

## Article

# Does Person Organization Fit and Person-Job Fit Mediate the Relationship between Public Service Motivation and Work Stress among U.S. Federal Employees?

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**Abstract:** A plethora of research has extolled the benefits of public service motivation (PSM) in public organizations. However, much less empirical attention has focused on its relationship to work stress. Even though it has been theorized that high levels of PSM causes individuals to be more resilient in stressful public service work environments, empirical research has failed to provide support. Only one study has been conducted which has revealed that high levels of PSM is directly associated with high levels of job stress among public employees, but that its beneficial effects are partially mediated by person-organization (PO) fit. That is, employees with high levels of PSM and high levels of fit to their organizations did not appear to suffer from high stress. This study sought to add to this limited body of research and explore the extent to which person-job (PJ) improves the field's understanding of the relationships among PSM, PO fit, and work stress. Based on a sample of federal employees in the United States, this study challenged and confirmed the findings of existing research. For instance, PSM had no direct relationship to work stress. However, PSM maintained an indirect relationship to stress through PO fit. The respondents with high levels of PSM reported that they had high levels of fit to their organizations which was associated with significantly lower levels of work stress. Similarly, PSM was not directly related to PJ fit, but was indirectly related through its association with PO fit. PSM was associated with high levels of fit between employees and public organizations, which was subsequently associated with high levels of fit with public service jobs and lower work stress. Above all, this research clarifies the process of how PSM influences work stress among public employees, through PO fit and PJ fit.

**Keywords:** public service motivation; work stress; person-organization fit; person-job fit; public management



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## 1. Introduction

The public sector is known for having many of the most stressful occupations in America (Salary.com 2020; Williams 2021). Many public sector jobs place employees on the frontline of pressing social problems that can have high emotional and physical toils. Due to the detrimental effects of stress on the wellbeing of employees, government organizations are in search of strategies that can help alleviate them. One such concept that has shown promise is public service motivation (PSM). PSM is a drive that some individuals have to contribute to the well-being of their community and society. Some have suggested that this drive makes public employees more resilient in high stress work environments (Bakker 2015). Unfortunately, empirical research has not confirmed this hypothesis. Existing research found that PSM was associated with higher levels of stress among public employees, rather than lower levels of stress (Giauque et al. 2013; Gould-Williams et al. 2015; Liu et al. 2015a). On the bright side, one study found that person-organizational (PO) fit partially influence PSM's relationship to stress (Gould-Williams et al. 2015). In that study, public employees with high levels of PSM were more likely to report being more congruent with the characteristics of their organizations, which subsequently was associated with

lower work stress. This suggests that outside of PO fit, PSM has detrimental consequences on the perceptions of work stress reported by public employees.

However, more research is needed on this topic. Only one study was found in the literature that investigated the relationships among PSM, PO fit, and work stress. As previously mentioned, this study found that PO fit mediated the relationship between PSM and work stress (Gould-Williams et al. 2015). More research on this topic would help confirm this relationship. Additionally, no study has been found that explores this topic from the standpoint of person-job (PJ) fit. Is there a comparative advantage of PJ fit has over PO fit relative to stress? Given that PO fit can be a resource that lowers job stress, to what extent is PJ fit a better or worst predictor among public employees? Answering these questions will help public managers better determine the level of analysis that should be the focus of their human resource recruitment and development strategies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to re-examine the relationships among PSM, PO fit and work stress, and the impact that PJ fit has on these relationships, using a sample of federal employees who work in a high stress occupation for the Transportation Security Administration.

