

## Public Service Motivation, Wasta and Employee Outcomes in the Saudi Public Sector

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### Abstract

Public Service Motivation (PSM) is assumed to be a force for good in public organisations because it encapsulates attitudes and behaviours that are associated with higher levels of organisational commitment and job satisfaction. However, those positive effects may dissipate in challenging working environments characterized by powerful negative institutional forces. To explore these ideas, this paper presents an analysis of the separate and combined effects of PSM and wasta - an indigenous form of Arab nepotism - on employee outcomes using survey data from a large Saudi Arabian public organisation. The statistical results showed that both the rational - normative aspect of PSM (PSM1) and affective aspect of PSM (PSM2) are positively related to organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to quit. Wasta had negative relationships with organizational commitment and job satisfaction and a positive relationship with intention to quit. Further analysis revealed that wasta also substantially weakens the positive PSM-outcomes relationship. It had negative moderating effect on the relationship between PSM1 and organizational commitment as well as for the PSM2 - organizational commitment relationship. Wasta also had significant negative moderating effects on the relationship between PSM1 and job satisfaction as well as for the PSM2 - job satisfaction relationship. However, no significant moderation effect was found in the relationship between PSM1 and ITQ or for the PSM2-ITQ relationship. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings for public policy and administration are discussed.

**Keywords:** Public Service Motivation; Institutions; Wasta; Employee outcomes; Saudi Arabian public sector; Institutional perspective

### Introduction

For many years, scholars have emphasised the distinctive characteristics of public service, such as altruism, civic duty and a commitment to serve the community at large [1,2]. Perhaps the most comprehensive theory capturing the unique motives that arguably influence public servants is Public Service Motivation (PSM), which looks at "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organisations that might drive individuals to perform public service" [3]. One of the key arguments of this theory is that PSM has a positive relationship with employee outcomes in the public sector, because public organisations offer working environments consistent with the values of individuals motivated to serve the public [4,5]. However, the validity of these propositions has still rarely been tested in non-Western settings, with almost no research examining PSM in Arab public organisations [6]. Yet, such organisations represent an especially interesting context in which to examine the boundary conditions of PSM-outcomes relationship due to the unique institutional environment in which they operate. In particular, the institution of wasta, an indigenous form of nepotism within Arab societies, is highly likely to influence the relationship between PSM and employee outcomes, due to its all-pervasive and all-encompassing nature. To build knowledge around the dynamics of PSM, this paper therefore presents the findings from a study examining the separate and combined effects of PSM and wasta on employee outcomes in a large Saudi Arabian public organisation.

Most empirical studies have confirmed a positive link between PSM and organisational commitment; job satisfaction and decreased turnover intentions [7-10] but nonetheless, a number have not [11,12]. Such inconsistency may indicate that the PSM-outcomes relationship is contingent upon context. Indeed, Perry et al. [13] argue that the complex role that PSM plays in shaping employee outcomes in the public sector arises from the presence of important confounding contextual factors.

As a result, despite the general advancement of understanding of the importance of PSM for public employees' attitudes and behaviour, its precise dynamics in different contexts remains less clear [14].

One important way in which the role of context in shaping the dynamics of PSM in public organisations can be investigated is through the influence of institutions. An institution can be defined as "a formal or informal, structural, societal or political phenomenon that transcends the individual level, that is based on more or less common values, has a certain degree of stability and influences behaviour" [15]. Researchers have studied institutional effects on PSM and employee outcomes at various levels of analysis. At the micro-level, PSM has been linked to individuals' family socialization, their commitment to volunteering and the characteristics of the job that they do [16-18]. At the meso-level, organisational institutions such as red tape, HRM practices and public organisation logics have been found to be influential [19-21]. Another less explored aspect of institutional influence in PSM studies, however, is the macro-level societal and national institutions that may have important direct and indirect relationships with PSM [22].

