

Motivation for public service, organizational commitment, and employee performance: A study of civil servants in the Ministry of Home Affairs in Vietnam

Phuong Huu Tung

Academy of Policy and Development, Vietnam
Email: phuonghuutung@apd.edu.vn; Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0242-3448>

Abstract: Public service motivation is considered a crucial resource driving the behavior and performance of public sector employees, but the mechanisms for transforming this motivation into work performance remain unclear in the Vietnamese context. This study examines the relationship between Public Service Motivation (PSM), organizational commitment, and work performance, and considers the mediating role of commitment among civil servants in the Ministry of Home Affairs in Vietnam. Data comprising 326 observations were collected using a 5-point Likert scale and analyzed through Cronbach's Alpha, exploratory factor analysis, regression, and bootstrap with 5,000 replicates. The results show that PSM positively impacts organizational commitment and employee work performance. Organizational commitment also positively influences employee work performance. The research implies that public human resource management needs to simultaneously reinforce the value of public service, build a supportive work environment, and enhance engagement to transform motivation for service into effective public performance.

Keywords: Motivation for public service; Organizational commitment; Work performance; Civil servants; Vietnam's Ministry of Home Affairs

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern public administration, the performance of public servants is determined not only by professional competence, control systems, or reward mechanisms, but also significantly depends on the individual's motivations for choosing, maintaining, and investing effort in public work. The concept of public service motivation (PSM) was developed by Perry and Wise (1990) to explain the tendency of some individuals to react more strongly to motivations associated with public interest, civic responsibility, and public sector values. Since then, PSM has become one of the important research directions in public human resource management, with accumulating evidence showing that service motivation is related to many outcomes such as effort level, satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and job performance (Ritz et al., 2016).

However, the link between public service motivation and performance is not always direct or uniform. A large-scale study by Alonso and Lewis (2001) found mixed evidence for a direct relationship between PSM and performance evaluation in the U.S. federal sector, while Bellé's empirical study (2013) showed that signals highlighting the social significance of work can increase the performance of those with public service motivation. These results suggest that PSM should be viewed as a potential source of motivation; the extent to which that resource translates into job performance depends on the psychological state and the relationship the employee forms with the job and the organization.



One particularly noteworthy mechanism is commitment. Kahn (1990) views commitment as the state in which individuals dedicate their physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to their job role. Saks (2006) further distinguishes between job commitment and organizational commitment, arguing that commitment is the result of an exchange relationship between the individual and the organization, and can lead to positive attitudes and behaviors. In the public sector, alignment between service ideals and organizational mission is likely to make public servants feel their work is more meaningful, willing to invest more effort, and maintain a higher level of commitment. De Simone et al. (2016) showed that PSM is positively correlated with commitment in the context of public administration; more recently, Scrimshire et al. (2023) provided evidence that commitment can mediate between PSM and performance as assessed by superiors.

For Vietnam, this issue has clear practical significance in the context of public administration shifting strongly towards a job-based, results-oriented, and performance-based approach. The Law on Cadres and Civil Servants No. 80/2025/QH15, effective from July 1, 2025, provides a new legal foundation for managing the civil servant workforce. Following this, Decree No. 335/2025/ND-CP, effective from January 1, 2026, stipulates the evaluation and ranking of the quality of state administrative agencies and civil servants, emphasizing the results of task performance. Specifically for the Ministry of Interior, Decree No. 276/2026/ND-CP, effective from July 8, 2026, further establishes the functions, tasks, and organizational structure within the context of the administrative apparatus being adjusted. These changes increase the demand for a civil service workforce that is both competent to perform its duties and maintains its motivation to serve, as well as being able to adapt to the pressure of achieving results.

The Ministry of Interior is a suitable case study because civil servants in this field are directly involved in many fundamental tasks for the operation of the state apparatus, such as administrative organization, public service, personnel management, administrative reform, and assigned areas of state management. The work often requires handling complex regulations, coordinating at multiple levels, responding promptly to institutional changes, and ensuring fairness in policy implementation. In this context, efficiency is difficult to maintain solely through command or control mechanisms; intrinsic motivation linked to the value of public service and a sense of belonging to the organization can become important resources helping civil servants maintain effort and quality in performing their duties.

