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Employees without a Cause: The Motivational Effects of Prosocial Impact in Public Service

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EMPLOYEES WITHOUT A CAUSE: THE MOTIVATIONAL EFFECTS OF PROSOCIAL IMPACT IN PUBLIC SERVICE

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ABSTRACT: *Public service employees often lack opportunities to see the prosocial impact of their jobs—how their efforts make a difference in other people's lives. Drawing on recent job design theory and research, I tested the hypothesis that the motivation of public service employees can be enhanced by connecting them to their prosocial impact. In a longitudinal quasi-experiment, a group of fundraising callers serving a public university met a fellowship student who benefited from the funds raised by the organization. A full month later, these callers increased significantly in the number of pledges and the amount of donation money that they obtained, whereas callers in a control group did not change on these measures. I discuss the implications of these results for theory, research, and practice related to work motivation in public service.*

I really love what I am doing... I am making a difference. I am truly serving the public in a positive way.

<div align="right">– Police captain (Jia 2004)</div>

One of my former first grade students, Monica Groves, had been selected to be shadowed by NBC Dateline during her first year of teaching in the Teach for America program. During Monica's interviews, she stated that I, as her first grader teacher, was an inspiration for the selection of her vocation. I was thrilled to learn that Monica had recalled so many specific, positive memories from her first grade educational experience... [A producer] suggested that I fly to Atlanta and make a surprise visit to Monica's sixth grade classroom... To spend the rest of the day in Monica's classroom... This day truly was one of the highlights of my life... I am amazed that Monica remembers so many of her first grade experiences in our classroom, as well as the values, she recalls, I tried to instill in my students... The goal of every teacher is to make a lasting contribution in the lives of their students. It was my pleasure to

> *observe Monica, a successful student from my classroom, making a*
> *difference in the lives of her students.*
>
> – Public schoolteacher (MSNBC 2006)

A core purpose of public service work is to make a positive difference in the health, safety, and well-being of individuals, groups, and communities (Perry 1996; 1997; 2000; Piliavin, Grube, and Callero 2002; Rainey 1997). Firefighters and paramedics save lives (Regehr, Goldberg, and Hughes 2002; Thompson and Bono 1993), police officers protect and serve communities (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Van Maanen 1975), public defenders safeguard the constitutional rights of citizens (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999), social workers improve the welfare of families (Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002), lifeguards promote the safety of swimmers (Harrell and Boisvert 2003), and military officers protect the safety of countries (Britt, Adler, and Bartone 2001). The individuals, groups, and communities that benefit from these jobs depend on motivated employees to perform them effectively.

Unfortunately, managers face considerable challenges in motivating employees in public service jobs, which are riddled with high levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion (for reviews, see Cordes and Dougherty 1993; Halbesleben and Buckley 2004; Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter 2001). Employees in public service jobs are often exposed to extensive negative feedback (Lee and Ashforth 1996), required to harm the people their jobs are designed to help (Molinsky and Margolis 2005), and overloaded with responsibility for helping (Marshall, Barnett, and Sayer 1997). These challenges can lead to traumatic events (Brough 2004) that result in depression and post-traumatic stress disorders (Regehr 2001).

In recent years, scholars have begun to develop models for understanding and solving these motivational challenges of public service jobs (see Bright 2005; Horton and Hondeghem 2006; Perry 2000). Many existing models focus on individualistic, instrumental goals and incentives (Wright 2001; 2004), and scholars have criticized these models for failing to capture the importance of the prosocial purpose of public service jobs (Houston 2000; 2006; Perry 1996; 2000). Current models that do consider the prosocial purpose of public service jobs assume that the motivation to serve the public is a relatively stable individual difference (Perry and Wise 1990), and therefore overlook opportunities for organizations to cultivate this motivation (for an exception, see Moynihan and Pandey 2007). The field needs a broader array of theoretically sophisticated, practically useful frameworks for understanding how the motivation of public service employees can be increased (Behn 1995; Kelman 2005; Perry 2000; Perry and Porter 1982; Wright 2001; 2004).