## 2. Work Stress and Strain

Stress is one of the most researched areas in the general management literature. While there is no universally agreed upon definition of stress, there are several widely used definitions and concepts. For instance, Folkman and Lazarus (1984) states that stress is centered in a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding their resources and endangering their well-being. Similarly, Johnson and Hall (1988) and Karasek (1979) describe work stress as a function of the relationship between the demands of the work environment and the control, resources, and support that employees have to address those demands. Job demands can be sources of stress, whereas resources and social support are the tools that employees have to meet the work demands. Still more have conceptualized stress as the result of a misfit between the characteristics of individuals and the demands of their work environment (Beehr and Newman 1978; French et al. 1974). The higher the misfit the more stress individuals will experience. Above all, most conceptualizations acknowledge that stress by itself does not automatically lead to aversive outcomes. Stress will become aversive when it leads to a strain, which is a condition that occurs when stress surpasses the available resources, coping strategies, and control available to manage it.

Along these same lines, there is also acknowledgement that some stressors are beneficial to the motivation and wellbeing of employees. According to Cavanaugh et al. (2000) challenge stresses are associated with stressful work demands that provide positive feelings and achievement. Whereas hindrance stresses are associated with work related demands that tend to constrain or interfere with an individual's work achievement. Unlike hindrance stress, challenge stress would produce positive work outcomes, because it does not hinder or interfere with the work efforts or achievement needs of employees, but instead promote personal growth and trigger positive emotions (Crawford et al. 2010). This study focuses on understanding the effects of hindrance stresses in government work environments.

### 2.1. Sources of Stress in Public Workplaces

Public organizations exist in environments of unique sources of stress for its employees. There is a body of research that has explored this topic from the standpoint of various high stress occupations, such as corrections, policing, nursing, firefighters, and other government occupations (Brown and Campbell 1994; Burke 2016; Carpenter et al. 2015; Huckabee 1992; Pendleton et al. 1989; Triplett et al. 1996; West and West 1989). This research confirms that job stress is generally high in many public sector workplaces, even though there is disagreement as to whether public sector workplaces are significantly more stressful than other sectors (Hamann and Foster 2014; Tankha 2006).

Nonetheless, there are many sources of stress in the public sector. Public organizations are tasked with some of the most difficult and demanding problems. These problems often expose employees to high physical dangers and emotional burdens. Internally, public organizations are notorious for having unclear goals, and burdensome rules and regulations (Blom 2020; DeHart-Davis and Pandey 2005; Lipsky 2010; Warwick and Meade 1980). Externally, government organizations are immersed in environments of extreme scrutiny and distrust. A powerful element of this environment is the mass media. Some have described the media as an essential ingredient for democracy that provide citizens with information needed to make intelligent demands on government institutions. However, the media is also known for promoting narratives about these institutions that tend to lower the trust level of citizens. According to the (Pew Research Center 2020), only 20% of Americans' believe that government can be trusted to "do the right thing" always or most of the time. Above all, public sector jobs, and the internal and external characteristics of government organizations have been associated with higher perceptions of stress among public employees (Schaufeli and Peeters 2000; Stevens 2005). Subsequently, the goal of this study is to explore the relationship that PSM has to perceptions of work stress and whether individuals with high levels of PSM cope more effectively with it.

## 2.2. PSM and Work Stress

Public service motivation is an altruistic need that attracts individuals to opportunities to contribute to the wellbeing of their communities and society. To what extent is PSM associated with work stress? Scholars have found that PSM is related to a range of attitudes and behaviors in organizations, such as job satisfaction (Gould-Williams et al. 2015; Homberg et al. 2015; Kim 2012; Liu et al. 2015b; Naff and Crum, 1999) and turnover intentions (Bright 2007, 2008, 2013; Caillier 2015; Christensen and Wright 2011; Gould-Williams et al. 2015; Kim 2012; Quratulain and Khan 2015). However, a much smaller body of research have investigated the relationship between PSM and work stress. Some have hypothesized that PSM is a resource that helps public employees cope with stress and strain (Giauque et al. 2013; Gould-Williams et al. 2015; Liu et al. 2015a). For example, according to Bakker (2015) "Those who are prepared to make sacrifices for the good of society will be better able to deal with organizational stressors because they know that dealing with those stressors serves the higher goal of helping others". Unfortunately, empirical research has not confirmed this hypothesis. Three studies have concluded that PSM is associated with higher job stress among government employees in Egypt, Switzerland, and China (Giauque et al. 2013; Gould-Williams et al. 2015; Liu et al. 2015a). These findings have been argued to be the result of the fact that PSM raises the performance expectations of employees which subsequently increases their stress levels.