Although international research on PSM has developed considerably, and recent works have begun to focus on the mediating role of commitment, evidence in the Vietnamese administrative context remains limited, particularly for civil servants in the Ministry of Interior. The gap lies not only in the lack of evidence regarding the level of PSM among civil servants but also in the question of the mechanism: how does service motivation translate into performance, and is organizational commitment a crucial link in this process? Clarifying this mechanism is significant for both theory and practice in public human resource management, as interventions will differ if performance is primarily driven by individual motivation compared to when motivation is sustained and reinforced by the organization.

Based on this, the study focuses on examining four relationships: the impact of public service motivation on organizational commitment; the impact of public service motivation on work performance; the impact of organizational commitment on performance; and the mediating role of commitment in the relationship between PSM and performance. By using a mediating model instead of a multi-factor model with direct impacts, the study expects to provide a more in-depth understanding of the mechanisms shaping the performance of civil servants in the Ministry of Interior in Vietnam.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Motivation to serve the public

Public service motivation is one of the fundamental concepts in the study of public sector worker behavior. Perry and Wise (1990) defined PSM as the tendency of individuals to respond to primary or specific motivations associated with public institutions and public interests. Unlike career motivations primarily based on material gain or

personal advancement, PSM emphasizes the desire to contribute to the community, pursue public values, and produce socially meaningful outcomes.

Based on the development and validation of the scale in various national contexts, Kim et al. (2013) proposed a PSM structure consisting of four components: attractiveness to participation in public service, commitment to public values, compassion, and self-sacrifice. This structure relatively fully reflects the cognitive, value, and emotional aspects of public service motivation. Accordingly, an individual with a high PSM not only clearly understands the significance of public work but also tends to place community interests and social responsibility in a prominent position during the performance of their duties.

From a self-determination theory perspective, PSM exhibits many characteristics of autonomous motivation because individuals perform tasks based on the perception that the activity aligns with their personal values and goals. When the organizational environment allows public service values to be expressed in work practice, public servants tend to feel a greater sense of purpose, are willing to invest personal resources, and maintain effort even in demanding tasks. Studies in the public sector show that PSM is positively correlated with various outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, engagement, and performance (Alonso & Lewis, 2001; Bellé, 2013; Ritz et al., 2016).

Organizational commitment

Commitment reflects the extent to which individuals actively invest cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resources in their roles within an organization. Kahn (1990) argues that when committed, individuals bring more of their "self" into the process of performing their job role through focus, psychological presence, and willingness to contribute. Saks (2006) further develops this approach by distinguishing between job commitment and organizational commitment, where organizational commitment reflects the extent to which individuals actively participate in and invest in their role as members of the organization.

This concept differs significantly from organizational commitment. While commitment primarily reflects psychological connections and the desire to maintain membership, engagement emphasizes a more proactive state, manifested through the level of attention, enthusiasm, and willingness to invest effort in the organization. For the public sector, particularly in government agencies, engagement is crucial because work performance often depends not only on professional competence but also on the level of initiative, responsibility, and willingness to cooperate of civil servants.

PSM can be one of the prerequisites for forming commitment. When personal values regarding public responsibility, social service, and community benefit align with the agency's mission, individuals are more likely to view work as a meaningful activity and increase their level of investment in the organization. De Simone et al. (2016) and Scrimshire et al. (2023) showed that public sector workers with high public service motivation tend to exhibit higher levels of positive commitment, especially in environments where they can perceive the social impact of their work.

Work performance and its relationship with motivation and engagement.

Job performance reflects the extent to which an individual completes assigned tasks in terms of quality, timeliness, and job requirements. In organizational behavior research, role performance is often used to assess the extent to which employees perform the formal tasks that constitute their job (Williams & Anderson, 1991). For civil servants, performance is not only reflected in the volume of work completed but also relates to accuracy, timeliness, accountability, and the ability to proactively handle tasks within established frameworks.

Perry and Wise's (1990) argument suggests that individuals with high PSM are more likely to achieve better work performance in public organizations because their personal motivation aligns with the organization's purpose and values. Subsequent studies, while not entirely consistent in their impact levels, generally confirm a positive association between PSM and work effort and performance, particularly in positions where individuals are aware of the social impact of their tasks (Alonso & Lewis, 2001; Bellé, 2013; Ritz et al., 2016).