In this article, I draw on recent job design theory and research to propose that the motivation of public service employees can be increased by connecting them to the prosocial impact of their jobs, enabling them to understand how their work makes a difference in other people's lives. I present the results of a quasi-experiment with fundraising callers serving a public university that tests this proposition. The results suggest that subtle alterations to job designs to accentuate the prosocial impact of

employees' efforts may have a surprisingly powerful effect on their motivation. I discuss the implications of these results for theory, research, and practice related to work motivation in public service.

WORK MOTIVATION IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Motivation is an umbrella concept that captures the psychological forces that direct, energize, and maintain action (e.g., Latham and Pinder 2005). Many models of motivation in public service jobs are based on traditional motivation theory, emphasizing the importance of individualistic, instrumentally oriented goals and incentives. For example, scholars have recommended setting difficult, specific goals, providing rewards for goal attainment, and removing procedural constraints as steps toward increasing the motivation of public service employees (for a review, see Wright 2001). Recent research has emphasized that these models are incomplete, as public service employees are less concerned with financial rewards, and more concerned with doing important work and contributing to society, than private sector employees (Houston 2000; 2006). Accordingly, pay-for-performance plans, which have been highly effective in the private sector (for reviews, see Rynes, Gerhart, and Minette 2004; Rynes, Gerhart, and Parks 2005), have often been ineffective in motivating public service employees (Crewson 1997; Houston 2000; Ingraham 1993; Jurkiewicz, Massey, and Brown 1998; Kellough and Lu 1993; Perry, Mesch, and Paarlberg 2006).

Thus, current models of public service motivation aim to transcend individualistic goals and incentives by examining the unique prosocial focus of public service jobs. Perry and Wise (1990) introduced the concept of public service motivation to describe individual predispositions toward serving others via public institutions. Empirical research suggests that public service motivation is grounded in four prosocial motives: attraction to public policy making, commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice (Perry 1996; 1997; Vandenabeele, Scheepers, and Hondeghem 2006). Researchers have discovered that the prosocial purpose of public service work can be highly motivating, as recent studies of federal employees provide suggestive evidence of higher job performance among those with high levels of public service motivation (Alonso and Lewis 2001; Brewer and Selden 1998; Naff and Crum 1999). However, a limitation of these findings is that scholars have conceptualized public service motivation as a stable individual predisposition (Perry 1996; Perry and Wise 1990), identifying underlying personal characteristics associated with the desire to serve the public (Bright 2005; Perry 1997), and examining how this desire takes different forms for different individuals (Brewer, Selden, and Facer 2000). Although information about the dispositional nature of public service motivation is important, knowledge is lacking about the role of work contexts in cultivating public service motivation, a topic of deep concern to both scholars and practitioners (e.g., Behn 1995; Dilulio 1994; Kelman 2007). In particular, little research has examined the role that job characteristics and work environments play in cultivating public service motivation (Perry 2000).

Prosocial Impact

The concept of prosocial impact provides a valuable window into understanding how the motivation of public service employees can be enhanced. Prosocial impact refers to the degree to which employees' actions make a difference in the lives of other people—the extent to which employees' efforts protect, promote, or contribute to the welfare of others (Grant 2007; 2008a). Prosocial impact is a core theme underlying research on a variety of individual actions and organizational practices directed toward benefiting others, including helping and citizenship behavior (e.g., Brief and Motowidlo 1986; Meglino and Korsgaard 2004), giving and generosity (e.g., Wade-Benzoni 2002; 2006), social responsibility (e.g., Wood 1991), generativity (e.g., McAdams and de St. Aubin 1992), social contribution (e.g., Keyes 1998), altruism (e.g., Piliavin and Charng 1990), volunteering (e.g., Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, and Schroeder 2005), care and social support (e.g., Kahn 1998), compassion (e.g., Dutton, Worline, Frost, and Lilius 2006), and cooperation (e.g., Smith, Carroll, and Ashford 1995).

