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*Public Service Motivation in an Ethnically Heterogeneous Society:
Towards a New Conceptual Framework*

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Abstract:

This exploratory study seeks to detail propositions and a conceptual framework that factor ethnic heterogeneity and exclusive institutions in determining public service motivation (PSM). Drawing on scholarly work on PSM, heterogeneity and institutions, our paper suggests that in assessing an individual's PSM and chances of joining the public service, ethnic heterogeneity matters. It matters because while personal attributes - like education, personal values and identity, political beliefs, socialisation - are important in determining one's public service motivation, they are not the sole determinants. As the paper highlights, an ethnically heterogeneous environment with the potential of producing numerous types of exclusive institutions can influence one's perception of the public service, alter one's motivation to serve in the public service or even eliminate one's chances of joining the civil service.

Keywords: Public Service Motivation; Heterogeneity; Institutions; Malaysia

Public Service Motivation in an Ethnically Heterogeneous Society: Towards a New Conceptual Framework

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Introduction

Previous scholarly work in the area of motivation in public service have taken various directions since Perry and Wise (1990) conceptualised and neatly categorised dimensions of public service motivation (PSM). They include identifying antecedents to PSM such as personal qualities (Bright, 2005; DeHart-Davis et al., 2006; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Naff & Crum, 1999; Steijn & Leisink, 2006), the influence of social institutions – like family, religion, and profession – on PSM (see Brewer, 2003; Houston, 2000; Perry, 2007), the relationship between whistleblowing and PSM (Brewer & Selden, 1998) or examining the causal link between job satisfaction and PSM (Naff & Crum, 1999).

While the array of literature is impressive, investigations on PSM have implicitly assumed a homogeneous setting. Works examining demographics – like gender, age, educational qualification, professions – with PSM have assumed the oneness of values or national value (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012). This tendency obviates certain interesting questions; should we assume that societies are guided by a dominant generalised value, that is one that is determined by the same set of rationality and socio-psycho behaviour or one that is a function of heterogeneity of values? Does an ethnically-heterogeneous society produce similar ideas of the nature of “public service”, “public good” or “community” when compared to a more ethnically-homogeneous society? If it is different, how can we account for the differences? Framed another way, will two individuals – with similar motivations to serve in the public service – produce identical behaviour and responses to similar situations in public service in an ethnically heterogeneous environment? If there are differences, what could account for such differences in behaviour and responses?

The above questions need further investigation for various reasons. First, we still do not know enough on “what constituent motives give rise to PSM” (Bozeman & Su 2015, Charbonneau & Ryzin, 2016). Second, works that lie outside the realm of PSM are suggesting that heterogeneity matters and that it can affect the quality of public good delivery (Sachs & Warner, 1995). One reason for this is that ethnic heterogeneity produces social and political division that leads to rent-seeking and inferior policy choices (Easterly & Levine, 1997). There are other works that argue that social activities is lower in more unequal and in more racially or ethnically fragmented societies that can impede the provision of the public good (A. Alesina & Spolaore, 1995; A. F. Alesina & La Ferrara, 1999; La Ferrara & Alesina, 2000). There are also those that found negative relationship between heterogeneity and public service’s technical efficiency as a result of a polarised society (La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer, & Vishny, 1999).

While a short search on “heterogeneity and PSM” and “institutions” in major journals of public administration gave no result, there are works that allude to it. Kim and Vandenabeele (2010) hinted on the importance of heterogeneity when explaining that PSM is a product of both the individual and the society. They point to the possibility that “historical and institutional differences might explain the different patterns of PSM in different countries (Kim & Vandenabeele, 2010, 702). There are also works on PSM that hinted on the need to include context because as much as PSM is measured at the individual level we need to account the institutional environment that the individual operates (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Moynihan, Vandenabeele, & Blom-Hansen, 2013; Perry 2000).

Perhaps one work that highlights the imperative of institutional quality (the importance of heterogeneous values) and public service delivery is Van der Wal and Yang (2015) two-country study of Dutch and Chinese public sector workers. They found that Dutch and Chinese bureaucrats had different ideas on what they deemed as “realistic values of bureaucracy”. Chinese civil servants had different value system than their Dutch counterparts and in carrying out their civil service duties, Chinese civil servants gave importance to loyalty, obedience, and propriety while Dutch civil servants treated independent ideas and innovativeness as important considerations (Van der Wal & Yang, 2015). Chinese officers also ranked highly “Chinese political ecology”, the “rule of man has more weight than rule of law” or “serve the superior or special group” while Dutch officers gave priority to public sector management and the idea of efficiency, transparency, and accountability. While the authors did not put up an institutional analysis, the explanations raise the possibility that Dutch and Chinese public sector workers were raised in different institutional “silos” and hence develop different considerations.