**Hypothesis 1.** *PSM will be positively related to work stress.*

## 2.3. PE Fit and Work Stress

Person-environment (PE) fit theory is a multidimensional concept that argues that employee behavior is the result of the congruence between the characteristics of the work environments (i.e., goals, demands, and/or resources) and the characteristics of individuals (i.e., values, interest, needs, and/or abilities). PE fit has multiple subtypes with person-organization (PO fit) and person-job (PJ fit) being among the most popular. The concept of fit between the environment and individual characteristics has been operationalized in several ways, such as demands-ability fit, needs-supply fit, or supplementary fit (Kristof 1996). For instance, from the demands-ability fit perspective, when the demands of the work environment exceed the abilities of the individuals to meet them, a misfit is the result. As previously discussed, misfits can lead to strains which are detrimental to work outcomes. Empirical research has confirmed that PO and PJ fit are distinct concepts that lower work stress and strain (Beehr and Newman 1978; Chilton et al. 2005; Deniz et al. 2015;

French et al. 1974; Hecht and Allen 2005; Ivancevich et al. 1982; Kristof-Brown et al. 2005; Kristof 1996).

To what extent is PO fit and PJ fit associated with stress in the public sector? Comparatively, which of these sub concepts is the best predictor of stress in public organizations? Only two studies were found that explored the relationships among PO fit, PJ fit, and stress in public sector workplaces and they reached different conclusions. For instance, Gould-Williams et al. (2015) found that PO fit was negatively related to work stress using a convenience sample of professionals from public universities and hospitals in Egypt. However, Giauque et al. (2014) came to the opposite conclusion in a comprehensive study of several PE fit sub concepts, using midlevel hospital employees in Switzerland. Giauque et al. (2014) found that PO fit was not associated with work stress, whereas PJ fit was found to be negatively related. Nonetheless, given the limited amount of research conducted on this topic in the public management literature, the findings of the general literature are more compelling. As a result, PO fit and PJ fit are expected to be associated with lower perceptions of work stress in this study. However, the stresses associated with public service work environments are expected to be primarily experienced through the demands of employees' formal job positions. In other words, burdensome regulations, negative media coverage, and citizen criticism make it more difficult for public employees to meet the demands of their jobs. As a result, PJ fit is expected to be more strongly associated with work stress when compared to PO fit in this study.

**Hypothesis 2.** *PO fit and PJ fit will be negatively related to work stress.*

#### 2.4. PSM, PO and PJ Fits, and Stress

Considering the association that PO fit and PJ fit may have to work stress, how are these concepts related to PSM? Does PO fit and/or PJ fit mediate the relationship between PSM and work stress? There is a body of research that can help address these questions. Empirical evidence suggests that PSM is positively related to PO fit (Bright 2007, 2008; Giauque et al. 2015; Gould-Williams et al. 2015; Jin et al. 2018; Kim 2012; Teo et al. 2016) and PJ fit (Bright 2013; Quratulain and Khan 2015) in public organizations. Public employees with high levels of PSM are significantly more likely to express high levels of fit to the goals of their organizations and the demands of their jobs. Even more, existing research suggest that the relationship PSM has to work stress is partially mediated by PO fit. According to Gould-Williams et al. (2015), even though PSM had a direct positive association with work stress, it also maintained an indirect relationship through PO fit. That is, public employees with high levels of PSM were significantly more likely to have high levels of fit with their organizations, which in turn was negatively related to work stress. While there is no research that was found that explored this issue from the standpoint of PJ fit, a similar outcome is expected. High levels of PJ fit will also mediate the influence that PSM has on work stress.