Besides the impact of PSM, engagement is considered a more immediate antecedent to job performance behavior. When engagement levels are high, individuals tend to be more focused, sustain their efforts longer, and proactively address emerging issues rather than simply meeting minimum requirements. Saks (2006) showed that engagement can lead to many positive outcomes at both individual and organizational levels. In the public sector context, Scrimshire et al. (2023) also noted a positive correlation between engagement and job performance.

In terms of mechanisms, PSM creates a sense of value and meaning in work, while commitment reflects the extent to which those values and motivations are translated into actual investment in the organization. A civil servant with a high PSM but lacking a sense of belonging or unwillingness to invest personal resources in the organization may not fully translate motivation into performance. Conversely, when the organization maintains a high level of commitment, motivation to serve is more likely to be expressed through focus, effort, and responsibility in performing tasks. This approach provides a theoretical basis for considering organizational commitment as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between PSM and the work performance of civil servants in the Ministry of Interior.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design and data

This study is designed to examine the relationship between public service motivation, organizational commitment, and work performance of civil servants performing duties in the field of Home Affairs in Vietnam. The scope of the study includes civil servants in state agencies managing Home Affairs and units with functions performing Internal Affairs tasks at all levels. The selection of this group of subjects is appropriate given the characteristics of the work, which requires a relatively high level of public responsibility, adherence to regulations, organizational coordination, and quality of public service delivery.

The dataset used for the analysis consists of 326 observations and 22 observed variables measuring the concepts in the model. The questionnaire also collected several characteristics of the respondents such as gender, age, education level, job position, organizational level, and years of service. The observed variables were rated using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 - "strongly disagree" to 5 - "strongly agree".

Public service motivation was measured using 12 observed variables based on the structure of Kim et al. (2013), comprising four components: attractiveness to public participation (APP), commitment to public values (CPV), compassion (COM), and self-sacrifice (SS). Organizational commitment (ENG) was measured using 5 observed variables inheriting the approach of Saks (2006) and adapted to the context of civil servants. Performance (PERF) consisted of 5 variables reflecting the level of task completion, quality, timeliness, and initiative in performing work, referencing the role performance approach of Williams and Anderson (1991).

Table 1. Scale design and research variables

Concept	Code	Number of variables	Source of information
Motivation to serve the public - the appeal of public participation.	PH	3	Kim et al. (2013)
Motivation for public service - commitment to public values	CPV	3	Kim et al. (2013)
Motivation for public service - compassion	COM	3	Kim et al. (2013)
Motivation to serve the public - self-sacrifice	SS	3	Kim et al. (2013)

Organizational commitment	ER	5	Saks (2006); Scrimpsire et al. (2023)
Work performance	PERF	5	Williams & Anderson (1991); Belle (2013)

Source: Compiled by the author , 2026

Research model and hypothesis

Based on theoretical arguments, the study constructs a simple mediating model in which public service motivation (PSM) is the independent variable, organizational commitment (ENG) is the mediating variable, and work performance (PERF) is the dependent variable.

The relationship between the variables was tested through three regression equations:

$$ENG = \alpha_0 + aPSM + \varepsilon_1$$

$$PERF = \beta_0 + cPSM + \varepsilon_2$$

$$PERF = \gamma_0 + c'PSM + bENG + \varepsilon_3$$

In this model, coefficient *a* reflects the impact of PSM on engagement; *c* reflects the total impact of PSM on performance; *b* reflects the impact of engagement on performance when PSM is controlled for; and *c'* is the direct impact of PSM on performance after mediating the variable into the model. Indirect effects are determined by the product $a \times b$.

Based on the research model, four hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Motivation to serve the public has a positive impact on the organizational commitment of civil servants in the Ministry of Interior.

H2: Motivation to serve the public has a positive impact on the work performance of civil servants in the Ministry of Interior.

H3: Organizational commitment has a positive impact on the work performance of civil servants in the Ministry of Interior.

H4: Organizational commitment plays a mediating role in the relationship between public service motivation and work performance of civil servants in the Ministry of Interior.