Prosocial impact is particularly important to public service employees, who value making a difference in other people's lives (Perry 1996) and describe making a difference as a key source of meaning and purpose in their work (Colby, Sippola, and Phelps 2001). Unfortunately, for at least three reasons, public service jobs are often not structured to enable employees to see the prosocial impact of their efforts (Marshall et al. 1997). First, many public service jobs involve considerable red tape that creates obstacles to making a difference (Scott and Pandey 2005). Second, many public service jobs that are high in task significance (Hackman and Oldham 1976) are designed to protect communities from rare, high-consequence accidents and disasters. These jobs provide scarce opportunities for employees to experience their work as making a difference. For example, hostage negotiators (Vecchi, Van Hasselt, and Romano 2005), pool lifeguards (Ward, Johnson, Ward, and Jones 1997), and nuclear power plant employees (Buffardi, Fleishman, Morath, and McCarthy 2000; Perrow 1984) only occasionally encounter situations that allow them to make a difference. Third, many of the public service jobs that enable employees to see the immediate prosocial impact of their efforts provide little exposure to the more enduring prosocial impact of these efforts, as in lifesaving jobs such as firefighting (Regehr and Bober 2005), emergency medical services (Palmer 1983), and policing (Jermier, Gaines, and McIntosh 1989). A lack of awareness of the lasting prosocial impact of their jobs may be one contributing factor to the aforementioned motivational challenges that managers and employees face in public service work.

Connecting Employees to Prosocial Impact

To fill this gap, I draw on recent job design theory suggesting that connecting employees to the prosocial impact of their jobs may play a significant role in increasing their motivation (Grant 2007). Specifically, I propose that the motivation of public service employees may be enhanced by redesigning their jobs to provide them with contact with the beneficiaries of their work. Contact with beneficiaries refers to the degree to which jobs are structured to provide employees with opportunities to interact with the people affected by their work. These interactions can range from brief, temporary encounters to repeated exchanges that result in lasting relationships (Gutek, Bhappu, Liao-Troth, and

Cherry 1999). For example, contact with beneficiaries may include federal policymakers meeting the citizens whose economic welfare is improved by their policies, police officers meeting the community members whose safety is protected by their actions, or paramedics reconnecting with the victims whose lives are saved by their efforts.

From a theoretical perspective, contact with beneficiaries enables employees to receive information and feedback about the difference that their efforts can make in beneficiaries' lives, strengthening their awareness that their actions can have a prosocial impact (Grant 2007; 2008a; Grant, Campbell, Chen, Cottone, Lapedis, and Lee 2007). When employees have contact with beneficiaries, they can receive verbal comments and observe physical cues that provide them with information about the positive impact of their actions on beneficiaries. This awareness of prosocial impact signals to employees that their work serves a personally meaningful, socially significant purpose, indicating that they can express and fulfill their values and motives directed toward making a difference (Perry 2000; Shamir 1991). As such, employees are likely to display higher levels of motivation, investing additional time and energy in their work in order to achieve a prosocial impact. This reasoning is consistent with the logics of classic expectancy and planned behavior theories of motivation, which hold that when employees are aware that their actions have the potential to bring about a personally valued outcome, they are more likely to direct their effort toward achieving this outcome (e.g., Ajzen 1991; Van Eerde and Thierry 1996; Vroom 1964). Thus, contact with beneficiaries is proposed to enable employees to understand how their work makes a difference, and thereby increase their motivation.[1]

Consistent with this theoretical proposition, innovative public organizations are already attempting to connect employees to their prosocial impact by providing contact with beneficiaries. For example, Northwestern University has recently developed a "buddy program" that introduces Alzheimer's scientists to patients. Scientists report that interacting with patients helps to remind them how their work can make a difference. As one scientist explained, "I've been working on Alzheimer's disease maybe four years now, and I don't know anyone with Alzheimer's . . . I had absolutely no idea what it's like living as a patient" (CNN 2005).

Although establishing contact with beneficiaries appears to be a promising step toward connecting employees to the prosocial impact of their jobs, little empirical research has directly examined how it affects the motivation of public service employees. To fill this gap, I conducted a quasi-experiment examining whether a brief opportunity for contact with one beneficiary is sufficient to increase the motivation of fundraising callers serving a public university. The results advance existing theory and research by highlighting practical steps that public managers may take to increase the motivation of public service employees by connecting them to the prosocial impact of their jobs.

