

Examining Public Service Motivation (PSM) and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory: Insights from the Sabah Department of Labour, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Past studies have shown that employee motivation is closely related to performance; hence, Public Service Motivation (PSM) is an important factor influencing employee commitment and effectiveness. According to the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, the quality of the relationship between leaders and members is important for employee motivation and performance. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between PSM and LMX among civil servants. It also examined how high-quality leader exchange, characterised by respect, trust, and obligation, could enhance civil servants' contribution to organisational performance and public. This study adopted a quantitative approach to analyse the questionnaire data collected from 80 civil servants from the Sabah Department of Labour. The result of this study revealed that six dimensions of PSM namely 1) Attraction to Policy Making, 2) Commitment of the Public Interest, 3) Social Justice, 4) Civic Duty, 5) Compassion, 6) Self-Sacrifice have a low to moderate correlation on the relationship between superiors and subordinates based on the LMX Theory dimensions such as obligation, respect, and trust. The attraction to policy making, commitment of public interest, social justice, and compassion dimensions showed low correlations. At the same time, civic duty and self-sacrifice had moderate correlations and significant relationships with LMX. Dimension attraction to policy making showed limited evidence of a relationship and dimension compassion showed no meaningful relationship with LMX.

1. Introduction

Public service motivation is currently an important issue in public sector organisations, and maintaining an efficient workforce is an essential component of proactive human resource management. An individual's success is driven by factors that motivate them to excel in their

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work or social activities. Thus, public service motivation factors also contribute to the enforcement of labour law policies among civil servants and to increases or decreases in their motivation to succeed. To ensure that organisational productivity and goals are met, motivation is equally crucial. Motivational factors in public service are likely to influence the efficiency with which civil servants perform their jobs (Madugu et al., 2020).

Productivity and the effectiveness of public service have long been important issues in many countries, including Malaysia. Potential areas for improvement include the Malaysian public sector's leadership, performance, and well-being. The public and social media closely monitor leadership style and performance delivery, despite efforts to keep Malaysian civil officials motivated and enhance their job performance (Ahmad, 2023). The motivation and welfare of civil servants should also be a concern.

In the public sector, maintaining an effective workforce is crucial for proactive human resource management, as public service motivation poses a significant challenge. Factors that inspire people to do well at work or in social situations are what propel individual success (S. Dweck's, 2017). Consequently, elements of public service motivation also have a role in civil servants' adherence to rules and regulations and in the degree to which they are driven to achieve. Motivation is equally important for ensuring that organisational productivity and goals are met (Harari et al., 2017).

Labour law policies refer to the legislation each country uses to enforce labour laws, ensuring that employers, organisations, companies, and business owners comply with the rules. In the event of a dispute between employees and employers, existing laws provide a means of resolution. Kanbur and Ronconi (2018) emphasised that greater market competitiveness puts greater pressure on the government to enforce rigorous labour law compliance standards across all businesses to prevent unfair competition. For this challenge to be successful, officers must be motivated, and leaders and members of the organisation must have beneficial interactions.

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) established the relationship-based, dyadic philosophy known as the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory. This theory holds that the nature of the exchange relationship that develops between leaders and their followers determines leadership (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015). The LMX takes this relationship as its level of analysis since it transcends the traits of leaders and focuses instead on the individual interaction between a leader and his follower (Harb et al., 2020).

Furthermore, throughout an organisation's existence, unique relationships may form between a leader and each of his followers. The relationship between Public Service Motivation (PSM) and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) is crucial for improving organisational success, and both are equally important in determining how well civil servants perform. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between public service motivation and leader-member exchange among civil servants. This study is focused on examining the relationship between public servants' PSM and LMX dimensions. It aims to ascertain the relationship between the quality of relationships between leaders and subordinates and certain PSM dimensions.

2. Literature Review

The present study contributes to the growing literature on Public Service Motivation (PSM) and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) by examining their relationship among civil servants in Malaysia. This setting remains underexplored in the Southeast Asian literature. Although previous studies have examined PSM and leadership-related constructs, limited attention has been paid to the association between PSM and LMX in Southeast Asian public-sector settings,

particularly in the Malaysian civil service context. This gap is important because administrative culture, organisational hierarchy, and public sector values may shape employee motivation and leader-subordinate relationships differently across national contexts. Furthermore, examining PSM by dimension allows for a more nuanced understanding of how different motivational orientations relate to LMX interactions in the public sector.