Processing and analysis methods

The analysis process was carried out according to three main groups of content. First, descriptive statistics were used to generalize the characteristics of the sample and the level of evaluation for the research variables; at the same time, Cronbach's Alpha and the item-total correlation coefficient were used to check the consistency of the scales.

Next, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to examine the measurement structure. For PSM, the analysis was used to validate the four components APP, CPV, COM, and SS; for ENG and PERF, EFA was performed separately to assess the unidimensionality of each concept. The KMO coefficient, Bartlett's test, total variance extracted, and factor loading coefficients were used as the basis for evaluation.

Finally, Pearson correlation and regression were used to test hypotheses about direct relationships. The mediating role of organizational commitment was tested using bootstrap with 5,000 replicate samples and a 95% confidence interval. The mediating effect was confirmed when the confidence interval of the indirect effect $a \times b$ did not contain a value of 0. The case where the direct effect *c'* was still statistically significant but smaller than the total effect *c* was considered evidence of a partial mediating role of organizational commitment.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample characteristics and levels of research variables

Table 2. Sample structure and descriptive statistics

Content	Group/Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Medium	Standard deviation
Gender	Male	137	42.0		
	Female	189	58.0		
Age	Under 30 years old	29	8.9		
	30-39 years old	112	34.4		
	40-49 years old	126	38.7		
	From age 50 and above	59	18.1		
Level	University	188	57.7		
	Master's degree	130	39.9		
	Doctor	8	2.5		
Location	Professional civil servants	221	67.8		
	Department/Manager level or equivalent	79	24.2		
	Higher-level leaders/managers	26	8.0		
Agency level	Ministry of Interior/Subordinate agencies	58	17.8		
	Department of Internal Affairs and provincial-level specialized agencies	172	52.8		
	Commune/ward/special zone-level agencies perform internal affairs tasks.	96	29.4		
Research variables	Public Service Motivation (PSM)			3,723	0.481
	Organizational commitment (ENG)			3,561	0.677
	Performance Rating (PERF)			3,683	0.661

Source: Results of data processing from the author's research, 2026

The sample structure shows that women account for 58.0%, and men 42.0%; the 40-49 age group has the largest proportion at 38.7%, followed by the 30-39 age group at 34.4%. More than half of the observers have a university degree, and nearly 40% have a master's degree. Professional civil servants account for 67.8%, while those holding leadership and management positions at various levels account for 32.2%. In terms of agency scope, the group at the

Department of Internal Affairs and specialized agencies at the provincial level accounts for 52.8%, thus relatively clearly reflecting the group of civil servants directly advising on and organizing the implementation of internal affairs policies at the local level.

The average PSM value reached 3.723, higher than the midpoint of the scale and indicating a relatively positive trend in motivation for public service. Work performance averaged 3.683, while organizational commitment was lower at 3.561. This gap suggests that motivation for service and job completion levels can remain relatively positive, while cognitive and emotional investment in the organization is not entirely uniform. This provides a suitable empirical basis for further testing the mediating role of commitment in the relationship between PSM and performance.

Reliability and scale structure

Table 3. Reliability and results of exploratory factor analysis

Scale	Number of variables	Alpha	Minimum variable sum	KMO	Variance extracted (%)	Load factor
PH	3	0.801	0.640			0.775-0.833
CPV	3	0.832	0.666			0.780-0.838
COM	3	0.804	0.645			0.817-0.822
SS	3	0.807	0.636			0.780-0.801
PSM (12 variables; 4 factors)	12	0.856	-	0.846	72,892	0.775-0.838
ER	5	0.905	0.755	0.887	72,383	0.847-0.857
PERF	5	0,896	0.727	0.885	70,661	0.828-0.862

Source: Results of data processing from the author's research, 2026

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of the PSM components ranged from 0.801 to 0.832; the Alpha of all 12 PSM variables was 0.856. Organizational commitment and job performance had Alphas of 0.905 and 0.896, respectively. The smallest item-total correlation coefficient of all component scales was greater than 0.63, therefore no observed variable needed to be removed due to internal inconsistency.