**Hypothesis 3.** *PSM will be positively related to both PO fit and PJ fit.*

Given the potential association between PSM, and the PO and PJ fit sub-concepts, which sub-concept does PSM best predicts? There are at least two major groups of studies that have directly and indirectly explored this question. The conclusions of these bodies of research are mixed. The first group of studies directly explored the relationship between PSM, PO fit, and PJ fit among public employees, and concluded that PSM was more strongly related to PO fit, than PJ fit (Bright 2013; Van Loon et al. 2017). These findings support Perry and Wise (1990) original hypothesis that the greater an individual's level of PSM, the more likely they will seek employment in public organizations. However, a second group of studies that comparatively explored the relationship between PSM and the career preferences of students failed to find support for this hypothesis (Bright 2016; Bright and Graham 2015; Christensen and Wright 2011; Rose 2012). PSM was not a predictor of government sector preferences when compared to preferences for careers in

the nonprofit sectors (Bright and Graham 2015; Rose 2012) and/or had a very limited relationship (Clerkin and Cogburn 2012). These findings support the argument that PSM is not inherently government specific, but instead attracts students to meaningful public service jobs/work opportunities regardless of the employment sector in which they are held (Light 1999; Perry and Hondeghem 2008). How can both set of studies be correct? Perhaps the answer lies in the types of research subjects used in these studies and their differing socialization experiences.

The first group of studies were based on public employees and the second group of studies were based on undergraduate and/or graduate students. This distinction is very important since public employees and students are likely to differ in terms of their socialization experiences which influences their perceptions of fit in government organizations. Public employees tend to have a better understanding of the realities of the public sector which has been gained over the years of their work experience and socialization in public organizations. Students with little to no work experience tend to lack a clear understanding of the benefits of public service careers, are more susceptible to negative messaging about the public sector, and rely on their degree programs to help them sort through the facts to make a career decision. This is especially important in light of the connection that Bright (2018) found between degree orientations, PO fit, and employment preferences.

Using a sample of approximately 500 students enrolled in 26 master's degree programs across the United States, Bright (2018) found that career preferences are related to the orientations of degree programs and their effectiveness in promoting the value of government careers. Degree programs that are more effective in addressing student concerns about the public sector produced students who reported having positive perceptions of their fit in government organizations, which subsequently were associated with a greater likelihood of seeking employment in local, state, or federal levels of government. These findings suggest that PO fit is a product of socialization by way of years of work experience and/or education. As a result, one would expect PSM to be more strongly related to PO fit than PJ fit, especially among employees in the public sector which are the focus of this study.

**Hypothesis 4.** *PSM will be more strongly related to PO fit than PJ fit among public sector employees.*

### 3. Method

The data for this study was drawn in 2017 from federal employees working for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) within the Department of Homeland Security in the State of Oregon. The survey population were employed at the same occupational classification level, served on the front-line of the agency, and were employed at several locations throughout the State. As front-line employees, their work required direct contact with citizens during the course of their daily work. To stay abreast of the latest rules and regulations that governed their work, all employees were required to undergo monthly recertification training sessions. Agency officials integrated the survey instrument into one of these required training sessions. The employees were provided with a workspace and instructions on how to complete the survey. The survey instructed the employees that their participation in the study was completely voluntary; their individual answers would be kept confidential; they could refuse to answer any question that made them uncomfortable; and that they could end the survey at any time with no penalty or loss. Five-hundred and fifty-seven (N = 557) useable surveys were collected with a response rate of 97%. The study sample was representative of the study population in terms of age, gender, and full-time status.