Different levels of PSM have been found among public servants in countries with different political and cultural backgrounds [23,24], and a small number of studies have examined the influence of positive macro-level institutions, especially professional identity, on PSM and its outcomes [17,25]. Nevertheless, to date, little attention has been paid to the possibility of negative institutional influences, even though

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there is growing concern that context could contribute greatly to the “dark side” of PSM, that is, negative employee outcomes [26,27]. This study aims to contribute to PSM theory and knowledge by investigating the influence of a negative macro-institution on the PSM-employee outcomes relationship in the context of the Saudi Arabia public sector. The institution is *wasta*, a specific form of implicit contract originating from tribal relationships and “obliging those within the group to provide assistance (favourable treatment) to others within the group” [28].

The rest of the article is structured as follows. First, there is a discussion of the institutional perspective on PSM and the role of context in shaping the relationship between PSM and employee outcomes. Next, the institution of *wasta* and its influence on employee outcomes in Saudi public organisations is assessed, before its moderating effect on the PSM- outcomes relationship is considered. Thereafter, the study context and methodology are described, and the results of statistical analyses of the hypothesised relationships proposed in the literature review are presented. The final section of the article discusses the findings and their implications for theory and practice.

### The institutional perspective on PSM

Perry and Wise [3] argued that PSM is a product of motives “grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organisations”. In recent years, public administration researchers have started paying more attention to the institutional grounding of PSM by considering the distinctiveness of national public administrations [23,29,30]. Some researchers see this as an important first step in conceptualising macro-level institutional influences on PSM and its connection with employee outcomes [31,32]. Indeed, as Moynihan et al. [33] assert, PSM “should never be seen apart from its institutional environment”. In seeking to deepen understanding of the macro-institutional influences on the relationship between PSM and employee outcomes, this study therefore examines the interaction between PSM and a macro-level cultural institution, *wasta*, something that previous research has yet to explore in depth.

### PSM and employee outcomes

The institutional perspective on PSM emphasises the role that institutional logics play in transmitting a public service identity [29]. In particular, whenever identities bring into play the public content of institutions, individual behaviour becomes shaped by logic of appropriateness, which represents the practices, beliefs and symbolic constructions that individuals draw upon to structure the world and make it meaningful [32]. The development of logic of appropriateness is especially salient in the public sector due to the importance of external legitimacy for public organisations. As a result, individuals who are employed in the public sector are expected to behave in a manner appropriate to a generalized ideal of public service. Public servants’ identities become institutionalised through various processes of social identification and acculturation [29]. Due to the connection between institutions and identities, Perry and Wise [3] posit that PSM should be associated with positive employee outcomes. Some of the most commonly studied relationships in this regard include those between PSM and organisational commitment (OC), job satisfaction (JS) and intention to quit (ITQ).

OC can be defined as “an affective attachment to the organisation, internalisation of its values and goals, and a behavioural desire to put forth effort to support it” [34]. According to Meyer and Allen [35], OC is based on three main determinants: An emotional attachment generated by the congruence between personal and organisational

values, a normative commitment, reflecting a feeling of “reciprocity”, and “continuance commitment” that originates in the lack of alternative employment and leads employees to “hang” on to their job. Because PSM also has normative, affective, and rational dimensions, a positive association has been proposed between them [36]. In fact, a positive relationship between PSM and OC has been confirmed in Anglo-Saxon countries, such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America [37-39], continental European countries, such as France, Italy and the Netherlands [8,9,40], and Asian countries, such as China and South Korea [41,42]. Therefore, it is anticipated that there will be a positive relationship between PSM and OC in the context of the Saudi public sector:

Hypothesis 1a: PSM will have a positive relationship with organizational commitment.

JS, defined as an individual’s “contentment with, and positive feelings about one’s job” [34], is perhaps the most commonly explored outcome of PSM. JS “appears primarily to be a function of an individual’s unique wants and expectations” [2]. From the perspective of PSM, a public service employee would be more satisfied with a job that allows them to deliver meaningful services that are beneficial for society [2]. A positive link between PSM and JS has been found in different national contexts [8,10,40,43-45], though not in the United States (US) [11,12,46]. Since research from countries other than the US identifies a straightforward connection between PSM and JS, this study proposes a positive association between the two:

H1b: PSM will have a positive relationship with job satisfaction.