METHODS

Sample

The quasi-experiment focused on a sample of paid fundraising callers serving a large public university in the Midwest United States. Forty-five callers (19 female,

26 male, average tenure 2.36 months, $SD = 2.49$ months) participated in the quasi-experiment. The callers were undergraduate students paid hourly for calling alumni of the university and attempting to persuade them to make financial donations. Each caller was responsible for contacting a mixture of non-donors, former donors, first-time donors, and current donors. The prospective donors were graduates of a wide range of schools and departments across the university, including business, law, nursing, social work, engineering, education, psychology, sociology, political science, economics, pharmacology, public health, physics, biology, chemistry, architecture, and music. Fundraising represented a particularly appropriate setting in which to conduct this research given that commissions and incentive compensation are disallowed by a recently developed code of ethics in fundraising (Association of Fundraising Professionals 2006). These restrictions on financial incentives in fundraising parallel norms throughout the public and nonprofit sectors, and may increase the importance of non-monetary motivational incentives.

Design and Procedures

I capitalized on a naturally occurring experiment introduced by managers, which took place when managers invited a fellowship recipient to speak with callers about how their work had made a difference in her life. Callers present on this day served as the intervention group, and callers not present on this day served as the control group. All callers were required to work the same number of hours and shifts per week, but were allowed to sign up for shifts of their choice. Accordingly, callers were divided between the two groups according to work schedules in a given week, such that callers who arrived for a shift on a Wednesday constituted the prosocial impact group ($n = 23$), and callers who did not arrive for that shift constituted the control group ($n = 22$). Although this assignment procedure does not qualify as random, it met the important criterion of preventing callers from self-selecting into treatment conditions (Campbell and Stanley 1966), as callers were not aware that the intervention would be occurring.

In the prosocial impact group, at the beginning of callers' shifts, an anthropology graduate student spoke about the difference that the funds raised by the callers had made in her life. She discussed the importance of her research for the field of anthropology, and described her background as a researcher. She explained that she received a fellowship that was made possible by the donations that the callers raised, enabling her to travel and collect data. The callers then had the opportunity to ask questions, which focused on her research, how she obtained the fellowship, and how she used the funds. The entire interaction between the callers and the fellowship student lasted for 15 minutes. In the control group, the callers did not receive this interaction. Other than observable demographic characteristics, the research team and the fellowship student were blind to all information about callers.

Measures

To measure caller motivation, the fundraising organization provided data on two automatically recorded metrics. The first metric measured the number of pledges

that callers obtained per week, and the second metric measured the total amount of donation money that callers obtained per week. These metrics are appropriate indicators of motivation given that productivity and performance in fundraising jobs have been shown to depend heavily on the amount of effort and persistence that callers are willing to display (e.g., Seligman and Schulman 1986). Moreover, the metrics were collected both before and after the intervention. This made it possible to control for callers' baseline levels on the metrics, such that significant changes in pledges and donation money could be attributed to increases in motivation. Both metrics were provided for two weeklong time intervals. The first time interval (pretest) was the one-week interval immediately preceding the intervention, and the second time interval (posttest) was a one-week interval a full month after the intervention. The one-month delay allowed for sufficient time to examine whether the intervention had a lasting effect on caller motivation.

RESULTS

Means and standard deviations for the motivation measures by group are displayed in Table 1. To assess the effects of the intervention, I began by comparing the groups on both dependent variables prior to the intervention. A MANOVA showed no difference between the two groups on pretest pledges obtained per week, $F(1, 43) = .12$, ns, nor on pretest donation money obtained per week, $F(1, 43) = .74$, ns. I then compared the groups on both dependent variables one month after the intervention. A MANOVA showed significant differences between the two groups on posttest pledges obtained per week, $F(1, 43) = 11.17$, $p < .01$, and on posttest donation money obtained per week, $F(1, 43) = 14.42$, $p < .001$. I then conducted repeated-measures ANOVAs for each of the two dependent variables. The ANOVAs indicated significant interactions between time and group on pledges obtained per week, $F(1, 42) = 9.27$, $p < .01$, and donation money obtained per week, $F(1, 43) = 16.78$,

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations by Treatment Groups

Treatment Group	Pledges Obtained Per Week		Donation Money Obtained Per Week	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Control	159.98 (89.61)	205.52 (137.02)	$454.55 (414.02)	$619.77 (307.90)
Prosocial Impact	149.09 (113.93)	364.32 (175.78)	$411.74 (474.18)	$2,083.52 (1725.76)

Notes. As discussed in the text, repeated-measures ANOVAs indicated significant interactions between time and condition on pledges obtained per week, $F(1, 42) = 9.27$, $p < .01$, and donation money obtained per week, $F(1, 43) = 16.78$, $p < .001$. Paired-samples t tests within each condition showed that callers in the prosocial impact condition increased significantly in pledges obtained per week, $t(21) = 4.87$, $p < .001$, and donation money obtained per week, $t(22) = 4.79$, $p < .001$; conversely, callers in the control condition did not change significantly in pledges obtained per week, $t(21) = 1.34$, ns, nor in donation money obtained per week, $t(21) = 1.86$, ns.