The discussions on institutions and plurality of values cut across disciplines. Tajfel's (1978) Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests that group - be it, social class, family, ethnicity - is an important source of individual's pride and identity. Indeed, Turner, Brown, and Tajfel (1979) expands on the Tajfel's (1978) argument, suggesting the relevance of heterogeneity and institutions. Turner et al. (1979) explain that individuals undertake processes to distinguish themselves (in-group) from other groups (the out-group). They do that by comparing and evaluating the group that they belong with other groups, and this would see them perceiving that their group is superior from the others based on cultural superiority, the richness of history, income level, migratory backgrounds or education. The findings lend further credence that public servants operating in an ethnically-heterogeneous setting could exhibit "in-group" and "out-group" disposition. Such attitude could see them offering different policy treatments to individuals depending on whether the client belongs to the "in-group" or the "out-group". So, while an individual's PSM is to be "useful to society", "help other people" and "do something worthwhile" - as Kim (1996) suggests - such motivations could also potentially take on the "in-group" or "out-group" imperatives that can compromise the quality and delivery of public good.

While critics may argue that such "in-group" and "out-group" imperative is also inherent in homogeneous settings, we cannot discount that an ethnically heterogeneous society runs greater risk of seeing its public servants operating along the "in-group" and "out-group" paradigm. We cannot dismiss the possibility that ethnicity, culture, religion can influence public servants' ideas of a good society and determine the priority they take on certain issues. The literature on PSM, give plenty of hints on how institutions (Perry, 2000; Perry & Vandenabeele, 2008) - by the manner of the family, the organisation, religious affiliation and volunteer organisations - can have important influence on individuals' PSM (Camilleri, 2007; D. P. Moynihan & S. K. Pandey, 2007; Perry, 1997). Given these arguments, there is the possibility that individuals raised in institutional silos - ethnically, culturally or religiously - could develop various interpretations of PSM that can affect the quality of public service delivery.

The above concerns resonate and bear relevance to Malaysia; an ethnically heterogeneous society. Malaysia's political, economic, social accounts are littered with social identification considerations. These imperatives are fostered by the generation and persistence of ethnically-exclusive institutions. Communal pluralism has had a profound effect on how Malaysians "behave and identify themselves, how interests are perceived and how issues are defined" (Esman, 1972: 17). Social identification of groups in the Malaysian case is so strong that Harris and Han (2019) assert that national value does not exist among Malaysians. Rather,

Malaysians tend to gravitate toward their own ethnic groups because they do not see people of different ethnic groups as equal to them. More disturbing is that the study found that conflict was often coloured by inter-ethnic differences fostered by the persistent nature of exclusive ethnic institutions.

Taking the above considerations into account, this paper examines PSM among Malaysia's higher civil servants. It was carried out using in-depth interviews on Malaysia's *Pegawai Tadbir dan Diplomatik* (PTD - higher civil servants). The work employed content analysis and thick description to provide insights to officers' motivation. To improve the validity of data, interviews were conducted in an iterative manner, where similar questions were remodelled or reframed for consistency of responses. This is an exploratory work, the purpose of which is to come up with a conceptual framework and propositions that factor ethnic heterogeneity and exclusive institutions in the calculations on PSM. This study takes an interdisciplinary approach on PSM, heterogeneity and institutions drawing on various scholarly discussions outside the existing literature on PSM. We do that because the various works allude to the need to consider heterogeneity and institutions for better understanding of PSM and the quality of public service delivery. At its most modest, the development of propositions and conceptual framework from this article can trigger further discussions on the relevance of heterogeneity, institutions and motivations.

The paper is structured as follows: the first part will discuss the concepts used; specifically, definitions of PSM, heterogeneity, and institutions. The second part will provide a brief description of Malaysia's public administration, the purpose of which is to provide the institutional and historical context to Malaysia's civil service practice. The next part of the article will explain the methodology used, discuss details about the research and the findings.

Situating Concepts in Context

Public Service Motivation (PSM) is defined as "individuals' disposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organisation" (Perry and Wise 1990, 368). Perry and Wise (1990) defined PSM into three categories: the rational (where individual action is based on utility maximisation); normative (where actions are based on the need to conform to societal norms); and affective (where behaviours are based on an individual's emotional response to social context). An important aspect of the "rational" dimension of PSM highlighted by Perry and Wise (1990) is "advocacy for a special interest" as one of the motives for individuals to serve the government. (Perry and Wise 1990, 368) While Perry and Wise (1990) did not deliberate on the various meanings of "special interests" we can extrapolate that

in an ethnically heterogeneous settings with multiple “special interest”, individual’s “advocacy of special interest” could take on special meanings. This paper adopts the Perry and Wise (1990) definition because it subscribes not only to utilitarian reasoning, but it also imbues the importance of context and socio-psychological behaviour. Although there is every likelihood that an individual is motivated to serve in the public service from a utilitarian perspective, the imperative of context – in particular, an ethnically- heterogeneous setting – could also see individual’s PSM persuaded by non-utilitarian special interest considerations.

The terms heterogeneity and institution obviate an explanation. By heterogeneity, we mean a society that is plural in nature. We are persuaded by Furnivall’s (1948) definitional description of a plural society as “a medley of people” where:

“...they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals, they meet, but only in the marketplace, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. Even in the racial sphere, there is a division of labour along racial lines.” (Furnivall 1948: 304).

