

Public servants are individually motivated to help environment

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Robert Christensen Credit: University of Georgia

New University of Georgia research shows that while on the job, public servants contribute not just to mandated sustainability but also to discretionary eco-friendly initiatives of their own.

"Some people are born with a higher intrinsic need to serve the public," said study co-author Robert K. Christensen, an associate professor in the School of Public and International Affairs. "They have a desire to help others and serve society. Government and nonprofit managers, for example, typically have higher levels of public service motivation than business managers."

The study in the *American Review of Public Administration* used a survey of hundreds of public servants in a large southeastern city to examine their environmental and organizational behaviors.

Authored by Justin M. Stritch, a former doctoral student in public administration and policy, and Christensen, who also is the school's Ph.D. director in the department of [public administration](#) and policy, the research found that public servants were likely to engage in eco initiatives.

"Eco initiatives are discretionary, pro-environmental behaviors that an employee can participate in during the day," said Stritch, who is now an assistant professor at Arizona State University. "Eco initiatives involve things like recycling or energy conservation. Reusing water bottles and turning off your computer screen are examples."

Eco initiatives include sustainable micro-level behaviors, small tasks that are done voluntarily by the employee. When an employee chooses to do things like save paper or turn off lights at work, they are participating in eco initiatives. Eco initiatives are done because employees choose to do them, not because they're enforced.

In the survey, public servants in the southeastern city from departments like neighborhood and business services, fire, police, human resources and the city manager's office reported their environmental and workplace behaviors. The results showed that eco initiatives had to do

with how motivated these public servants were to help society.

Public service motivation, a type of altruism, determines how people feel about the public and how they want to service public values. People with public service motivation can fulfill their desire to help society by choosing a job in government or a job in the private sector that helps citizens.

"Eco initiatives are correlated with the public service motivation of an individual," Christensen said. "Public servants with high public service motivation engage in micro citizenship behaviors to benefit society on a broader basis."

Along with public service motivation, two other predictors indicate a person's likeliness to perform eco initiatives.

"The three key drivers are public service motivation, organizational commitment and environmental connectedness," Stritch said. "The three work together to determine whether a person engages in eco initiatives."

Environmental connectedness describes an individual's attachment to nature. Having a strong connection to nature will increase an employee's likelihood of performing [environmental initiatives](#). An employee's concern for the environment will help predict whether, and to what extent, they engage in eco initiatives.

"Even after accounting for an individual's connectedness to nature, an employee's public service motivation is a key factor in understanding voluntary, eco initiatives in the public workplace," Christensen said.

Stritch and Christensen hope that future studies will examine how institutional arrangements and mandated sustainability initiatives in cities change environmental commitment and behavior.

"Our hope is that people begin to think about stewardship and public resources in a broader way," Stritch said. "We want to see how [public servants](#) consider the environment over time and in different places."

"We have some compelling, if not preliminary, evidence that government workers often have the motivation to go above and beyond to benefit the environment while working in jobs that benefit society," Christensen said.

More information: The full article, published online ahead of print, is available at arp.sagepub.com/content/early/.../552470.full.pdf+html

Provided by University of Georgia

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