$p < .001$. To facilitate the interpretation of these results, I conducted paired-samples *t* tests within each group. Callers in the prosocial impact group increased significantly in pledges obtained per week, $t(21) = 4.87$, $p < .001$, and donation money obtained per week, $t(22) = 4.79$, $p < .001$. Callers in the control group, on the other hand, did not change significantly in pledges obtained per week, $t(21) = 1.34$, *ns*, nor in donation money obtained per week, $t(21) = 1.86$, *ns*.

DISCUSSION

I tested the proposition that the motivation of public service employees can be increased through exposure to information about the prosocial impact of their jobs. A quasi-experiment allowed fundraising callers to spend merely 15 minutes learning about the difference that their efforts made in the life of one fellowship student. A full month after learning about this prosocial impact, fundraising callers increased more than twofold in the number of weekly pledges that they obtained and more than fivefold in the amount of weekly donation money that they obtained. Conversely, callers in the control group did not change in pledges or donation money obtained over the same time period. These findings suggest that connecting public service employees to the prosocial impact of their work can enhance their motivation. Considering the minimal nature of the manipulations, the effects are particularly powerful (Prentice and Miller 1992).

The findings constructively replicate the results reported by Grant and colleagues (Grant 2008a; Grant et al. 2007), who conducted true field experiments with different samples of fundraising callers using controlled contact with scholarship recipients and random assignment to treatment conditions. In these true field experiments, the use of random assignment to controlled treatments facilitated causal inferences by ruling out threats to internal validity (Campbell and Stanley 1966). However, true field experiments remain open to threats to external validity: controlled manipulations can change the nature of the phenomenon under study, and the mere knowledge of participating in an experiment can change employees' responses (Argyris 1975; Evans 1976; Lawler 1977; Orne 1962; Rosenthal 1994; Wall, Kemp, Jackson, and Clegg 1986). The present quasi-experiment minimizes these threats by capitalizing on a more natural prosocial impact manipulation that occurred without researcher intervention.

Theoretical Implications

Although public service work plays an invaluable role in protecting and enhancing the welfare of individuals and communities, many public service employees are demotivated, burned out, and emotionally exhausted. Existing models of public service motivation have been limited by either a focus on individualistic goals and incentives (Perry 2000; Wright 2001; 2004) without sufficient consideration of the prosocial purpose of public service (Houston 2000), or an emphasis on enduring dispositions toward public service motivation (Brewer et al. 2000; Bright 2005; Perry

1996; 1997) without investigation of how work contexts can be designed to cultivate this motivation. This article takes two steps toward filling these gaps. First, rather than adopting an individualistic approach of changing employees' goals or incentives, I adopted a relational approach of changing employees' interactions with other people. Second, I conceptualized prosocial impact as a variable experience rather than a stable disposition. These steps open new doors for designing work contexts to cultivate motivation in public service jobs, identifying how small information about prosocial impact can play a large role in increasing employee motivation.

The use of a longitudinal quasi-experiment advances beyond existing correlational models (e.g., Alonso and Lewis 2001; Naff and Crum 1999; Moynihan and Pandey 2007; Perry 1996; 1997) to demonstrate the causal behavioral effects of connecting employees to their prosocial impact. In so doing, the findings highlight the importance of job design in influencing the motivation of public service employees. Whereas existing research focuses on the task, knowledge, and physical architectures of jobs (e.g., Campion and McClelland 1993; Fried and Ferris 1987; Hackman and Oldham 1976; 1980; Parker and Wall 1998; Parker, Wall, and Cordery 2001; Wright and Kim 2004), these findings emphasize the importance of the relational architectures of jobs that shape employees' interpersonal relationships and social connections (Grant 2007; Humphrey, Nahrgang, and Morgeson 2007; Morgeson and Humphrey 2006). The findings suggest that redesigning jobs to provide brief, temporary relationships with beneficiaries can be sufficient to enhance the motivation of public service employees.