Malaysia’s “medley of people” is very much in keeping with Furnivall’s (1948) definition. At the risk of oversimplifying, Malaysia’s “medley of people” can be divided into two groups; indigenous and non-indigenous. Indigenous peoples of Malaysia are known as the *bumiputeras* (sons of the soil). There are two subcategories within the *bumiputeras* category. The first, are Malays which form the largest group and the second, are native tribes that together make up about 10-12 percent of the population. The non-indigenous group comprises of the Chinese, Indian and Eurasian or people of mixed percentage. According to the Malaysian census 2019, the population of Malaysia is made up of 54.6 percent Malay, 24.6 percent Chinese, 7.3 percent Indian and Others 12.8 percent (mainly other indigenous peoples).

It is clear that Malaysian society is ethnically heterogeneous and this is accentuated by the existence of diverse and highly exclusive institutional setups in many social spheres - education, the economic and labour sectors, politics etc. (Furnivall, 1948). Malaysians generally attend ethnically, linguistically and religiously-defined schools. They go to different places of worship, live in different areas and are concentrated in certain employment sectors. The civil service, for instance, is dominated by Malays; Malays make up 67 percent of total civil servants, with Chinese making up 20 percent and Indians making up 7 percent. If the public sector is overwhelming presence of Malays, Malaysia’s private sector is dominated by

Chinese. Lim (2013) found that Chinese make up 56 percent of private-sector professionals while they made up only 20 percent of public sector professionals.

While it is impossible to provide details to Malaysia's heterogeneity, suffice it to say that the heterogeneous nature of Malaysian society is a product of a number of factors: colonisation and limited efforts to integrate a highly plural society, migration, the generation of spatially and ethnically-defined industrial or employment activities, the setting up ethnically-diverse educational setups that persisted even after independence. One policy that can best capture the prevalence of heterogeneity and Malaysia's struggle to remove ethnically-defined institutions is the country's New Economic Policy (NEP). Introduced in 1971, the NEP was aimed at reducing the economic and social imbalance between indigenous and non-indigenous groups and eliminate the identification of economic functions with certain groups. Despite its best intentions, the policy only worsened ethnic polarisation. While the NEP has been successful in reducing Malaysia's overall poverty – Malaysia is among the wealthy economies in Southeast Asia, even in Asia - the NEP has also deepened ethnic polarisation. Edwards (2005) describes that despite years of NEP, Malaysia still sees concentration of groups “in particular sectors of the economy” (Edwards, 2005) with high concentration of non-indigenous population (Chinese and Indians) in the private sector and high concentration of the indigenous group (Malays) in the public sector.

Indeed, Malaysia's heterogeneous society is propped by ethnically defined institutions. By institutions, we mean the set of informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct) and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights) that facilitate or constraint how societal actors behave (North, 1990). Institutions distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate, “right” and “wrong”, “possible” and “impossible” actions. Institutions determine social behavioural patterns, roles, rules, values, ceremonies and they are embedded by way of religion, family and other social structures that provide order, stability, and predictability to behaviour (March, 1989; Perry & Hondeghem, 2008). Institutions are maintained through socialisation where individuals identify themselves with significant others and assume a distinct social identity in order to become members of the institution (Vandenabeele, 2007: 548). Socialisation is a powerful force that preserves and promotes the formation, maintenance, and distribution of particular institutions. Malaysia's ethnically-based institutions, as mentioned above, are propped by the continued preservation of heterogeneous concerns by its population as well as political, social and economic imperatives.

In discussing the ethnic heterogeneity and institutions, the Malaysian civil service needs special mentioning. The Malaysian civil service epitomises the challenge of an ethnically-heterogeneous setting. It is constantly managing and negotiating the often-competing expectations and challenges of a plural society that demands more efficient public service delivery. To make assessment of the challenges of the public service, we need to appreciate that Malaysia's public administration is a product of centuries of historical, socio-cultural, and institutional experiences. Pre-British colonial rule, Malaysia (Malaya) had an elaborate administrative structure - *adat Temenggong* - where the Malay sultans were both the administrative head as well as the head of government. British colonial rule brought a modern professional civil service, one where Malay aristocrats were reassigned new positions in the professional service and entered the wage economy for the first time (Siddiquee, 2013).

While exercising *de facto* power over its colony, British indirect rule however retained Malay *de jure* power (by virtue of Malay rulers being heads of state and highest authority in the state council). This accommodation of Malay *de jure* power effectively ensured continued incorporation of Malay considerations in the civil service. Malay character in the bureaucracy was retained as the administration catered to the various demands of the Malay royal houses. In 1910, the demands by Malay aristocratic elites that Malays be exposed to the rigours of modern administration led to the introduction of an elite service called the Malay Administrative Service (MAS). To ensure a steady supply of Malay officers in the MAS, the colonial administration established the Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) in 1912, a boarding school that initially catered to children of aristocrats. Modern Malaya saw greater demands by Malay aristocrats demanding that more places be provided for Malays in the civil service. The British administration saw no reason to object as there was the need to engage Malays in the modern economy. The fear of unemployment and its impact on the economy also saw the administration making effort at Malay employment because Malays were not heavily involved in the private sector (Tilman, 1968) unlike non-Malays, who were highly represented in the private sector - as workers in the tin mines or agricultural plantations or as traders and professionals (Puthucherry, 1978). Malay presence in the civil service was also aided by British preference policy. In 1922 – as a result of global recession - the Retrenchment Commission recommended that the ratio of Malays to the local-born-non-Malays appointment in the civil service be kept to seven Malays to three non-Malays (Roff, 1965). This policy was amended in 1952 with the new ratio being 4 Malays to 1 Non-Malays (Haque, 2003).