Several major variables were collected in this study: PSM, PO fit, PJ fit, work stress, and demographic characteristics. See Table 1 for a description of the variables and coding strategies. PSM was collected using the Kim (2009) 12-item revision of Perry (1996) 24-item PSM scale and had good internal reliability (Cronbach's Alpha of .843). PO fit and PJ fit



were collected using multi-item survey questions and conceptualized in terms of demands-ability fit and supplementary fit. For instance, high levels of agreement with the statements that “my job fully utilized my abilities” or that “my values and goals are very similar to the values and goals of my organization” were indicators of high levels of fit to their job and organization, respectively. The survey questions were found to have good internal validity (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.790 and 0.730, respectively) and were summed. For the sake of brevity, work stress was collected using a single-item survey question: How stressful is your job? While multi-item scales are preferred in some cases, empirical evidence suggest that single item survey questions can produce reliable and robust data (Wanous et al. 1997). In addition, several demographic variables (i.e., age, education, gender, minority status, and work experience) were collected and used as control variables.

**Table 1.** Description of study variables.

Construct	Description/Survey Question	Variable Coding	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Age	What year were you born?	Year of birth minus Year of study	19	74	41.94	13.1
Education	What is the highest level of education you have completed?	(1) No College to (5) Masters/Higher	1	5	2.69	0.983
Gender	What is your gender?	(0) Male; (1) Female	0	1	0.447	0.498
Job Satisfaction	How satisfied are you with your current job?	(1) Extremely Dissatisfied to (6) Extremely Satisfied	1	6	4.03	1.43
Minority Status	How would you describe your racial or ethnic group?	(0) Minority; (1) Non-minority	0	1	0.754	0.431
PSM	APM	Sum PSM items 1, 2, 3	3	18	11.82	2.68
	CPI	Sum PSM items 4, 5, 6	3	18	13.03	2.55
	COM	Sum PSM items 7, 8, 9	3	18	12.09	2.54
	SS	Sum PSM items 12, 13, 14	3	18	12.55	2.73
Work Experience	How many years have you worked for the TSA?		0	16	6.74	5.14
Person-Organization Fit (PO)	My values and goals are very similar to the values and goals of my organization.	(1) Strongly Disagree to (6) Strongly Agree	1	6	4.25	1.234
	I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.	(1) Strongly Disagree to (6) Strongly Agree	1	6	3.80	1.294
	What this organizations stand for is important to me.	(1) Strongly Disagree to (6) Strongly Agree	1	6	4.87	1.046
Person-Job Fit (PJ)	My job fully utilizes my skills and abilities.	(1) Strongly Disagree to (6) Strongly Agree	1	6	3.19	1.466
	I enjoy my work more than anything else I do.	(1) Strongly Disagree to (6) Strongly Agree	1	6	2.85	1.322
	How satisfied are you with the meaningfulness of your job?	(1) Extremely Dissatisfied to (6) Extremely Satisfied	1	6	4.23	1.382
Work Stress	How stressful is your job?	(1) Not Stressful at all to (5) Extremely Stressful	1	5	3.13	1.039

The analysis of this study was conducted in three stages. First, a bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to confirm the relationships among the study variables. Any control variables that were not correlated with work stress were removed from subsequent analysis for the purpose of enhancing the power of the study and to maximize parsimony. Second, as shown in Figure 1, as structural equation modeling in AMOS was used to explore the relationships among PSM, PO fit, PJ fit, and work stress. Third, bootstrap analysis will be used to test the significances of any mediation effects found. Statistical significance was set at 0.05, two-tailed. All regression weights are standardized maximum likelihood estimates, unless otherwise noted.

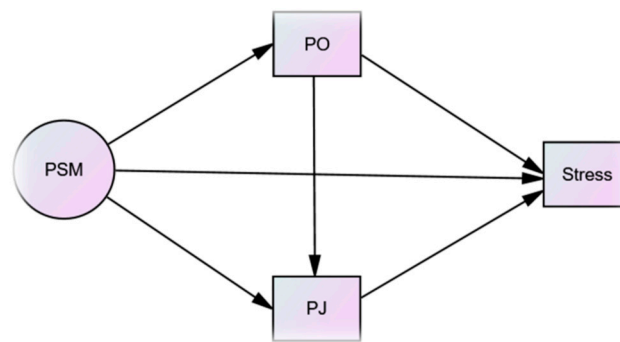


Figure 1. Study model.