The emphasis on prosocial impact also helps to build a bridge between public administration and public management scholarship and management and organizational behavior scholarship. The focus on prosocial impact is consistent with public administration conceptualizations of public service motivation (Perry 1996; 1997; 2000): the motives of attraction to public policy making, commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice are all directed toward the benefit of others. The focus on prosocial impact is also consistent with recent trends in management and organizational behavior emphasizing that acting to benefit others serves a variety of functions for employees, including cultivating a sense of meaning and purpose (Ruiz-Quintanilla and England 1996), building relationships (Flynn 2003), enhancing feelings of competence and value (Grant 2007; 2008a), and fulfilling core motives and values (Rioux and Penner 2001). Although researchers have long emphasized distinctions between public and private organizations (see Frank and Lewis 2004; Perry and Rainey 1988), cross-fertilization is now being encouraged by both public administration scholars (e.g., Kelman 2005; 2007; Perry; 2000; Wright 2001; 2004) and management and organizational scholars (e.g., Adler and Jermier 2005; Ouchi, Riordan, Lingle, and Porter 2005; Pettigrew 2005; Rynes and Shapiro 2005; Walsh, Weber, and Margolis 2003). As firms become increasingly concerned with connecting their work to a social purpose (Brickson 2005; Margolis and Walsh 2001; 2003; Orlitzky, Schmidt, and Rynes 2003), and begin to recognize that socially responsible firms are often more successful in attracting, motivating and retaining employees (e.g., Larson 2001; Thompson and Bunderson 2003; Turban and Greening 1997), collaboration between researchers studying prosocial impact in public and private organizations may prove generative.

Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to discuss several limitations of this research and how they may be resolved in future investigations. First, because only objective behavioral measures were available as dependent variables, it was not possible to examine the psychological and behavioral processes through which the prosocial impact intervention influenced caller motivation. It will be valuable for future studies to examine several explanatory processes, including increased confidence that one can make a meaningful contribution (Small and Loewenstein 2003), increased perceptions of prosocial impact, social worth, and commitments to beneficiaries (Grant 2008a; Grant et al. 2007), increased clarity of goals and objectives (Hackman, Oldham, Janson, and Purdy 1975), and the strategic use of the information about prosocial impact to persuade alumni to give donations. More generally, although I conceptualized the behavioral outcomes as outputs of public service motivation, I did not measure public service motivation itself. As such, it is not yet clear whether and how the prosocial impact intervention affects, or is affected by, public service motivation. In future research, it will be critical for scholars to measure public service motivation directly as a potential mediator that explains—and as a potential moderator that alters—the behavioral effects of connecting employees to their prosocial impact.

Second, it is possible that research design limitations played a role in explaining the results observed. If information about the prosocial impact intervention was diffused to callers in the control group, these callers may have responded with resentful demoralization, reducing their effort as a result of frustration with the unequal treatment that they received (Cook and Campbell 1979; Cook and Shadish 1994). Although dividing the two groups by shifts minimized the risk of this type of social interaction threat, further research should take additional steps to ensure that participants in the control group receive equal treatment. On a related note, because the callers were not assigned to groups using pure randomization procedures, I cannot rule out the possibility that callers who arrived for the Wednesday shift differed systematically from those who did not. Although the steps taken to prevent callers from self-selecting into groups strengthen the assignment procedures, future research should use pure random assignment techniques to ensure that the effects can be attributed to the experimental treatment (see Grant 2008a; Grant et al. 2007).

Third, the prosocial impact intervention confounded two manipulations: receiving the information firsthand from the beneficiary (information source) and receiving the information in person (information medium). To examine the active ingredients in the effects observed, future studies should draw on social psychological evidence that both the source and the medium matter: firsthand information is generally more credible and authentic than secondhand information (Levine and Valle 1975), and information is generally more persuasive when communicated in person than in writing (Chaiken and Eagly 1983; Alge, Wiethoff, and Klein 2003). Moreover, when it is not feasible to provide employees with firsthand contact with beneficiaries, should managers verbally relay stories secondhand, or should they share written stories authored by beneficiaries, as the Red Cross does when it posts stories about lifeguards making a difference on its website (American Red Cross Everyday Heroes

Archive 2006)? Managers need theoretically and empirically based guidelines for which of these two approaches is more likely to succeed.