What is important is that the institutions carved out over the years have set the tone for the present character of Malaysia's employment sector. The civil service is dominated by Malays and the private sector by non-Malays. While British preference policy for Malays can be one reason why Malays are dominant in the civil service, historical readings also show that non-Malays prefer the private sector. Alatas (1977) points out that an improving Malaysian economy and expansion of the private sector provided non-Malays with lucrative returns that make joining the public sector a less attractive option. More recently, Woo's (2018) analysis found that the low participation of non-Malays in the public sector was due to them opting for the private sector. In another work, Woo (2019) asked non-Malay final year college students on their preferred employment sector, and the majority of respondents (non-Malays final year university students) chose the private sector over the civil service. This analysis is supported by Lim's (2013) earlier findings that found tertiary-educated Chinese preferring private sector employment; Chinese in fact made up 56 percent of private-sector professionals as compared to 20 percent of public sector professionals.

The above discussions on the skewed nature of public and private sector employment, the persistence of Malay dominance in the civil service, and the overall relevance of institutions and PSM raise important questions:

1. Does ethnic identity determine individual's perception of the civil service?
2. Does ethnic identity determine individual's capacity to develop public service motivation (PSM)?
3. Ultimately, to what extent are ethnically-heterogeneous institutions relevant in determining individual's public service motivation (PSM)?

To address the above concerns, we now outline the research methodology.

Sample Profile and Demographics

We obtained detailed responses via purposive sampling from twenty-eight higher civil servants or *Pegawai Tadbir dan Diplomati (PTD)* or Administrative and Diplomatic Officers on their motivations to join the public service. These officers are considered the *crème de la crème* of Malaysia's civil service officers as they are targeted to take on important policy roles in the administration. At the time of the interviews, the PTD officers were attending a 10-month training at the National Institute of Public Administration or *Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN)*.

INTAN provided the maximum number of non-indigenous officers available, 40 (11 percent) non-indigenous officers (non-Malays) out of 378 officers in the cohort attending the training. For indigenous officers, officers were chosen on a random basis given their large numbers. In all, 28 officers agreed to participate in the interview, giving a response rate of 93 percent. Of the 28 officers, 18 were non-indigenous officers, 9 Chinese and 9 Indian officers. Twenty-one of the respondents were female officers. Only four of the 28 officers belonged to the 30-year-old age group while the rest were in the 20 –year old age group. Given the background of our respondents, we have labelled the respondents by way of respondent 1 (R1), respondent 2 (R2) etc, for the purpose of maintaining anonymity and ethical considerations.

Of the 28 respondents, 16 previously worked in the private sector, 8 had worked in the public sector as non-PTD officers, 2 had previously worked in not-for-profit organisations while 2 had no job experience prior to joining the scheme. Nine of the officers had Masters Degrees, two PhD holders with the rest having bachelor's degrees. Also, three of the respondents were Perdana Fellows, which is a prestigious six -month fellowship scheme where top young graduates were given the opportunity to work with ministers to get first-hand experience on matters of policymaking. Of the 28 respondents, 10 were also government scholars who were given scholarships to study at reputed overseas universities and upon graduation were required to serve a bond with the Malaysian public service for five years. The interviews however revealed that the five-year bond was not strictly adhered to. Officers mentioned that they could have chosen to ignore the bond. They spoke of friends who were government scholars and chose not to return to Malaysia. This is possible because the officers said there had been no legal cases brought against bond breakers thus far. We turn now to the specifics of the interviews.

Methods

Each of the 28 semi-structured interviews lasted about one hour, which took six months to complete. Six questions, that entailed a comprehensive universe of motivation to serve in the public service were posed to the 28 PTD officers with additional questions posed depending on the response. Prompts and probes were used, with the interviewer always keeping in mind officers' motivations and relevance to issues of heterogeneity. To ensure that the responses were consistent, an iterative method was adopted where at the “end” of the interview, the recorder was turned off. The interviewer would then pose the same six questions - with slight variances or reframing - the purpose of which is to validate respondents' earlier taped responses.

Transcripts for all 28 interviews were analysed for codes that matched the concepts raised in the study. Content and narrative analysis were employed to study the data. This involved systematically translating the written and vocal communication from the interviews into a quantitative description. The transcripts produced keywords, phrases or sentences which were then used to identify and quantify respondents' different sets of motivations. Responses were broken into topic-specific units (referred to as "unitisation"). The units were coded which are often a word or short phrase (Saldaña, 2003). When coding care was taken to preserve the original intent of each response. The interviews also produced additional codes, such as family support, social ties, working experiences and future expectations which were included in the analysis. These codes - family support, spouse or friends - were subthemes that could potentially influence the decision to apply for the scheme (the main theme). Care was taken to refine the themes (codes) and sub-themes; they were reviewed first as independent parts and later conceptualised to see how they relate to one another, the aim of which is to recognise relationships among various sub-processes that, together, could represent possible motivation of higher civil service officers. Effort was also made for qualitative trustworthiness. This was done by keeping accurate accounts in research journals that include observational notes, personal insights into the conceptualisation, and notes on the methodological decisions made. We now move on to discuss the details of our findings.

