 730).

Subsequent research (De Simone, Cicotto, Pinna and Giustiniano, 2016) provides support for Bakker's predictions about how public service motivation affects the job resources and job demands cycles.

Figure 1. The Job Demands—Resources Model



Strategies to manage loss and gain cycles

Framing a response to paradoxes created by the COVID-19 pandemic using the job demands—resources model means that a significant burden for mitigating the effects of COVID-19 rests with public policymakers, public executives and public managers who influence the quality of government (Dahlström and Lapuente, 2017). I outline below some of the steps policymakers and bureaucrats can take to increase employee engagement and reduce employee stress and strains.

Creating more opportunities for job crafting. Job crafting, employee-initiated job changes to infuse meaning into work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), has not surfaced in the context of public service motivation research until recently. In a study of work-family conflict as a potential “dark side” of public service motivation, Asseburg (2018) proposed using job crafting as a method to mitigate tensions for high public service motivation staff. Using a two-wave survey of 306 German public employees, Asseburg (2018) concluded that public service motivation is a predictor of work-family conflict and job crafting partially mediated the conflicts.

Job crafting gives individuals who pursue public service an opportunity to proactively shape the meaning of their work. It is not a monolithic technique but covers three general avenues by which employees may craft their jobs (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001). Task crafting involves jettisoning tasks, adding tasks that are particularly appealing, or changing the way tasks are performed. Relational crafting focuses on changing the social relationships of work, which may include developing new relationships and reframing existing relationships. Cognitive crafting involves changing how people think about or perceive their jobs, which may involve employee's altering their perceptions of the purpose of work or reframing their job to better fit their identity.

Giving employees more opportunity to craft their jobs puts them in positions to enhance gains and mitigate loss from job demands and resources. Opportunities to jettison or add tasks, for instance, position employees to eliminate sources of strain and embrace engaging work that facilitates their management of work-related stress.

Public work environments may require extra creativity in implementing job crafting, but the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic dictates a need for creativity. One example of creativity is collaborative job crafting among co-workers. Leana, Applebaum and Shevchuk's (2009) study of job crafting in 62 childcare centers illustrates that individual and collaborative job crafting can co-exist. In fact, given the ubiquity of teamwork in so many public services—among them the military, public healthcare, police and fire services, elementary and secondary education, policy development—collaborative job crafting is likely to bring significant advantages. It may, for example, assure that legally essential tasks that are shed by one employee are embraced by another who finds them more challenging. Collaborative job crafting may also open more paths for innovative configurations of public services. In addition, the process of collaboration may help spread the collective passion that brings many employees to the public service in the first place. Thus, collaborative job crafting merits serious consideration in public services.

Expanding mental-health counseling and services. Organizational interventions to help employees deal with physical, cognitive, and emotional strains to develop healthier regulation strategies (Berking et al., 2010; Cicotto et al., 2014) have been common for some time. The most widespread organizational intervention to support employee mental health services are employee assistance programs, typically organized by internal human resource units. Employee assistance programs are work-based programs that offer confidential assessments, short-term counseling and referrals to employees who have personal and/or work-related problems. These interventions are usually employee-specific and ad hoc, rather than a comprehensive response to a general problem, such as common work-related stressors.

The recent rise in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) associated with COVID-19 (see, for example, Valeria, Vincenzo and Valeria, 2022) is a signal that public officials need to become more proactive in

protecting mental health within their workforce. Among the steps Valeria, Vincenzo and Valeria (2022) recommend based on their review of the literature on healthcare professionals are:

- Regularly monitor the psychological well-being of staff;
- Evaluate working times and rest or break times that the staff needs;
- Give staff opportunities to express concerns and ask questions;
- Encourage mutual support among colleagues;
- Facilitate access to mental health services within the work context and outside.

Using technology to constrain job demands and increase job resources. Most governments are at the early stages of digital transformation, but the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to accelerate the pace of transformation to satisfy service users and employees. The pandemic has also added employee well-being as another outcome to traditional outcomes of efficiency and effectiveness as indicators against which to assess the design and performance of new technologies.

The pandemic created situations where telework was necessary to pursue an organization's mission and permit employees to safely perform their jobs. The U.S. federal government expanded telework far beyond historic levels and has recently changed its policy so that telework would be accepted more widely (Wagner, 2021).

Telework and other flexibilities are now seen as important retention and recruitment tools. A recent COVID-19 study in healthcare (López-Cabarcos, López-Carballeira, and Ferro-Soto, 2020) alludes to both benefits from technology and its potentially broad scope for application:

In addition, providing technological applications to facilitate more effective communication flows with patients and colleagues, or promote virtual collaborative workspaces, may help enhance healthcare professionals' well-being, at the same time increasing the quality of the service offered. Enhancing employee personal resources or providing tools to improve the sense of control, the autonomy, the flexibility and the meaning of work can allow public healthcare professionals to cope with and adapt to job requirements in a better way.