According to Chang et al. [47], an employee’s stated ITQ an organisation refers to the extent to which they want to leave their current employer in search of a new one. It is therefore considered by personnel psychologists to be the best predictor of actual employee turnover [48]. Assuming that public sector organisations socialise employees in ways that can enable them to exercise their PSM, public employees with higher levels of PSM should be more likely to identify themselves with their organisation, and therefore be less likely to quit [37]. Empirical evidence on the relationship between PSM and ITQ is not as extensive and detailed as for OC or JS. Moreover, the results are less clear-cut with some studies reporting a negative PSM-ITQ relationship [8,38,44,49], and others reporting no relationship at all or even a positive one between the two variables [6,11,37]. Again, given that the majority of the reported studies have followed established theory and found a negative relationship between PSM and ITQ, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1c: PSM will have a negative relationship with intention to quit.

### Wasta and employee outcomes

Smith et al. [50] define *wasta* as “a process whereby one may achieve goals through links with key persons”. In modern days, *wasta* involves a process whereby a person of power intervenes on behalf of another individual to help that individual resolve a personal issue [51]. In the organisational context, *wasta* is therefore a means to get employment, promotion or other preferential treatment from the relatives or members of the extended tribe. *Wasta* may seem similar to nepotism practices in the Western world; however, it is much more far-reaching and all-encompassing. *Wasta* practices are deeply embedded within the social fabric of many Arab countries, where it is practiced in an open manner, without remorse, shame or guilt [28]. Hence, Cunningham and Sarayah [52] wrote that “understanding *wasta* is a key to understanding decisions in the Middle East, for *wasta* pervades the culture of all Arab countries and is a force in every significant decision”.

As an institution, wasta is transmitted to individual identities in Saudi Arabia through the logic of appropriateness: it is generally considered a legitimate and appropriate way to get things done. Wasta is an especially important issue for careers in the public service, because jobs in the Saudi public sector are widely desired for their high salaries, job security and other benefits [53]. Wasta represents a means for many to obtain these positions, and the identity of individuals who are employed through the use of wasta may be more strongly influenced by that than the motivation to serve the public.

Within public organisations extensive use of wasta implies that kinship connections and obligations are more important than organisational and societal concerns [54]. In such an institutional context, wasta is therefore likely to have a negative relationship with employee outcomes, especially OC. Moreover, wasta's detrimental effect on employee outcomes could arise from its influence on work relationships. Recruitment and selection through wasta does not necessarily fill all employment gaps within an organization. As a result, the working personnel in organisations where wasta is practiced is likely to consist of those who were hired on merit and those who were hired via wasta. This generates significant intra-organisational strife whereby non-wasta employees' feel a strong sense of injustice, because they do not receive the same treatment accorded to high-wasta colleagues. Hence, wasta seems likely to be associated with reduced commitment to the organisation, lower JS and a greater ITQ among both beneficiaries and casualties of its use in Saudi organisations.

Prior research has emphasised that worker stress and distrust are common outcomes of nepotistic practices at work [55,56]. In fact, several empirical studies uncover negative relationships between nepotism, cronyism and favouritism and a range of employee outcomes [56-59]. Some researchers suggest that nepotistic practice can have positive outcomes, such as more satisfaction from working with close relatives [60,61]. However, even these marginal benefits seem insufficient to outweigh the substantial problems that such practices pose to wider employee and organisational outcomes. Therefore, this study proposes that:

Hypothesis 2a: wasta will have a negative relationship with organisational commitment.

Hypothesis 2b: wasta will have a negative relationship with job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2c: wasta will have a positive relationship with intention to quit.