#### 4. Results

Table 2 displays the demographic characteristics of the study sample. Most of the respondents were between 18–40 years old (52%), had some to no college experience (53%), were male (55%), identified as White (75%), and gained an average of seven years of work experience in the TSA. As shown in Table 3, work stress was high among the respondents. When asked “how stressful is your job”, nearly two-thirds of the respondents indicated that their jobs were “moderately to extremely” stressful. However, as shown in Table 4, work stress was not significantly correlated with any of the demographic characteristics despite the varying ages, education levels, genders, and years of work experience of the respondents. Similarly, although PO fit and PJ fit were significantly and positively related to work stress, PSM was not directly related. While the respondents with high levels of PSM were more likely to report higher stress than their counterparts with lower levels of PSM, these differences were not statistically significant. These findings are a preliminary indication that PSM’s relationship to stress depends on PO and PJ fit.

Table 2. Description of the study respondents.

Characteristics	N	%
<b>Age</b>		
18 to 30 years old	131	25%
31 to 40 years old	143	27%
41 to 50 years old	90	17%
51+ years old	167	31%
<b>Education Level</b>		
No College	35	6%
Some College	260	47%
AA/Technical	122	22%
BA	123	22%
Masters/Higher	17	3%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	293	55%
Female	237	45%
<b>Race and Ethnicity</b>		
Black/African American	18	3%
Hispanic/Latino	22	4%
White/Caucasian	399	75%
Asian/Pacific Islander	40	8%
Native American/ Alaska Native	5	1%
Multi-Racial	47	9%
<b>Work Experience</b>		
1 year and less	130	23%
1 to 5 years	143	26%
5 to 10 years	130	23%
10 years and more	154	28%

**Table 3.** Work stress survey results.

Survey Question	Response Categories				
How Stressful is your job?	Not Stressful at all 6%	Slightly Stressful 20%	Moderately Stressful 40%	Very Stressful 23%	Extremely Stressful 11%

**Table 4.** Bivariate correlations among study variables.

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	1								
2. Education	0.022	1							
3. Experience	0.746 **	0.098 *	1						
4. Gender	−0.089 *	−0.065	−0.189 **	1					
5. Minority Status	0.233 **	−0.023	0.225 **	−0.017	1				
6. Stress	0.003	−0.008	−0.028	0.039	−0.066	1			
7. PO	0.101 *	0.02	0.107 *	0.091 *	0.107 *	−0.174 **	1		
8. PJ	0.078	−0.071	0.029	0.056	0.006	−0.189 **	0.686 **	1	
9. PSM	−0.013	0.055	0.068	−0.049	−0.009	−0.005	0.415 **	0.317 **	1

\*\* =  $p \leq 0.001$ ; \* =  $p \leq 0.05$ .

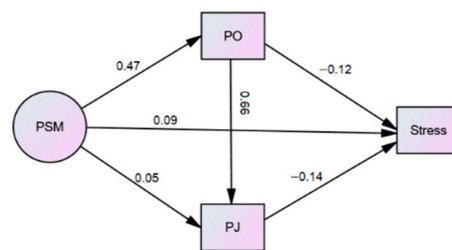
In order to test the hypotheses and disentangle the relationships among PO fit, PJ fit, and work stress, a SEM was conducted. Since the control variables were not meaningfully correlated with work stress they were removed from further analysis. The results of the SEM analysis are displayed in Table 5 and Figure 2. The indices indicate that the study model had a good fit to the data (GFI = 0.998, NFI = 0.996, CFI = 0.998, RMSEA = 0.041). Subsequently, four hypotheses were advanced in this study. The first hypothesis posited that PSM will be positively related to work stress. This hypothesis was rejected. PSM was not meaningfully related to perceptions of work stress in this study. The respondents with high levels of PSM did not report being any more or less stressed in their jobs when compared to their counterparts. The second hypothesis posited that PO fit and PJ fit will be negatively related to work stress. This hypothesis was confirmed. The respondents who reported having high levels of fit to their organization or jobs were significantly more likely to also report having lower levels of stress when compared to their counterparts with lower PO fit and PJ fit. The third hypothesis posited that PSM will be positively related to both PO fit and PJ fit. The findings were mixed. PSM was not found to be meaningfully related to PJ fit, when its relationship to PO fit was considered. However, the respondents with high levels of PSM reported that they had significantly higher levels of PO fit than their counterparts. Hence, the fourth hypothesis that posited that PSM would be more strongly related to PO fit than PJ fit was confirmed by default.