Study Results and Analysis

The six questions posed were broad questions; they asked respondents on what it means to make a positive difference to society, the reasons for people to do good, their motivations to join the higher civil service, their take on the various dimensions of public service motivation (PSM) that best reflect their choice of joining the service and the people who are instrumental in making them consider the scheme. There were also questions on officers' past employment sectors and working experience and officers' assessment of the PTD recruitment exercise. The questions were aimed to examine different aspects of the motivation of officers and the extent to which ethnic heterogeneity influence such motivation.

Two broad categories were employed to determine the relevance of heterogeneity and exclusive ethnic institutions in individual's motivation. The first category was individuals' sense of public duty or service. This is done by examining the text responses of the two groups of officers – indigenous and non-indigenous. Words associated with public duty or service were examined to determine whether there are significant differences in response between the two

groups. The second category was to examine the impact of ethnically-exclusive institutions in a heterogeneous setting. Texts were analysed and words sorted out that capture the significance of institutions, for example, analysing views of one's perception of the attractiveness of employment sectors (public and private sector). To find out the impact of and relationship between institutions and heterogeneity, the responses of the two groups – indigenous and non-indigenous officers - were compared. We look now at the findings for what it means to do “good for society.”

Different Perspectives and Meanings of ‘doing good for society’

Indigenous and non-indigenous officers gave distinct response to what it meant “to do good and to make a positive difference to society.” All indigenous officers except for one respondent mentioned the need to provide for the greater society. One indigenous officer R1, considered himself “as ambassador to improve public policies...make a positive impact on people's life” while another r officer, R2 spoke of “social causes” and “to make Malaysia better”. Another officer, R3 spoke of serving the larger interest and “moving forward as one people (Malaysians)”. Another indigenous officer, R5, mentioned that “you are serving the society.” and “I view Malaysians as my customers”. The only exception was the response from one officer, R6, who highlighted that he joined the civil service “part of it is because of religion...another part is because of patriotism”.

The responses from non-indigenous officers were slightly nuanced. While they all spoke of wanting to serve society and public interest, they also mentioned that they joined the service to serve their specific community. One non-indigenous officer, R16, remarked that “I once told a panel of interviewers that the number of Chinese in this sector is so small” and that “I wanted to improve my community”. Another non-indigenous PTD officer, R26 remarked that one of her reasons to join the PTD was to help the community. The officer spoke that the “Indian population size is very small (less than 7 percent). I feel if I am there, I would be able to help...” the officer also mentioned the perks of being in such a service saying that “...the power is so immense. This is not being racist. I tend to see it from an angle, if you are a Malay, you give back to your community and uplift. If the Chinese get to do for their society and uplift and Indians (also) get to do.”

The officers were then briefed on each dimension of PSM and asked to identify a particular dimension of PSM that best fits them. R21, a non-indigenous respondent pointed to “attraction to policymaking”, saying that after having worked as an activist in a not-for-profit organisation he felt that his community (Indian) needed the most help. Another non-indigenous

respondent, R24, also shared the need to help his community pointing out the small population of his race (Indian) and the need to uplift the community. Another non-indigenous officer, R11, chose the “ability to influence public policies” reasoning that:

“It is my dream to work in the public sector because there is so little percentage of Chinese in the bureaucracy. I am not racist but if I am in the system, I can lead my community”.

The responses from indigenous officers’ contrast that of non-indigenous officers. Being in the majority, indigenous officers used general terms like “serve the nation”, “responsibility to society” or “the need to think of others”. Three indigenous respondents cited compassion as a prime motivator. One officer, R21, pointed out that “as a decision-maker in public policy, I will make sure that I will identify other people’s needs and it is my responsibility to serve our nation.” Another officer, R25, chose “commitment to public value” as he felt that “as a public servant, I feel that I need to think for others and everyone around me in terms of public values.” One indigenous officer, R20, however, took exception to remarks posted by other indigenous officers. The officer chose “attracting to public policy” because she felt that the dimension best reflected the need to change the life of his “people.” This respondent came from an indigenous tribe in Sabah, and she felt the need to concentrate on issues in her hometown.

The responses indicate that when it comes to delivering the public good, officers in a heterogeneous environment had a varied idea of who the beneficiaries are. There is every likelihood that “serving the public” could mean serving the public in general as it is about serving a specific community. While indigenous officers generally targeted the larger community, responses from non-indigenous officers were more qualified and directed toward serving their specific communities, not just the larger society. We turn now to another important aspect of the probe – the role of institutions in influencing or determining an individual’s PSM.

Institutional Quality and Heterogeneity

To gauge the impact of ethnically-exclusive institutions we used three proxies to measure the impact of ethnically-exclusive institutions on an individual’s motivation to serve in the public sector. The proxies are – socialisation (primary and secondary), views of the civil service and choice of the employment sector. These proxies reflect the degree in which institutions like family, schools, place of employment can impact one’s view of public service and disposition to serve public interest.