### **The moderating effects of wasta on the PSM-outcomes relationship**

The public content that is invoked by a logic of appropriateness will be contingent upon the strength of different institutions within and across societies, and by the level of an individual's exposure to those institutions [29,30]. Hence, the connection between an individual's desire to serve the public and positive individual and organisational outcomes in Saudi public organisations may vary according to the level of wasta that is present within them. Van der Wal [62], for instance, argues that cultural values are likely to be important institutional elements that moderate the relationship between PSM and its outcomes. Given that Wasta is an all-pervasive cultural institution within Saudi Arabia, it is therefore potentially a very powerful moderator of the PSM-outcomes relationship. More specifically, the problems that it poses for organisational identification, the development of a public service identity and harmonious intra-organisational relationships

mean that wasta is likely to be contextual force that diminishes the positive effect of PSM on employee outcomes.

As discussed above, wasta is assumed to be associated with logic of appropriateness that runs counter to the demands of the logic of appropriateness conventionally associated with service in public organisations. For employees in the Saudi public sector, the conflict between these two contrasting logics may be felt especially keenly by those individuals with high levels of PSM. Such individuals may become demotivated, disillusioned and dispirited in circumstances where they are surrounded by attitudes and behaviours that are the precise opposite of those that they associate with public service. Based on these assumptions, this study therefore proposes that:

Hypothesis 3a: Wasta will weaken the relationship between PSM and organisational commitment.

Hypothesis 3b: Wasta will weaken the relationship between PSM and job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3c: Wasta will weaken the relationship between PSM and intention to quit.

### **Study context**

This study focused on the public education branch in Al Qassim region of Saudi Arabia. This is the central region of the country with a population of over 1.2 million. The General Directorate of Education in Al Qassim is run by more than 900 staff who oversee more than 2,500 educational establishments at all levels (primary, intermediate, secondary), over 33,000 instructors and a total student population of over 260,000 [63]. The Saudi public sector is an especially apt setting for exploring the influence of macro-level cultural institutions on the PSM-outcomes relationship. According to Common [64], while the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia "appears receptive to international reform trends, its cultural and administrative context dictates that such trends are not easily implemented". Saudi culture represents a very strong blend of Arab traditionalism and Islamic values [65]. These strongly collectivist values are all reflected in, and reinforced by, the practice of wasta, literally translated as "going in between", which is widespread throughout many Arab countries, especially in Saudi Arabia [51].

### **Method**

For the purposes of the study, a questionnaire was posted online and the links were distributed to 496 employees via working email by the organisation's management. Each email contained a brief cover letter describing the study and the rights of the participants. To supplement this data collection, a further 200 hard copy questionnaires were distributed and collected by hand. The survey design process followed Brislin's [66] back translation technique for translating the questionnaire from English to Arabic. Two professional bilingual (English and Arabic) translators were recruited for the procedure. After the translations from the source language into target language and back were completed, the two versions were compared and where discrepancies were noted, a consensus between the translators regarding the final wording of the items was reached. A pilot test of the translated questionnaire was conducted with a group of twelve Saudi public servants, and their suggestions for minor changes in the questionnaire were taken into account.

The total number of surveys returned was 282. After discarding incomplete questionnaires, the final number of responses was 276, giving a response rate of 39.4%. Due to straight lining issues [67], however, an additional 70 questionnaires were discarded to increase

the quality of data collected. The final number of questionnaires used for the analysis was, therefore, 206. Following Armstrong and Overton [68], non-response bias was analysed by comparing the responses of early and late respondents with the latter used as a proxy for non-respondents. The results of t-tests indicate that no significant differences existed between the survey answers provided by first 30 and last 30 respondents. These results, therefore, confirmed that non-response bias was not an issue in this study. The sample of respondents was mostly men (68%), aged between 31 and 40 (53.4%), educated to Bachelor's degree level (70.4%), had no major supervisory responsibilities (54.9%) and served between 11 and 20 years within the organization (50.5%) as shown in Table 1. This distribution is likely to be representative of the study population.