**Table 5.** Study variables estimates by model paths.

Model Paths			$\beta$	P
PO	<—	PSM	0.786	***
PJ	<—	PSM	0.093	0.195
PJ	<—	PO	0.740	***
Stress	<—	PSM	0.053	0.081
Stress	<—	PO	−0.043	0.043
Stress	<—	PJ	−0.042	0.016

\*\*\* =  $p \leq 0.001$ .



**Figure 2.** Study results.

In addition to the findings with regard to the hypotheses, the research model revealed that PO fit enhanced PJ fit, with both concepts maintaining direct and positive relationships to perceptions of work stress. Bootstrapping (2000 samples) was used to test whether PJ fit fully or partially mediated the association that PO fit had to work stress. As shown in Table 6, while the relationship that PO fit had to work stress was partially mediated by PJ fit, the direct association between PO fit and stress was the stronger pathway in comparison.

**Table 6.** Bootstrap mediation analysis results.

Analysis	Direct Effect (x → y)	Indirect Effect	Result
PO → PJ → Stress	−0.123 *	−0.091 *	Partial

\* =  $p \leq 0.05$ .

### 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships among PSM, PO fit, PJ fit and work stress. The findings demonstrated that PSM maintained an indirect relationship to work stress through its association with PO fit. The respondents with high levels of PSM reported that they had high levels of fit to their organizations which was associated with higher fit to their jobs and significantly lower levels of work stress. These findings help clarify the process whereby PSM influences stress, through PO fit and PJ fit. There are several implications of this study.

The first implication of this study centers on the relationship between PSM and work stress. The findings of this study contradict existing research that has found a direct relationship between PSM and perceptions of work stress. In this study, PSM did not directly lead to higher levels of stress. The primary path by which PSM impacts stress was through its association with PO fit. Individuals with high levels of PSM reported significantly lower levels of stress, when they also reported holding high levels of fit to their organization. As far as the findings of this study are concerned, PSM does not directly lead to higher work stress, but indirectly lowers stress by increasing congruence with the characteristics of public organizations. In addition, these finding clarifies Bakker (2015)'s hypothesis. That is, based on this research, public employees are better able to deal with organizational stressors, not only because they know those stressors serve the higher goal of helping others, but also because these motives place them in better alignment

with the conditions of their organizations. This finding suggests that the best means that organizations can help public employees cope in high stress situations is to effectively communicate the meaningfulness of their goals, and provide support to employees in need. Employees desire to be associated with organizations that are supportive of their public service goals, communicate the importance that its goals has to society, and create jobs that are enjoyable. These elements in organizations help all employees and especially those with high levels of PSM, cope with the stress that is associated with their work.