We found that indigenous and non-indigenous officers underwent different socialisation process that can influence individual's decision to serve in the civil service. Nine out of ten indigenous officers mentioned that they joined the PTD scheme because of primary socialisation. The officers mentioned having parents, siblings, spouses or friends who were public servants.

The responses by indigenous officers contrasted that of non-indigenous officers. Non-indigenous officers mentioned that their motivation to serve the civil service was the result of secondary socialisation. Had it been primary socialisation, the officers felt that they would not be impelled to consider public service. This is because there was little and no encouragement from people close to them to join the civil service. Fourteen out of eighteen non-indigenous respondents mentioned that their family members did not support their application to be PTD officers. The officers only knew about the civil service and decided to join the PTD scheme from secondary socialisation - from university lecturers, supervisors and university friends. They also highlighted that their loved ones did not see a career in public service as something worth pursuing; they instead urged the officers to join the private sector for better pay and career opportunities or even seek overseas employment. One respondent, R12, remarked that, "my parents did not agree with my decisions to be part of this scheme...they said that I deserve a better job than working for the government and told me I would go further by staying away from Malaysia." One officer, R15, only got to know about the PTD scheme after he clinched a government scholarship. Another officer, R17, said he knew about PTD after serving as Perdana Fellow saying that the fellowship was an eye-opener as it gave her a better appreciation of the inner workings of the civil service. Another non-indigenous officer, R15, remarked on the importance of secondary socialisation saying that "being a Perdana fellow informed me of the PTD...Else, I did not know." Only one non-indigenous officer, R26, gave a different response saying that she has been socialised very early about the need to serve. The officer mentioned of her early exposure to the life of a civil servant that prompted her to opt for the scheme. She said "Back then when my mum who was working in the Agricultural office, we used to spend time in her office after school. That was the time when I saw the officers, they were very friendly and warm to us. I knew I would love to be working in the public sector."

The powerful impact of institutions in a heterogeneous setting is also reflected when we probed officers on their views of the PTD scheme and their experience applying for the scheme. This question was aimed at gauging officers' perception of the civil service and their assessment of the fairness of the selection process in the civil service given the often-cited view of discriminatory hiring practices.

The non-indigenous officers acknowledged that they had initial reservations when applying for the scheme; all of them thought that securing a job in the public sector was going to be difficult given their perception that the civil service prioritise indigenous applicants. Against their own expectations, nearly all non-indigenous officers – sixteen out of eighteen non-indigenous respondents - said that they secured a place in the scheme on their first attempt. Having completed the selection process, one non-indigenous officer, R22, remarked that the low number of non-indigenous applications was because of perception. She elaborated that “People of my race perceived the government jobs very negatively. They always assume that they will not be given a chance to join the scheme, but no one applied. This proved that the system is fair, and we (Chinese) never tried applying for government jobs but claimed that the system is unfair.” Another non-indigenous officer, R28, also gave a similar assessment, mentioning that there was a common perception that non-indigenous applicants would not get a place in the scheme. Another respondent, R12, a graduate from an American university gave a similar remark saying that “Our people do not know a lot about government jobs because the pay is low. My parents think I should work in the private sector and earn more money because I am a US graduate.”

The ease in gaining a place in the PTD scheme for non-indigenous officers contrasted with that experienced by indigenous officers. Indigenous officers felt that the recruitment process was stringent, something they did not expect. Only two indigenous officers secured a place in the scheme on their first attempt, five indigenous respondents secured the place after attempting twice, two respondents who got into the scheme on their third attempt and another officer who secured a place in the scheme in her fourth attempt.

We also asked respondents on why they chose the public sector and their experience, if any, of past employment sectors. This was to investigate two things. The first was to examine whether officers’ decision to serve the public service was due to “altruistic, non-monetary, non-tangible” motivation or whether their decision to be in the public sector was due to rational, extrinsically driven factors like better pay or better career prospects or job security. The second, drawing on Edward’s (2005) and Woo’s (2018) findings of the relationship of employment sectors with ethnicity, was to find out whether officer’s decision to be in the public service could potentially be dependent on Malaysia’s institutional quality.

In broad terms, there is no distinct difference between non-indigenous and indigenous officers when it comes to reasons to join the service; all officers displayed an almost similar mix of PSM. Indigenous officers, cited highly on items like “job security”, “challenging job content”, “high salary”, “helping others” and “accomplishing something worthwhile.” Non-

indigenous officers rated highly on items like, “job security”, “job that is useful to society”, “career development”, “prestige and status.” Indian officers rated highly on items like, “helping others”, “job that is useful to society”, “prestige and status”.

Despite the broad similarities, “high salary” is frequently mentioned by indigenous officers as their most important consideration when choosing the public sector. When probed, most indigenous officers gave the response that the pay in the public sector was more attractive than the private sector. This is surprising given popular perception that the public sector pays less than the private sector. Though the officers cited altruistic quality of wanting to serve “society or Malaysians in general,” they also commented that they joined the public service because they had difficulty getting employment in the private sector. Indigenous officers who had the experience of working in the private sector cited “low pay” and “discrimination.” Some also added that it was the frustration of not getting a well-paying and rewarding career in the private sector that drove them to consider the public sector. One officer, who holds a Ph.D., told of her difficult experience working in the private sector that forced her to seek public sector employment. She remarked that “There is bias in the private sector. I was treated and paid differently. The private sector pays non-Malays with lower academic qualification higher than the Malays”. Another respondent, R4, mentioned that it was, “racial discrimination in terms of pay and job position,” which forced her to leave for a public sector job. Another indigenous officer mentioned that joining the PTD scheme was a better option because he faced discrimination in the private sector when it came to job scope and pay. He was not able to get a job that matched his qualifications in law and governance. One of the other indigenous officers mentioned that despite being a degree holder, she held the position of administrative clerk for four years in the private sector and admitted that “racial discrimination in terms of pay and job position” made her choose the public sector.