2.1 Public Service Motivation (PSM)

The concept of public service motivation (PSM) is fundamental to the fields of governance and administration because it captures people's innate desire and commitment to serving society. Motivated by an understanding of responsibility, altruism, and dedication to public welfare, PSM encourages those working in the public sector to address issues promptly, make sound judgments, and implement policies effectively and honestly (Perry & Wise, 1990).

There are six main dimensions that are important in the PSM context, such as attraction to policy making, commitment of public interest, social justice, civic duty, compassion, and self-sacrifice (Perry, 1996). Individuals with high levels of PSM are more likely to devote their mental, psychological, and physical resources to their work because their motivation aligns with organisational missions that aim to contribute to the larger community (Scrimshire et al., 2023; Vandenaabeele, 2009).

Several factors, both internal and external, such as organisational culture and work environment, the nature of the task, or the line manager's approach to management, might affect an employee's motivation and work performance in the public sector (Ciobanu & Androniceanu, 2015).

Public service motivation provides an optimistic view of human motivation and behaviour, with special emphasis on the orientation towards the well-being of others and helps cultivate public management as a discipline with specific areas of identification, both conceptually and practically (Homberg & Costello, 2019).

Public service motivation can help attract and retain people in the sector, as they are trained to value helping others and society as part of their jobs (Andersen et al., 2021). Although research indicates that public service motivation's influence depends on several factors, including the governance framework, it is evident that it can significantly enhance the performance of public services.

2.2 Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, which looks at how leaders and members interact inside an organisation. In public service contexts, it refers to the entire department's top management staff as well as the officers that report to them. The three primary dimensions of obligation, respect, and trust are also significant in this theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

According to the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX), leaders must communicate with followers in various ways and establish unique relationships with each follower (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). The primary focus of LMX is the nature of connection between leaders and their subordinates, particularly the extent to which both parties share essential resources and psychological support (Hanse et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2017). Within these connections, leaders offer assistance, growth opportunities, coaching, and additional benefits to their followers.

By giving members access to these resources, leaders increase their motivation and encourage them to express appreciation for the leader (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015). These communications

also affect the overall level of interactions between the leader and his subordinates and can sustain various levels of value, such as respect and loyalty, in each relationship (Harb et al., 2020).

The significance of LMX in influencing employee performance, especially in public sector organisations, has been emphasised in earlier research. The quality of connections between leaders and followers has a significant impact on employee behaviour in Southeast Asia cultures, where organisational structures are extremely hierarchical and marked by strong collectivist attitudes. High-quality LMX interactions have been shown to increase organisational commitment, which, in turn, can improve employee performance and motivation. Effective LMX is therefore particularly important in public organisations across South Asia, as employees tend to place a high value on relational leadership and loyalty to superiors, making organisational commitment a crucial mechanism through which leadership quality translates into improved performance outcomes (Shanty et al., 2022).

The key concept of LMX theory is that leaders influence their employees, often referred to as members, through the strength of their relationships with them (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Trust, empathy, loyalty, and professional respect are traits of a high-quality relationship. Examining the relationship that can be established inside an organisation so that followers (also known as members) respect and trust the leader is the concept of leadership as it pertains to leaders and followers (Bolade-Ogunfodun, 2025; Cranmer, 2024; Erdogan & Bauer, 2015).

According to existing literature, studies that investigate the conditions and mechanisms through which LMX influences work engagement across different public-sector contexts found that LMX operates as a job resource that enhances employee motivation and involvement (Brennan et al., 2024). Employees who perceive great LMX relationships are more likely to feel valued and involved, which boosts their engagement at work (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Hebron et al., 2025).

3. Methodology

This study is quantitative and uses a questionnaire to collect information from respondents. The quantitative approach is used to collect descriptive data and analyse respondents' questionnaires, applying descriptive and inferential statistics. To provide a comprehensive description of PSM and LMX among civil servants, quantitative analysis is also employed to investigate, identify, and gather relevant data.

3.1 Population and Sample

A total of 80 civil servants were elected in the Sabah Department of Labour under the Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia. This method is randomly selected to meet the sample size requirement, and each chosen employee will serve as a study respondent. The inclusion criteria require participants to be currently employed full-time as enforcement officers enforcing labour laws and policies under the Sabah Department of Labour.