### Dependent variables

The study used Meyer et al. [69] measure of affective OC, which tends to be closely related to other measures of employee outcomes [70], and has been shown to be especially important in PSM research [71]. JS is measured using a single-item operationalisation 'Overall, I am satisfied with my job', developed by Wanous et al. [72], which has strong face validity and is strongly correlated with multi-item measures of JS. Finally, ITQ is conceptualized as the degree to an employee wishes to discontinue membership in his or her organisation. This study applies to measurement of ITQ of O'Reilly et al. study [73], which predicts actual employee turnover.

### Independent variables

To measure PSM, Kim's [74] shortened 12-item version of Perry's original instrument was used to help reduce respondents' workload. This instrument gauges four key dimensions of PSM: attraction to policy-making; commitment to the public interest; compassion; and, self-sacrifice. Empirical investigations that have employed workable, validated questionnaire instruments for wasta are scarce. Several studies like Abdallah et al., [57] did not use the term wasta directly although they were carried out in the context of Middle Eastern organisations and measured instances of nepotism, favouritism and cronyism. This study employed adapted wasta measures from Tlaiss and Kauser [75].

### Control variables

Following Perry [17], the study controlled for participants' age, gender, education, employee supervision and service years. The study also controlled for the potential effects of family and religious socialisation on the relationships that are analysed by including the measures of these important sources of personal values and attitudes developed by Perry et al. [18].

### Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

EFA was used to establish the construct validity of the dependent and independent variables. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.802 and Bartlett's significant test for sphericity ( $p < 0.001$ ) suggested that factor analysis was appropriate for the data. The rotated component matrix shown in Table 2 shows the five derived constructs alongside means and standard deviations for the survey items. OC and ITQ factors were formed from the items initially assigned to them. PSM was rotated not into four but two components, forming a parcelled PSM measure based on two factors: One composed of a normative-rational dimension (PSM1) and the other composed of an affective dimension (PSM2). However, models with a reduced number of PSM dimensions are not uncommon with studies based on three [76-78], two [9,79], and even single PSM dimension [8] present. The wasta construct was

derived in its original form. Scale reliability for all the constructs was very good, with alpha values of 0.83 for OC, and 0.88 for ITQ, 0.76 for PSM1 and PSM2, and 0.84 for wasta.

### Common method bias

Harman's one-factor test was performed to measure common method bias by loading all study variables into an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify the number of factors necessary for the variable variances. A 50% cut-off point is generally selected to avoid common method bias [80]. The value for the strongest component in the table was 24.0%, which indicates that the data were free from common method bias.

### Statistical Results

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for all the variables included in the statistical modelling. To reduce the potential effect of outliers on the outcomes of the analyses, robust regression was applied [81]. Table 4 presents the results of the regressions evaluating the independent relationships between PSM and employee outcomes and wasta and employee outcomes. The first three models regresses the PSM1 measure and wasta on to OC, JS and ITQ. The second three models substitute the PSM2 measure for PSM1.

The results reported in Table 4 indicate that the control variables tend to follow patterns observed in prior research. Male respondents are more likely to quit their job. Younger respondents tend to be more committed to the organization and satisfied with their job, while middle-aged respondents are less likely to quit. Respondents educated to degree level had lower OC and JS, and were more likely to quit-those with doctorates also had lower OC and JS. Supervisors had higher OC and JS, and respondents with very long service were less likely to quit. Family and religious socialization did not appear to matter for the three employee outcomes considered here.

Turning to the main variables of interest, positive significant relationships were found between PSM1 and OC ( $\beta = 0.151, p < 0.05$ ) and between PSM1 and JS ( $\beta = 0.048, p < 0.1$ ). These findings provided support for Hypotheses 1a and 1b. However, PSM1 was also positively associated with ITQ ( $\beta = 0.318, p < 0.05$ ). Consistent with the results for PSM1, positive significant relationships were also found between PSM2 and OC ( $\beta = 0.116, p < 0.05$ ), between PSM2 and JS ( $\beta = 0.053, p < 0.05$ ).