The non-indigenous officers gave contrasting responses, all of them rated private sector perks as more attractive than that of the public sector and that they joined the civil sector because of non-monetary benefits. In fact, discrimination in the private sector was not mentioned by non-indigenous officers as they all pointed to getting attractive salaries in the private sector.

It was clear that non-indigenous officers joined the civil service on mainly altruistic reasons. They mentioned that the public sector allowed them to serve the larger society and not narrow private interest. One non-indigenous officer, R28, said that although the salary and position in the private sector were attractive, “I am only contributing to one organisation”. Another officer mentioned that the private sector job was not her calling. She mentioned that

after having been a Perdana fellow, she had a new perspective of the public service pointing out that that “I admire higher civil service officer’s role in the public service... They put in so much effort in their duties to improve public service delivery...” Another respondent (non-indigenous), R21, who used to work for a not-for-profit (NGO) organisation, mentioned that he chose the public sector because working in an NGO gave him limited power to improve the quality of life and deliver quality public good. There were, however, exceptions; one non-indigenous officer said that he joined the scheme to “try-out” while another officer, R24, said he chose the PTD scheme to explore different job scope.

The responses demonstrate the huge influence that exclusive institutions can exact on an individual’s PSM. The responses show that institutions can determine social behavioural patterns, roles, rules, values, ceremonies and are embedded by way of religion, family and other social structures that provide order, stability, and predictability to behaviour (March, 1989; James L Perry & Annie Hondeghem, 2008). The responses demonstrate two things; first that institutions are powerful in influencing officers’ employment option and, second, that ethnically-exclusive institutions operate in Malaysia’s employment sector, judging from the perception from the officers that one ethnic group stands better chance of employment than other ethnic groups – be it in the private sector or the public sector. The responses show that, even though you might have a liking for public service, your ultimate choice of working in the public sector or private sector can be determined by ethnic identity.

Study Discussion and Propositions

The responses by the officers confirm that ethnic heterogeneity matters when we assess individual’s public service motivation. The responses reveal several propositions. The first is that having the motivation to do public service is not enough in a heterogenous setting. One’s ethnic identity can be critical. You might have PSM but ethnic identity and with it, the quality of socialisation, can determine one’s chance of ending up in the public service. Ethnic imperatives and PSM are related to many of the institutions in a heterogeneous society and these include the family, schools and even employment sectors. Malaysians defined themselves along ethnic lines because of their consistent exposure to ethnically exclusive institutions – family, the schools they go to and the friends they make. Ethnic categories are brought to life and operationalise in everyday encounters - education, personal values and beliefs or even ideology - so much so that the individual’s decision to be in public service and their perceptions of the civil service are modulated through ethnically - exclusive institutions.

A second proposition is that there is the need to account the importance of socio-historical context - and with it the significance of exclusive institutions – when determining motives to public service. The responses show that context can determine one’s perception of the civil service. Context can decide one’s chances to be in public service and determine one’s motivation toward public service. An individual may have an interest in the public service, but the eventuality of joining the public service is determined by ethnically exclusive institutions. In the Malaysian case, the nature of affirmative action and Malay privileges that have been imbued in the civil service over the years have spun different perceptions of one’s chance to secure civil service jobs. This perception that the civil service is only meant for Malays is reinforced by ethnic-based institutions (family, schools, workplaces). Accordingly, the possibility of two individuals – both with innate PSM disposition - joining the public service depends on their exposure to the different nature of Malaysia’s exclusive ethnic institutions that are products of Malaysia’s historical, political and economic processes.