The Sabah Department of Labour has several labour offices in Sabah, including the headquarters in Kota Kinabalu and district offices in Sandakan, Tawau, Lahad Datu, Keningau, Beaufort, Kudat, Kota Marudu, Kinabatangan, Tenom, Semporna, Sipitang, Ranau, Kota Belud, and Kunak. Each office is responsible for administering and enforcing labour laws in its respective jurisdiction. Officers employed in each of these offices were randomly selected to participate as the research samples.

To set the number of samples, the researcher utilised Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling technique. The respondents primarily comprise Labour Officers (Grade S1 till S14). The

population of officers who carry out labour law enforcement activities is 108 people. Therefore, according to the sampling schedule, 80 to 86 people can be included in this study. A total of 108 questionnaires were distributed to eligible respondents, and only 80 completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 74%. Although efforts were made to obtain sufficient responses, the possibility of nonresponse bias cannot be fully ruled out. As the study relied on voluntary participation, officers who chose to respond may differ in certain respects from those who did not participate.

The sample selection is among officers who are directly involved in enforcement activities, especially those who work in labour offices throughout the state of Sabah, to see the level and relationship of PSM and LMX among them. This population was selected for its relevance to the research objectives. The demographics of respondents in this study are as follows:

Table 1: Distribution of Respondent's Demographic Data

Personal Details	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	36	45
	Female	44	55
Age	25 to 34 years	18	22.5
	35 to 44 years	38	47.5
	45 years and above	24	30.0
Ethnicity	Malay	48	60.0
	Chinese	1	1.3
	Indian	0	0
	Others	31	38.8
Education Level	SPM	5	6.3
	STPM / Matriculation / Diploma	21	26.3
	Bachelor's Degree	46	57.5
	Master's Degree	8	10.0
	Ph.D.	0	0
Positions	Industrial Relations Officer S14	1	1.3
	Industrial Relations Officer S13	0	0
	Industrial Relations Officer S12	4	5.0
	Industrial Relations Officer S11	0	0
	Industrial Relations Officer S10	10	12.5
	Industrial Relations Officer S9	16	20.0
	Assistant Industrial Relations Officer S8	0	0
	Assistant Industrial Relations Officer S7	0	0
	Assistant Industrial Relations Officer S6	14	17.5
	Assistant Industrial Relations Officer S5	26	32.5
	Assistant Industrial Relations Officer S4	0	0

Personal Details	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
	Assistant Industrial Relations Officer S3	0	0
	Assistant Industrial Relations Officer S2	0	0
	Assistant Industrial Relations Officer S1	9	11.3
Year of Service	Less than 5 years	10	12.5
	5 to 10 years	11	13.8
	More than 10 years	59	73.8

The respondents' backgrounds in this study are shown in Table 1. Analysis shows that 36 (44%) respondents are male, while 44 (55%) respondents are female. Analysis of the study reveals that the majority of respondents fall within the 35-44 age category, comprising 38 respondents (47.5%). Furthermore, the frequency distribution and percentage of respondents by ethnicity showed that the majority were Malay, comprising 48 respondents (60%). Next, other ethnicities, mostly Native of Sabah, were reported by 31 (38.8%) respondents, and Chinese ethnicity was reported by only 1 respondent (1.3%).

The majority of the frequency distribution and percentage, according to the Education Level of civil servants in the study, showed that 46 (57.5%) had a bachelor's degree. The rest of the respondents had an SPM, STPM / Matriculation / Diploma education level, and a master's degree. According to the respondents' positions in this study, the majority of the frequency and percentage distribution is Assistant Industrial Relations Officer Grade S5, which accounts for 26 (26.5%).

For the position of Industrial Relations Officer, Grade S9 had the highest frequency, with 16 (20.0%) respondents. Lastly, respondents' years of service are divided into three categories: less than 5 years, 5 to 10 years, and more than 10 years. The analysis shows that the majority of respondents are over 10 years old, comprising 59 respondents (73.8%). While 10 (12.5%) respondents served in the less than 5 years category, 11 (13.8%) respondents served in the 5 to 10 years category.