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	140	68.0
	Female	66	32.0
Age Group	18 to 30	18	8.7
	31 to 40	110	53.4
	41 to 50	70	34.0
	over 50	8	3.9
Education	High School	25	12.1
	Bachelor's	145	70.4
	Master's	33	16.0
	Doctorate	3	1.5
Supervision	Yes	93	45.1
	No	113	54.9
Length of service	1 to 5 years	24	11.7
	6 to 10 years	43	20.9
	11 to 20 years	104	50.5
	over 20 years	35	17.0

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the sample.

Concept	Questionnaire Item	Mean	SD	Component				
				1	2	3	4	5
Affective organizational commitment	I feel emotionally attached to this organization	5.29	1.50					0.694
	I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own	5.26	1.46					0.862
	I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization	5.55	1.38					0.830
Intention to quit	I would prefer another more ideal job to the one I have now	4.27	1.97		0.677			
	If I have my way, I won't be working for this company a year from now	3.49	1.98		0.891			
	I have seriously thought about leaving this organization	3.29	1.87		0.924			
	I don't intend to remain with this organization for long	3.56	1.96		0.830			
PSM-Attraction to policy making	I am interested in making public programs that are beneficial for my country or the community I belong.	6.29	0.88				0.757	
	Sharing my views on public policies with others is attractive to me	5.94	1.13				0.559	
	Seeing people get benefits from the public programme I have been deeply involved in brings me a great deal of satisfaction	6.55	0.69				0.729	
PSM-Commitment to the public interest	I consider public service my civic duty	6.55	0.79				0.668	
	Meaningful public service is very important to me	6.60	0.69				0.681	
	I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community even if it harmed my interests	6.42	0.94				0.478	
PSM-Compassion	It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress	6.46	0.84	0.728				
	I am often reminded by daily events how dependent we are on one another	6.48	0.75	0.664				
	I feel sympathetic to the plight of the underprivileged	6.53	0.65	0.703				
PSM-Self-sacrifice	Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements	6.15	1.07	0.692				
	I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society	6.05	1.09	0.523				
	I believe in putting duty before self	6.26	0.96	0.550				
Wasta	Wasta is important for recruitment and promotion in my organization	4.30	1.83				0.741	
	To get a good position in my organisation, wasta is more important than what you know	3.70	2.01				0.862	
	Wasta is more important in my organisation than qualifications and work experience	3.49	1.97				0.821	
	Wasta is commonly used at my workplace	3.71	1.85				0.608	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Values less than 0.450 are suppressed; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 2: Exploratory factor analysis.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Organizational commitment	3	21	16.11	3.75
Job satisfaction	1	7	5.10	1.29
Intention to quit	4	28	13.95	6.09
PSM1	16	35	31.93	3.04
PSM2	24	42	37.93	3.64
Wasta	4	28	15.15	6.29

N=206

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for study variables.

Likewise, just as was the case with PSM1, the relationship between PSM2 and ITQ was positive ( $\beta=0.227$ ,  $p<0.1$ ). It is possible that wasta contributed to dissatisfaction with work for people with high levels of PSM. Indeed, in line with the study predictions, significant negative relationships were found between wasta and OC ( $\beta=-0.194$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and between wasta and JS ( $\beta=-0.074$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) while a positive significant relationship was found between wasta and ITQ ( $\beta=0.376$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). These findings provided support for hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c. To explore the potential for wasta to influence the connection between PSM and employee outcomes, it is necessary to analyse its moderating effects by including a variable interacting PSM and wasta in the models presented in Table 4. The results of the moderation tests are shown in Table 5.