In addition, the lack of association between PSM and work stress in this study points to the need for more research using more specific stressors. Unlike existing research that relied on global multi-question surveys of work stress, this study relied on a single unitary measure. The problem is that both unitary and global measures of work stress will conceal the unique impacts that various discrete sources of stress have in public sector work contexts. The distinguishing aspects of work stress in the public sector stems from the difficulty of its formal job tasks, the internal structure of large seemingly impersonal bureaucracies, the external scrutiny routinely receive from the public, and many other dimensions. The stressors that stem from public sector jobs, organizations, and environments are three distinctive sources of stress that unitary and global measures may inadequately represent. Thus, more research is needed that explores the process whereby PSM impacts a wider range of specific stressors and how each type of stressor is associated with the work attitudes and behaviors of public employees. Research of this type will help the field build an even deeper understanding of the extent to which PSM is associated with specific stressors and whether those stressors lead to detrimental or beneficial work outcomes.

The second implication of this study centers on the relationship between PSM and PJ fit. Even though PSM was found to enhance the fit between the respondents and their organization, it did not share the same relationship with PJ fit. The level of PSM among the respondents was not related to their perceptions of job fit. While it was expected that PJ fit would not be the primary pathway that PSM influences stress among public employees, the lack of a relationship between PSM and PJ fit was surprising. The findings may have been driven by the nature of the jobs that the respondents held in this study. Employment in the TSA is tightly managed. Potential employees are required to undergo extensive employment testing, verification, and training to ensure that they have acquired the skills to do their jobs within its complex legal landscape. Additionally, the variation among the respondents were further limited by the fact that they were all employed at the same job level and class. It could be that while PSM is not associated with varying PJ fit perceptions in the particular line of work investigated in this study, there is a possibility that more variation would be found among employees in other classes of work. Therefore, a future study of PJ fit using a wider range of job types in organizations may yield different results.

The third implication of this study centers on the relationships between PO fit, PJ fit, and work stress. Consistent with existing research, the fit between the respondents, and the characteristics of their jobs and organizations were significantly related. The respondents with high levels of PO fit tended to also report having high levels of PJ fit which were both associated with lower levels of stress. Even more, the level of PJ fit among the respondents was strong enough to partially mediate the relationship between PO fit and stress. This ultimately presented another option by which PSM influenced work stress. That is, PSM not only directly led to improved perceptions of fit to public organizations, it also had the auxiliary consequence of indirectly improving perceptions of PJ fit among public employees as well. This finding adds to the body of research on the benefits of PSM in public organizations, as well as emphasizes the importance of fostering strategies that attract and retain individuals with high levels of PSM in these organizations. Individuals with high levels of PSM who also have high levels of fit with the characteristics of their public organization are more likely to have significantly higher job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions, better perceptions of PJ fit, and lower stress.

## 6. Conclusions

This study re-examined the relationships between PSM, PO fit, and work stress using a sample of federal employees who work in a high stress occupation for the Transportation Security Administration in the United States of America. The findings of this study demonstrated that PSM had an indirect relationship to work stress through its association with PO fit. Public employees with high levels of PSM were significantly more likely to report being more congruent with their organization, which was also associated with higher levels of fit to their jobs and lower perceptions of work stress. While this study adds to the field of research and human resource management in the public sector, the findings should be interpreted cautiously considering its weaknesses.

One weakness of this study is its cross-sectional design. Cross-sectional designs limit interpretations of causality. This study assumed that PO fit, PJ fit, and work stress were all consequences of PSM. However, it could be the case that high levels of PO fit and PJ fit are conditions that generate high levels of PSM in employees. Similarly, work stress may vary the levels of PSM that is possessed by employees over time. Therefore, even though this study confirmed that meaningful relationships were present among PSM, PO fit, PJ fit, and work stress, longitudinal or experimental research designs should be used to confirm these causal relationships. A second weakness of this study is that it drew its data from the State of Oregon's Transportation Security Agency. Even though the results are comparable to similar organizations in similar circumstances, there may be limits to the generalizability of this study. This presents an opportunity for future research to confirm the findings of this study with data extracted from a broader sample of organizations and public service jobs. Nonetheless, with these weaknesses in mind, this study confirms and adds to existing research by demonstrating that PSM is a major resource to stress by enhancing the fit between employees, and the characteristics of government organizations and public service jobs.

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