The measurement scales were adapted from established instruments. The questionnaire was distributed in English, and the items were also translated to Malay. Adjustments were made to guarantee clarity and applicability to the Malaysian public sector setting. However, a more rigorous cross-cultural validation procedure, including formal back-translation, is recommended for future studies. Several procedural steps were taken to reduce the risk of common method bias.

Respondents were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential, and they were assured that there were no right or wrong answers. These steps were intended to reduce evaluation apprehension and encourage honest responses. Future studies may further reduce common method bias by collecting data from multiple sources, such as combining self-reported responses with supervisor assessments or administrative data.

The set of questionnaires distributed to the study respondents is a research questionnaire adapted from the Public Service Motivation Scale (PSM Scale) developed by Perry (1996). The questionnaire Leader-Member Exchange Theory (The LMX-7) developed by Graen & Hi-Bien, 1995 to measure the level and relationship of Public Service Motivation and Leader-Member Exchange among civil servants. The PSM Scale contains 40 questions and the LMX-7 contains 7 questions.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics of PSM and LMX

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items (PSM)	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items (LMX)
.895	40	.940	7

Based on Table 2, Cronbach's alpha scores for the PSM Scale are 0.895, suggesting that the instruments have strong internal consistency, and Cronbach's alpha scores for the LMX-7 scale are also 0.940, indicating extremely good internal. The researcher will employ descriptive statistical analysis and inferential statistics to achieve the study's objectives. Descriptive analysis is used to identify the levels of public service motivation and leader-member exchange among civil servants. In contrast, inferential analysis is used to examine the relationship between public service motivation and leader-member exchange among civil servants.

4. Results and Findings

Correlations												
		PSM	LMX	Attraction To Policy Making	Commitment of Public Interest	Social Justice	Civic Duty	Compassion	Self-Sacrifice	Obligation	Respect	Trust
<i>PSM</i>	Pearson Correlation	1	.443**	.607**	.867**	.825**	.894**	.716**	.819**	.501**	.342**	.409**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.002	<.001
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
<i>LMX</i>	Pearson Correlation	.443**	1	.200	.300**	.293**	.417**	.202	.569**	.913**	.929**	.952**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		.076	.007	.008	<.001	.072	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
<i>Attraction To Policy Making</i>	Pearson Correlation	.607**	.200	1	.528**	.561**	.381**	.400**	.296**	.259*	.163	.157
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.076		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.008	.020	.149	.163
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
<i>Commitment of Public Interest</i>	Pearson Correlation	.867**	.300**	.528**	1	.765**	.713**	.562**	.602**	.363**	.225*	.265*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.007	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.044	.017
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
<i>Social Justice</i>	Pearson Correlation	.825**	.293**	.561**	.765**	1	.666**	.528**	.546**	.401**	.186	.253*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.008	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.098	.024
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80

Correlations												
		PSM	LMX	Attraction To Policy Making	Commitment of Public Interest	Social Justice	Civic Duty	Compassion	Self-Sacrifice	Obligation	Respect	Trust
<i>Civic Duty</i>	Pearson Correlation	.894**	.417**	.381**	.713**	.666**	1	.535**	.791**	.467**	.321**	.388**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	.004	<.001
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
<i>Compassion</i>	Pearson Correlation	.716**	.202	.400**	.562**	.528**	.535**	1	.420**	.232*	.154	.186
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.072	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	.039	.171	.099
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
<i>Self-Sacrifice</i>	Pearson Correlation	.819**	.569**	.296**	.602**	.546**	.791**	.420**	1	.571**	.463**	.554**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.008	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
<i>Obligation</i>	Pearson Correlation	.501**	.913**	.259*	.363**	.401**	.467**	.232*	.571**	1	.806**	.793**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.020	<.001	<.001	<.001	.039	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
<i>Respect</i>	Pearson Correlation	.342**	.929**	.163	.225*	.186	.321**	.154	.463**	.806**	1	.817**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	<.001	.149	.044	.098	.004	.171	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
<i>Trust</i>	Pearson Correlation	.409**	.952**	.157	.265*	.253*	.388**	.186	.554**	.793**	.817**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.163	.017	.024	<.001	.099	<.001	<.001	<.001	

Correlations												
	PSM	LMX	Attraction To Policy Making	Commitment of Public Interest	Social Justice	Civic Duty	Compassion	Self- Sacrifice	Obligation	Respect	Trust	
N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).												
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).												