Wasta had a statistically significant negative moderating effect on the relationship between PSM1 and OC ( $\beta=-0.035$ ,  $p=0.014$ ) as well as for the PSM2-OC relationship ( $\beta=-0.024$ ,  $p=0.008$ ). This confirms hypotheses 3a regarding the negative moderating effects of wasta on the relationship between PSM and OC. Wasta also has significant

negative moderating effects on the relationship between PSM1 and JS ( $\beta=-0.015$ ,  $p=0.005$ ) as well as for the PSM2-JS relationship ( $\beta=-0.024$ ,  $p=0.008$ ). Here the results for the moderation tests affirm hypothesis 3b, which specified a negative impact of wasta on the relationship between PSM and JS. However, no significant moderation effect was found in the relationship between PSM1 and ITQ ( $\beta=0.030$ ,  $p=0.308$ ) or for the PSM2-ITQ relationship ( $\beta=-0.013$ ,  $p=0.480$ ). These findings mean that hypothesis 5c is unconfirmed.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This study reveals several important findings. First, PSM was positively related to OC and JS among Saudi Arabian public servants. These findings were consistent with the findings of most prior research [9,10,40]. Nevertheless, the influence of norm-based rational aspects of PSM appeared to be a stronger determinant of OC than affective ones. This suggests that Saudi public servants who are devoted to the organizations for whom they work may be more driven by rational than emotional motives to serve the public.

	PSM1			PSM2		
	OC	JS	IQ	OC	JS	IQ
PSM	.151**	.048*	.318**	.116**	.053**	.227*
Wasta	-.167***	-.065***	.416***	-.176***	-.065***	.392***
Male	.205	.072	3.396***	.126	.044	3.104***
Age 31-40	1.927**	.582*	-2.112	1.727**	.497	-2.257
Age 41-50	1.728*	.577*	-3.685**	1.569*	.504	-3.658*
Aged 50+	1.244	.538	-3.181	1.110	.479	-3.405
Bachelor's degree	-1.064*	-.460**	2.331*	-1.173*	-.465**	1.963
Master's degree	-.917	-.467	2.424	-1.073	-.488*	2.118
Doctorate	-5.139***	-1.74***	4.978	-4.967***	-1.573**	4.379
Supervisor	.853**	.313**	-.065	.886**	.298**	-.113
Service 6-10 years	-1.386*	-.454	.399	-1.107	-.315	.854
Service 11-20 years	-.512	-.175	1.192	-.389	-.117	1.320
Service above 20 years	-.181	-.141	3.506*	.086	-.037	3.874*
Family socialisation	.024	-.000	-.061	.034	-.003	-.041
Religious socialisation	-.026	-.002	-.031	-.039	-.010	-.055
R square	.272	.163	.250	.272	.159	.251
F statistic	4.69***	4.53***	4.17***	4.96***	4.68***	3.77***

N=206; \*\*\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*p<0.10.

Table 4: Regression results: PSM, wasta and employee outcomes.

	PSM1			PSM2		
	OC	JS	IQ	OC	JS	IQ
PSM	.191**	.062***	.266	.149**	.065**	.246*
Wasta	-.164***	-.0716***	.406***	-.185***	-.072***	.390***
Wasta x PSM	-.035**	-.015***	.030	-.024***	-.010***	-.013
R square	.319	.182	.254	.310	.190	.253
F statistic	4.92***	5.11***	3.93***	4.96***	5.32***	3.54***

N=206; \*\*\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*p<0.1. All models include control variables shown in Table 2.

Table 5: Moderation Results: PSM × Wasta and employee outcomes.

Somewhat surprisingly, PSM was positively related to ITQ. Since there is no universally accepted view of PSM's effect on ITQ, these findings may reflect the presence of contextual factors. Indeed, further analysis revealed that the positive relationship between PSM and intention to quit only emerged when wasta was added to the regression analysis, implying the presence of mediation effect. Therefore, the organizational dysfunctions associated with wasta may be responsible for the link between PSM and ITQ. In addition to this potentially indirect effect of wasta on the PSM-outcomes relationship, the first stage of our analysis identified strong negative relationships between wasta and OC and JS, and a strong positive relationship with ITQ. Such findings provide valuable public sector evidence that corroborates the existing empirical literature on nepotism and employee outcomes in private firms [55,56,58].