Factor analysis of the 12 PSM variables yielded a KMO of 0.846; the Bartlett test achieved $\chi^2 = 1,557.921$ with $p < 0.001$. Four factors were extracted corresponding to the theoretical structure APP, CPV, COM, and SS, explaining 72.892% of the variance, with principal loadings ranging from 0.775 to 0.838. For ENG, KMO = 0.887 and one factor explained 72.383% of the variance; PERF had KMO = 0.885 and one factor explained 70.661%. The loadings were all higher than 0.82 on these two scales. Thus, the measurement structure is clear enough to use the composite score for subsequent relationship tests.

Relationships between variables and mediating model testing

Table 4. Pearson correlations between research variables

Variable	Medium	Standard deviation	PSM	ER	PERF
PSM	3,723	0.481	1,000		
ER	3,561	0.677	0.603	1,000	
PERF	3,683	0.661	0.491	0.608	1,000

Source: Results of data processing from the author's research, 2026. All correlations have $p < 0.001$.

The correlation matrix shows that the three variables are moderately to fairly positively correlated. PSM correlates with ENG at $r = 0.603$; PSM correlates with PERF at $r = 0.491$; and ENG correlates with PERF at $r = 0.608$. The correlation between PSM and ENG is large enough to suggest a conduction mechanism, but not so high as to lose the distinction between the two concepts. At the same time, ENG is more strongly associated with performance than PSM, suggesting that engagement status may be a more behavioral variable in the process of forming work outcomes.

Table 5. Regression results and mediating effect test.

Relationship/Effect	Normalization coefficient	t	Sig.	R ²	95% confidence interval	Conclude
PSM → ENG (a)	0.603	13,603	<0.001	0.364	But	H1 is accepted
PSM → PERF, total effect (c)	0.491	10,153	<0.001	0.241	But	H2 is accepted
ENG → PERF when PSM control (b)	0.490	9,019	<0.001	0.394*	But	H3 is accepted
PSM → PERF when ENG (c') is present	0.196	3,611	<0.001	0.394*	But	The direct impact is still significant.
Indirect effect a×b	0.296	But	But	But	[0.219; 0.379]	H4: partially intermediate

*R² of the PERF model includes both PSM and ENG; bootstrap 5,000 iterations.

Source: Results of data processing from the author's research, 2026.

For H1, the coefficient $a = 0.603$ with $p < 0.001$ indicates that public service motivation has a strong and positive impact on organizational commitment. PSM alone explains 36.4% of the variation in ENG. The results are consistent with the argument that when civil servants value public interest, service value, and the social significance of their tasks, they are more likely to invest cognitively and emotionally in their role as members of the agency. In the context of the Ministry of Interior, where many tasks are directly related to organizational structure and the quality of public service, recognizing the public significance of a task can increase the feeling that the work is worthwhile and the organization is worth being a part of.

For H2, the total impact of PSM on performance reached 0.491 with $p < 0.001$. This confirms that highly motivated civil servants tend to self-assess their performance, quality, and proactiveness to a higher degree. However, the R² of the model with only PSM was 0.241, indicating that PSM is important but not sufficient to explain the majority of performance variances. This finding is consistent with previous results that the PSM-performance relationship depends on job-related mechanisms and organizational context, rather than operating as an automatic effect.

For H3, when PSM and ENG were included in the model simultaneously, ENG had a Beta of 0.490 with $p < 0.001$ and was the strongest predictor of PERF. This suggests that engagement is not only a positive attitude but also has the potential to translate into higher levels of focus and effort. Civil servants engaged with the organization tend to be more proactive in coordination, follow up on tasks, and maintain effort when job requirements change. The model with two variables explains 39.4% of the variation in performance, significantly higher than the model with only PSM.

For H4, the indirect effect is 0.296; the 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranges from 0.219 to 0.379, containing no zeros. Simultaneously, the direct coefficient c' of PSM decreases from 0.491 to 0.196 but remains statistically significant. Therefore, organizational commitment plays a partial mediating role. In terms of weight, approximately 60% of the total impact of PSM on performance is transmitted through ENG. This result is the most important point of the model: the motivation to serve the public creates a foundation of value, but high performance primarily emerges when that foundation is transformed into a state of positive organizational commitment.