Enhancing career development opportunities. We have compelling evidence from research on quality of government that career development and performance-based career advancement are strongly related to higher effectiveness and lower corruption (Dahlström and Lapuente, 2017; Nistotskaya and Cingolani, 2016). Research arising from the COVID-19 pandemic also points to career development and advancement as policies employees perceive as constructive for managing gain and loss cycles (Deng, Liu, Guo, Gao, Wu and Yang, 2021; Fernandes, Santinha and Forte, 2022; Ye, Liu and Zhang, 2021).

Investing in leadership development to enhance employee support. A recent study of public hospital administrators identifies supervisors, middle managers, and top managers as important agents for improving the status of frontline public workers (Deng, Liu, Guo, Gao, Wu and Yang, 2021). Deng et al (2021) offer advice based on their analysis: "... administrators should encourage and assist supervisors in their leadership functions, e.g., by urging supervisors to care about the work and life of subordinates and assist them whenever possible, identify and acknowledge the strengths and accomplishments of workers and encourage and recognize their efforts, and make workers' jobs as interesting as possible."

Some of the advice Deng and colleagues provide implicitly intersects with concrete proposals above, such as creating more opportunities for job crafting and expanding mental-health counseling and services. Supervisors and managers, for instance, need to engage proactively to create more opportunities for job crafting, including collaborative job crafting. But the objects of leader development can be broadened in other ways to enhance employee support. Leadership development programs could place more emphasis on leader-follower behaviors and exchange, for example, that facilitate and support diagnosis of strain and stress, which, in turn, increase prospects for addressing follower needs. A more expansive perspective would be for leadership development to be aligned with leadership theory and styles that are more likely to enhance employee support. Servant leadership theory that emphasizes leaders serving, in contrast to traditional leader models that emphasize power up the hierarchy, may be better aligned with future needs in public organizations (Perry, 2021). At a minimum, public organizations will need to assess their leadership development programs in light of the new normal in the post-COVID era.

Increasing employee public service motivation. Because public service motivation is a personal resource that moderates both gain and loss processes, increasing its presence in the public workforce is likely to produce beneficial consequences for interactions between job resources and job demands. Higher levels of public service motivation within the public workforce are likely to affect demand loss cycles and resource gain cycles through multiple direct and indirect channels (Perry, 2021). A recent study of public managers in New Zealand, for instance, found that employee resilience, "defined as the capability to use resources to continually adapt and flourish at work, despite day to day challenges" (p. 353) was heightened by public service motivation, employees' pro-social skills and constructive leadership by supervisors (Plimmer, Berman, Malinen, Franken, Naswall, Kuntz and Löfgren (2022).

In addition to beneficial effects for employee resilience, public service motivation is likely to pay dividends for employee engagement, thereby strengthening resource gain cycles, employee motivation and, ultimately, performance. A study of emergency medical services personnel in a local fire department in Texas found that public service motivation, as measured by compassion and self-sacrifice, facilitated implementing an at-home vaccination program during the COVID-19 pandemic

(Rauhaus, 2022). In a study of 2066 healthcare workers in 68 Chinese public hospitals, Deng, et al (2019) found that public service motivation was directly and positively associated with healthcare quality and mediated the relationship between stress and healthcare quality.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 brought to light some paradoxes of public work that public officials must address to maintain the capacity of the public workforce to fulfill the missions on which citizens and societies depend. The analysis above points to a variety of changes public jurisdictions can make to more effectively manage gain and loss cycles associated with job demands and resources. Among these changes are creating more opportunities for job crafting, expanding mental-health counseling and services, using technology to constrain job demands and increase job resources, enhancing career development opportunities, investing in leadership development to enhance employee support and increasing employee public service motivation.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted deficiencies and gaps in public work to which policy makers and public leaders should pay attention, the pandemic also reminds us of the enormous value that the public workforce and public service contribute to the societies they serve around the globe. A recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report (2020) report articulates this public value:

Public employees are heroes in this crisis. They are keeping medical systems functioning, families safe, finding novel ways to address the unprecedented economic and social impacts, keeping businesses afloat and dealing with incredible spikes in unemployment. This is a unique opportunity to renew the image of public service as an attractive workplace that has impact. Post-crisis, public managers should consider how to showcase the values of a job or career with the public service (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic has identified paradoxes that must be better managed. At the same time, the pandemic reminds us of the origins of these paradoxes: the attractiveness and meaningfulness of public work, which deserve to be celebrated as foundations for effective public service.

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