Importantly, the study found that wasta moderated the PSM-employee outcomes relationship, reducing the degree to which PSM positively influenced OC and JS, though no moderation of the PSM-ITQ relationship was observed. The presence of statistically significant interaction effects is in line with other recent analyses of negative moderators of the PSM-employee outcomes relationship [82]. These findings confirm the insights of the institutional perspective on PSM, which emphasizes that contextual factors play a critical role in shaping the PSM-outcomes relationships [78,83]. They also provide valuable new evidence that institutional effects may be negative as well as positive.

Practical implications can be drawn from this study. Public organisations should strive to improve the experiences of employees

at work. Because, as demonstrated, the influences of institutions can be both positive and negative, the task of management is to identify the relevant institutional factors, examine their roles and, whenever possible, manage them by enhancing the impact of the positive institutions and reducing the impact of negative institutions. In particular, it is recommended that wasta should be actively screened and eliminated as a practice within Arab public organisations. This could be done by establishing clear guidelines against wasta practices and through the inclusion of anti-wasta clauses in employment contracts. In developed countries, nepotism often falls under the conflicts of interest section of administrative law. For example, the US Code openly prohibits employment of relatives by public officials unless the latter is the most eligible candidate (5 U.S. Code § 3110). Even though it may be some time before similar laws are enacted in Saudi Arabia, public organizations in the Kingdom could establish and enforce their own codes of practice. This could be managed and monitored through regular anonymous employee surveys and the setting-up of whistleblowing hotlines for reporting wasta incidence [84]. Prior research suggests that whistleblowing may be more prevalent among employees in collectivistic societies like Saudi Arabia [85]. Furthermore, individuals with high levels of PSM may be more willing to report wasta practices [86]. Hence, while we may conclude our study by underlining the challenges that wasta poses for the Saudi public sector, we can also emphasise that with appropriate support mechanisms, public service-motivated employees can potentially aid organizations struggling with a legacy of indigenous nepotism.

## Limitations and Future Research

While offering important findings of theoretical and practical nature, the results of this study should be considered with caution. Two important study limitations were a cross-sectional design and convenience data sampling. Studies of cross-sectional design do not demonstrate causality; rather, the relationships they show are associations. A longitudinal study could offer more insight into causal relationships between wasta, PSM, and employee outcomes in the context of Saudi public organizations. It would offer insights into the relationships' stability and variability over time. The study also surveyed public service professionals from the Saudi Ministry of Education, which may not make the findings readily generalizable onto the other organizational settings. The study also investigated only one particular institution, and while some hypothesized relationships were confirmed, the effects of other institutional forces could be in place. Finally, the study applied EFA analysis to investigate the hypothesized relationships. A CFA analysis followed by structural equation modelling (SEM) could offer stronger results and also include the mediating effects of wasta in addition to moderation effects presented in this paper.

This study provides an opportunity for a number of promising directions for future research. The study found that normative-rational aspect of PSM is a stronger determinant of organizational commitment than affective aspect. It is conceivable that in Saudi Arabia, a country high on the collectivism scale and with work values based on Islam, which emphasizes duty and obligation to society, public servants derive their motivation from normative prescriptions rather than individual personal feelings. This could be investigated further. Another possible explanation, though, could be the role of gender representation in the sample. Gender differences in PSM have been found in a number of studies [44,87], and it is possible that the predominantly male sample here is more influenced by rational aspects of PSM. Research comparing the gendered nature of the PSM-outcomes relationship across countries with very different political and societal cultures would cast valuable light on this issue.

The negative impact of wasta was found in this study, but the exact mechanism of that impact was not studied in detail. To understand better the causal mechanisms that lie behind the negative impact of wasta on employee outcomes, future studies could investigate its connection with employees' perceptions of organizational justice and the psychological contract within Arab organizations. Exploration of the possible effects of other negative institutions, such as workplace discrimination or bullying, would illuminate the institutional dynamics of PSM still further.

In general, this study can be used as a foundation for applying the PSM theory in the context of Saudi public organisations. To the knowledge of the author, no affirmative, comprehensive theory of motivation for employees in Saudi public sector has been developed. The findings of this study provide a good starting point for investigations of PSM and its role in public organisations in the country.

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