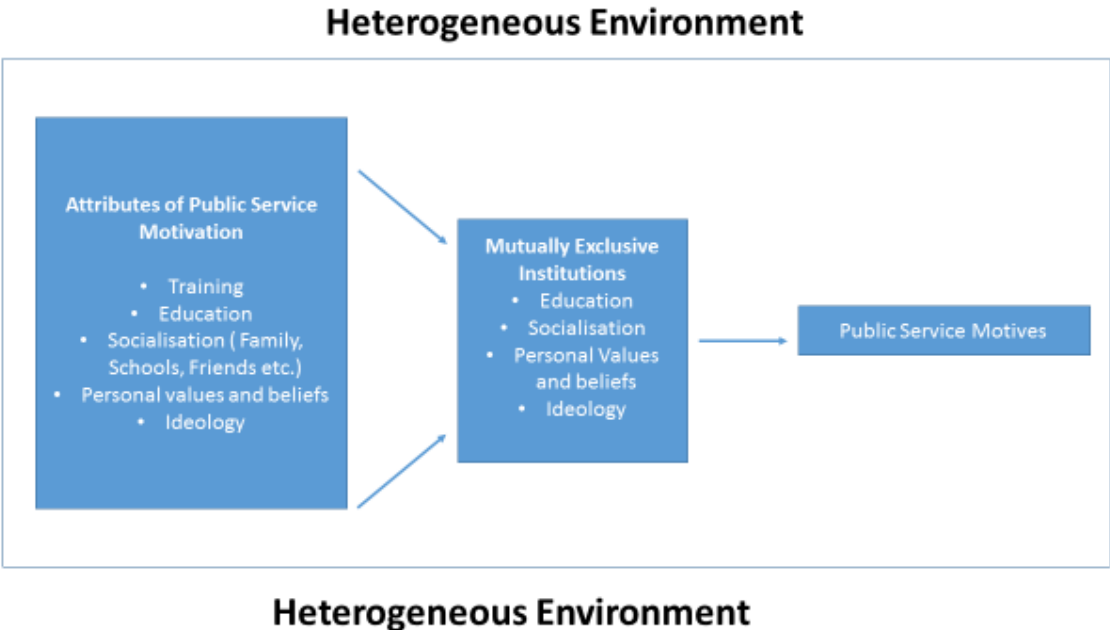
A third proposition is that an individual’s idea of “public service” is determined by ethnic considerations as a result of exposure to heterogeneous institutional setting. The responses show that individuals can generate different versions of what it means to serve society based on respondents’ “institutional” experience. Put differently, in an ethnically-heterogeneous setting, “doing good to society” is filtered by exclusive institutions that took a more nuanced meaning. In the case of Malaysia, the officers might mention the need to serve society, but they might, at the same time, stressed their motivation to be of service to their own ethnic community. These responses find parallels with the work of Mun, Fee, Jawan, and Darshan (2015) that suggests Malaysia’s ethnic groups have different ideas about society, one where non-Malays perceived themselves as being marginalised and feel the need for them to stay united and protect each other against state actions and, on the other hand, Malays view themselves as indigenous people with an obligation and responsibility to serve the country.

The fourth proposition is that socialisation exercised via ethnically exclusive institutions is crucial in determining one’s preference for and perception of the public sector. Ethnically-exclusive institutions can generate socialisation processes that are capable of producing multiple perceptions of certain institutions (such as the civil service or private sector) that will determine one’s chances to serve in the public sector. So, unlike the suggestions by (Delfgaauw & Dur, 2008; Lewis & Frank, 2002; Rainey, 1982) that individuals with high PSM would naturally gravitate toward public sector employment, the Malaysian example suggests that in a heterogeneous setting, it might not necessarily be the case; primary and secondary socialisation can produce different impressions of the civil service. Even when the individual has the

inclination to serve it can remain latent as a result of socialisation. The responses showed that had it not been for secondary socialisation, many of the officers might not end up in the civil service. This is because they were socialised – primary socialisation- into thinking that the civil service was only for certain groups or that the civil service was an unattractive option. Accordingly, there is a high likelihood that a person with PSM could stay out of government service as a result of different hurdles and incentives imposed by exclusive institutions.

Figure 1, below, captures the above key propositions of this study. It underlines the relationship between attributes, ethnic heterogeneity and the generation of exclusive institutions and PSM. The diagram explains that while personal attributes – like education, personal values and identity, socialisation, political orientations - are important when considering one’s public service motivation (Bright, 2016; Perry, 1997; Ritz & Brewer, 2013; Vandenabeele, 2011), in a heterogeneous setting such attributes need to be placed in a context, or rather, filtered, due to the presence of exclusive institutions. The diagram captures the fact that an ethnically heterogeneous environment has the potential to produce numerous types of exclusive institutions that can influence one’s perception of the public service, alter one’s motivation to serve in the public service or even eliminate one’s chances of joining the civil service. In other words, in an ethnically-heterogeneous setting, a person’s education, training, socialisation process, personal belief system and values are modulated by society’s many exclusive institutions that affect motivation toward public service.

Figure 1. Public Service Motivation in an Ethnically Heterogeneous Environment



Conclusion

We make no pretence that this paper is anything more than an exploratory study. It is part of a larger project that seeks to diagnose the different motivational sets of civil servants in heterogeneous settings. If anything, it points to the need for more comparative and cross-national research to improve the conceptualisation and operational measurement of PSM in multiple contexts. While we acknowledge that heterogeneity is a contested and loaded term, the main thrust of this study is that ethnic heterogeneity can take on special significance if is supported by the constant building and reinforcement of exclusive institutions that, end up being a near arbiter of one's motivation to serve and one's choice of employment. Indeed, the empirical findings underscore the need to develop conceptual frameworks and propositions that better capture public service motivation in terms of context, specifically, heterogeneous settings. Perhaps, future works on conceptualising PSM could be more "attentive to linguistic, contextual and cultural considerations." (Perry, 2010, 687) This study also suggests the relevance of an interdisciplinary approach to examining PSM. Issues concerning PSM can be probed from the fields of psychology, sociology, leadership, management, politics and public policy. Nonetheless, the hope is that the conceptual parameters highlighted in this study lead to more understanding of the various antecedents of public service motivation.

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