The combined results show that Public Service Motivation (PSM) plays a clear role in public service performance, but this influence does not operate entirely through a direct mechanism. A significant portion of PSM's impact is transmitted through organizational engagement. This finding is particularly significant in the context of administrative reform and increased performance-based evaluation: if the demands for targets and deadlines increase but the organizational environment does not reinforce job meaning, voice, fairness, and a sense of belonging, the motivation to serve may struggle to fully translate into sustained effort. Conversely, governance mechanisms that help public servants clearly identify their contributions, participate, receive recognition, and have the opportunity to develop their capabilities will increase the likelihood of PSM being translated into performance.

5. CONCLUSION AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

This study constructs and tests a mediating model to clarify the relationship between public service motivation, organizational commitment, and work performance in the context of civil servants in the Ministry of Interior in Vietnam. The analysis results show that all four hypotheses are supported. PSM strongly impacts commitment; both PSM and commitment have a positive impact on performance; in particular, commitment transmits a significant portion of PSM's influence to work outcomes. Accordingly, public service motivation can be seen as a behavioral-oriented resource, while commitment is a psycho-organizational mechanism that transforms that resource into effort and task performance results.

The first implication relates to the recruitment and placement of civil servants. In positions that directly impact organizational structure, public service, and the quality of public service, management should pay more attention to the alignment between professional motivation and public service values. The assessment doesn't necessarily have to make PSM a rigid recruitment criterion, but can utilize situational interviews, simulations, and behavioral questions to identify the ability to place public interest, responsibility, and public service standards in the decision-making process. At the same time, it's important to avoid assuming that PSM is a fixed trait; the work environment and organizational experience can reinforce or weaken this motivation over time.

Secondly, human resource management policies need to shift their focus from merely appealing to a sense of responsibility to maintaining engagement. Since ENG (Employee Engagement) is a powerful mediating variable, the Ministry of Interior's units need to create conditions for civil servants to clearly feel the meaning of their work, understand the connection between individual tasks and reform results and service quality, and have opportunities to participate in the work improvement process. Two-way communication mechanisms, leadership feedback, recognition of contributions, and appropriate delegation of authority can help civil servants bring more cognitive and emotional resources to their organizational roles. This is more important than general motivational slogans because engagement is formed from daily organizational experiences.

Third, performance evaluation needs to be designed to be both clear about results and protect intrinsic motivation. Decree No. 335/2025/ND-CP creates a legal framework emphasizing the evaluation of the quality of administrative agencies and civil servants based on results. When implemented, indicators should accurately reflect the level of task completion, quality, progress, and value created, but avoid turning the evaluation system into a purely supervisory mechanism. If indicators lack individual control or focus too much on quantity, they can diminish the sense of meaning in the work. Conversely, when objectives are clear, feedback is timely, and results are linked to the interests of the organization and the people, performance evaluation can strengthen both PSM and engagement.

Fourth, developing a leadership and management team is crucial. Direct leaders are the agents who translate the public mission into concrete work experiences for civil servants. Managers need to explain why tasks are important, ensure fairness in assignments, acknowledge efforts, and create space for civil servants to propose improvements. This role is even more essential during periods of organizational change because uncertainty about functions, job positions, and processes can undermine engagement even among individuals with high PSM (Personal Service Management). Therefore, human resource management, change communication, and trust building should be considered a central focus in leadership training for the Ministry of Interior.

Finally, the research suggests that sustainable civil service reform needs to simultaneously impact three levels: personal values, organizational experience, and job outcomes. The first level creates the reason civil servants want to serve; the second determines whether they are willing to invest themselves in the organization; and the third reflects the results of that process. Managing each level separately can create a gap between motivation and performance. An effective public service system needs to connect recruitment, placement, leadership, evaluation, and career development so that motivation to serve is sustained by a positive organizational experience and translates into observable results.

Despite the achievements, the study still has limitations that need to be noted. The dataset in this draft was constructed to serve the testing and illustration of an intermediate model; therefore, the coefficients are not generalizable as representative evidence for all civil servants in the Ministry of Interior. Further studies need to collect actual survey data at various levels of agencies, combining self-assessment with superior assessment or work performance data, and considering moderating variables such as leadership style, organizational equity, reform pressure, and clarity of objectives. Nevertheless, the structure of the results shows that the PSM (Personal Engagement - Performance) model is a valuable approach for further testing in public human resource management research in Vietnam.

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