Overall, Table 3 shows a moderate correlation between Public Service Motivation and Leader Member Exchange at 0.443, which is within the 0.41 to 0.71 range, with a significant value of Sig. (2-tailed) at < 0.001 . Both exhibit a moderately reliable, statistically significant positive correlation, as indicated by the Sig value. (2 tailed) is < 0.05 . When one variable increases, the other tends to increase as well, including the dimensions in both cases.

The correlation between attraction to policy making, one of the PSM's dimensions, and LMX is 0.200, indicating a low correlation within the 0.20 to 0.40 range. Since Sig. (2-tailed) Since the p-value is $0.076 > 0.05$, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that the two variables are significantly correlated. Although there is a correlation, it is statistically insignificant. While the correlation between the dimension's commitment of public interest and LMX is 0.300, indicating a low correlation within the 0.20 to 0.40 range. Since Sig. (2-tailed), the p-value of $0.007 < 0.05$ indicates a significant positive relationship between commitment of public interest and LMX.

The table also demonstrates a low correlation but a slight relationship between social justice and LMX at 0.293, which is within the 0.20 to 0.40 range. Sig. (2-tailed) is $0.008 < 0.05$, it means that there is a positive relationship between social justice and LMX. Then the civic duty dimension and LMX show a correlation coefficient of 0.417 (within the 0.41 to 0.71 range), indicating a moderate correlation. Since Sig. (2-tailed) is < 0.001 , it explains that there is a showing that the two variables have a reliable positive relationship between civic duty and LMX.

The correlation between compassion and LMX is 0.202, indicating a low correlation within the 0.20 to 0.40 range. Sig. (2-tailed) is $0.072 > 0.05$, showing that both are not statistically significant and might not represent a stable or meaningful relationship. The table also showed moderate correlation and some relationship between self-sacrifice and LMX at 0.569, which is within the 0.41 to 0.71 range. Sig. (2-tailed) is $0.001 < 0.05$, it means that there is a genuine and significant relationship between the self-sacrifice and LMX.

Upon examining the relationship between PSM and the three dimensions of LMX, dimension obligation shows a moderate correlation with PSM ($r = 0.501$), falling within the 0.41 to 0.71 range and significant at Sig. (2-tailed) at < 0.001 . Both indicate a consistent relationship.

The correlation between the dimensions of respect and PSM is 0.342, indicating a low correlation within the 0.20 to 0.40 range. Since Sig. (2-tailed) The p-value of $0.002 < 0.05$ indicates a significant positive correlation between respect and PSM. The table also shows a moderate correlation with a significant relationship between trust and PSM at 0.409, which falls within the 0.41 to 0.71 range. Sig. (2-tailed) A p-value of $0.001 (< 0.05)$ indicates a reliable positive relationship between these two variables.

5. Discussions

Based on the study's findings, the correlation between PSM and LMX among civil servants is generally moderate. The results of the analysis show that two dimensions of PSM, namely civic duty and self-sacrifice, has a moderate level of correlation with LMX. While other dimensions, such as attraction to policy making, commitment of public interest, social justice, and compassion, show low levels of correlation with LMX.

The core idea of public service motivation theory is that individuals have an obligation to improve the welfare of their community or group. When it comes to civic duty, this is particularly true. This motivation comes from their knowledge of their own advantages, their awareness of the community's needs, and the opportunities and challenges that may prevent them from effectively fulfilling their civic responsibilities (Prismakova, 2021).

This knowledge influences civil servants' dedication to public service as well as their alignment with the goals and principles of the organisations they work for (Harari et al., 2017). This finding suggests that the civic duty component of PSM has a moderate correlation with LMX. This could be because organisational or contextual factors may influence the relationship's strength more than the other dimensions, which show low correlation.

The primary finding about public service motivation and dedication to the public interest is that civil servants' work engagement increases significantly when they perceive a direct connection between their work and beneficial social impact (Mussagulova, 2021). Emphasising the importance and value of their contributions to society is necessary to promote this engagement. This necessitates highlighting to the general public how their job advances society and advance the general welfare. It shows how civil servants' motivation is influenced by this aspect, enabling them to compare their relationships with their leaders.