Fourth, it will be important for future research to investigate the costs and boundary conditions related to connecting employees to their prosocial impact. With respect to costs, it is possible that employees may feel overwhelmed by excessive pressure and responsibility (Bolino and Turnley 2005; Grant 2008b), manipulated by managerially driven interventions (Alvesson and Willmott 1992), or traumatized by exposure to severe distress of beneficiaries (Brough 2004; Regehr 2001). With respect to boundary conditions, it will be important to examine several salient parameters along which connecting employees to prosocial impact may vary in motivating potential. One such parameter is the frequency of exposure to prosocial impact (e.g., Molinsky and Margolis 2005). Do employees habituate to repeated exposure, lessening its influence, or does repeated exposure reinforce the conviction that they are making a difference? Another key parameter is the nature of the interactions with beneficiaries (e.g., Halbesleben and Buckley 2004). Whereas the present research focused on pleasant, appreciative interactions with beneficiaries, it will be valuable for further studies to investigate whether interacting with rude, difficult, unpleasant, or ungrateful beneficiaries undermines rather than enhances motivation. Another significant parameter concerns the nature of the prosocial impact of the occupation (e.g., Colby et al. 2001). Connecting employees to their prosocial impact may pose significant challenges in occupations in which prosocial impact is geographically or temporally distant. For example, the epigram in the introduction about the teacher reconnecting with a first grade student whose life she changed suggests that in many occupations, a significant time delay may be necessary for prosocial impact to leave a visible imprint.

This point highlights an additional limitation: because the study focused on only one occupation, it is not yet evident whether the results generalize to other public service occupations. It will be fruitful for further research to examine how connecting employees in other occupations to their prosocial impact influences their motivation. Of particular interest are jobs in which performance outcomes are not concretely measurable or feedback from beneficiaries is unavailable. Furthermore, since the fundraising callers were college students, it will be important for additional research to examine how connecting adults to their prosocial impact influences their motivation. On one hand, it is plausible that student callers were especially responsive to the intervention because they were able to identify with fellowship recipients as members of their in-group (Stürmer, Snyder, and Omoto 2005). On the other hand, it is equally plausible that the student callers would be jealous of the fellowship recipients; whereas the callers were working in order to support themselves and pay for their college tuition, the fellowship recipients were freed from this burden. To tease apart these issues, future research should examine the broader psychological and behavioral implications of the experience of prosocial impact across different employees in different public service occupations.

Practical Implications

Both scholars and practitioners may draw on these findings to increase the motivation of public service employees by connecting them to their prosocial impact. As

an illustrative example, several students and I developed a pilot program to introduce police officers to stories about their departments making a difference in the community. Through the news media and our personal networks, we tracked down several local citizens who were grateful for the work that officers had performed. We asked the citizens to write stories about how the department's efforts had made a difference in their lives. We then shared the stories with officers and asked them to describe their reactions. One detective explained, ''This experience made me realize how rare positive feedback is in this profession. We never hear from citizens who appreciate what we do. It seems that this would be good for officer morale and mental health.'' I hope to see scholars and practitioners collaborate to develop, plan, implement, evaluate, refine, and institutionalize these initiatives in the future.

CONCLUSION

Employees in public service jobs perform tasks that are critical to protecting and promoting the welfare of individuals, groups, communities, and societies. However, their motivation is often limited by a lack of connection to the difference that their work makes in other people's lives. In the face of threats to human welfare from sources as diverse as terrorist attacks and natural disasters, the motivation of public service employees is perhaps more important than ever before. The findings presented in this article suggest that merely meeting the beneficiaries of their work can enhance the motivation of public service employees. These endeavors may play a valuable role in protecting the individuals, groups, communities, and societies that depend on public service employees' efforts.

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NOTE

1. Not all contact with beneficiaries is expected to be beneficial (e.g., Cordes and Dougherty 1993; Grant 2007). The complications of unpleasant contact and negative feedback are discussed later in this article.

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