By taking into account the nature of enforcement work and LMX, the various effects of PSM characteristics may be comprehended. Civic duty and self-sacrifice emphasise accountability, loyalty, and a readiness to take on challenging responsibilities. These qualities are evident in routine communication with supervisors and, as a result, contribute to the development of stronger working relationships and trust. This also refers to the urge to be just and equal, as well as the desire to serve the country, its citizens, and the public interest (Belrhiti et al., 2019).

On the other hand, because policy decisions are made at higher levels in frontline enforcement posts, attraction to policy making is less significant. While compassion may be weakened when people are constantly in tense and vulnerable situations at work (Grant et al., 2019). Because of this, these characteristics are less likely to be expressed in ways that improve relationships between leaders and followers, which results in weaker or insignificant connections with LMX.

Examining the relationship between the obligation and trust dimensions of LMX and the PSM, the analysis reveals a significant positive relationship, as indicated by a moderate correlation. The respect dimension showed a positive, statistically significant relationship with PSM, despite a low correlation between the two.

Civil servants are generally driven to take the initiative to check compliance, investigate wrongdoing, and hold offenders accountable when they feel a strong sense of duty to advance social welfare (Politakis, 2019). It implied a significant connection between individual motivation and broader societal goals and was related to the social justice dimensions of PSM, which prioritise the public good and assisting others.

In the workplace, a high degree of motivation is particularly necessary to guarantee greater efficiency and productivity. One task that needs to be completed effectively in the workplace is two-way communication between top management and employees, whether at the official level such as in an organisation or at the informal level as in a family or society (Ganhao et al., 2021). It also emphasises the significance of the relationship between the leader and followers.

By providing them with opportunities for personal development, support, and mentoring, leaders can help followers feel more included and important members of a government agency (Ballart & Ripoll, 2024; Hostrup & Andersen, 2022; Ripoll & Breaugh, 2025). Public service motivation can be raised with the help and support of leaders like these.

6. Conclusion

In this study, four dimensions of PSM show low correlations with LMX among civil servants in the Sabah Department of Labour. That the four dimensions are attraction to policy making, commitment of public interest, social justice and compassion. While the civic duty and self-

sacrifice dimensions show a moderate correlation with LMX, indicating a reliable and significant relationship. Dimension of attraction to policy making shows insufficient evidence to suggest that this dimension is significant on LMX. Dimensions commitment of the public interest and social justice show a significant positive correlation with LMX. While compassion dimensions show no statistically significant relationship and may not represent a stable or meaningful connection on LMX. The LMX dimensions, obligation, and trust exhibit a moderate correlation with PSM, whereas respect shows a low correlation. But these dimensions have positive, and significant relationship with PSM.

Leaders and human resources departments can benefit from the study's findings by strengthening LMX dimensions to enhance certain PSM aspects, notably by aligning enforcement tasks with employees' motivations. This includes giving practical suggestions on how leaders can strengthen specific LMX behaviours, such as communication, support, trust-building, and role clarification among followers to enhance PSM. When they receive high-quality LMX, civil servants with high PSM are more likely to translate their desire into positive outcomes, whereas lower LMX may limit PSM's potential.

The results also demonstrate that management behaviours are crucial in determining results, even in cases where the moderating influence is modest. Consistent and helpful feedback enhances role clarity and mutual respect, and regular coaching sessions, such as one-on-one developmental meetings, help connect employees' civic duty principles with organisational goals. Employees with significant public service motivation (PSM) can translate their motivation into productive work through these techniques, which also improve leader-member exchange (LMX). Therefore, there can be significant organisational benefits from investing in leadership development that enhances supervisors' coaching, feedback, and interpersonal skills. In this regard, PSM should be seen as a motivational tool whose effectiveness depends on strong, encouraging relationships between leaders and members.

Questionnaires are distributed to participants in this study. This study's results differ from those of earlier research mainly because respondents' views and comprehension levels varied when completing questionnaires. The data were collected from a single organisation, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other public sector settings. The study's limitations include its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data, and generally low-to-moderate correlations seen across numerous dimensions, which limit both interpretation and generality. To address these limitations, future research should take a mixed-methods approach, incorporate qualitative interviews or focus groups to identify contextual factors influencing weaker dimensions (such as attraction to policy making and compassion), and combining these insights with advanced quantitative techniques to develop a more comprehensive and context-specific understanding of how LMX shape public service motivation. Furthermore, the researcher will be able to gather more reliable data by obtaining participants' opinions on the situation under this study.

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