

2021

The impact of recession-era austerity measures on the work-life balance of public employees

Judith Small-Benn
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Judith Small-Benn

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Karel Kurst-Swanger, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Clarence Williamson, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Eliesh Lane, University Reviewer,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2021

Abstract

The Impact of Recession-Era Austerity Measures on the Work-Life Balance of Public
Employees

by

Judith Small-Benn

MA, Walden University, 2020

MA, Keller Graduate School of Business, 2005

BS, St. Francis College, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Management

Walden University

December 2021

Abstract

The downturn in the economy from 2009 to 2011 caused public service leaders to adopt austerity measures, such as increased costs of nonwage benefits, mandatory furlough days, and merit increase freezes. There is little research on the impact of austerity measures on the lives of public service employees. The purpose of this study was to bridge this knowledge gap through an exploration of the long-term effects of austerity measures on the lives of the state agency employees. The theoretical framework for this study was Perry and Wise's public service motivation theory. The study presented the impact of austerity measures on all aspects of public servants' lives. A qualitative, phenomenological design with purposeful semistructured interviews of 15 members of the Georgia State Retirees Association was the approach employed for the study. The data from the interviews underwent thematic coding and categorization for analysis and comparison of the emergent themes of the effects of austerity measures on all aspects of the participants' lives. The theme that emerged as the most dominant based on the data was employee dissatisfaction. All the participants expressed a form of dissatisfaction with the austerity measures that were implemented during the Great Recession. The implications for social change include educating managers and leaders of government agencies about the long-term impact of austerity measures on public employees' lives, which could provide helpful information for policy decision making in future economic downturns.

The Impact of Recession-Era Austerity Measures on the Work-Life Balance of Public

Employees

by

Judith Small-Benn

MA, Walden University, 2020

MA, Keller Graduate School of Business, 2005

BS, St. Francis College, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

December 2021

Dedication

I give all the Glory to God who helped and guided me through this long journey. I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Janielle, Jherelle, and Theodore, and my grandchildren Joyah-Marie and Marc. I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother Joan Corneille and my stepfather Earl Corneille who has been proud of me through all my accomplishments. I was able to finish this journey because I placed my faith in God and kept my focus on being an example for you all. Never give up on your dreams.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my first chairperson who guided me through my prospectus, Dr. Shirley Baugher. I also want to thank my wonderful chair who gave me hope when I thought all was lost and wonderfully guided me through the dissertation, Dr. Karel Kurst-Swanger. I also thank my Committee member, Dr. Clarence Williamson, and my URR Dr. Elizabeth Lane. I am grateful to my Student Success Advisor, Judia Yael Malachi and my Academic Advisor, Yoshi Yoshimine for their wonderful advice. Thank you, Dr. Diana Clarke, for taking this journey with me and encouraging me to continue when I would have given up.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background of the Study	3
Problem Statement.....	5
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	7
Theoretical Foundation	8
Nature of the Study.....	9
Definitions.....	11
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations	13
Limitations	13
Significance of the Study	14
Summary and Transition.....	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	16
Introduction.....	16
Literature Search Strategy.....	17
Theoretical Foundation	17
Literature Review.....	25
Recessionary Austerity Measures and Job Satisfaction and Motivation	25

Summary	30
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	32
Introduction.....	32
Research Design.....	33
Research Rationale.....	35
Role of the Researcher	36
Methodology.....	37
Participatrion Selection Logic.....	36
Instrumentation and Materials.....	38
Data Analysis Plan.....	38
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	40
Ethical Procedures.....	42
Summary	43
Chapter 4: Results.....	44
Introduction.....	44
Research Setting.....	45
Demographics	46
Data Collection	47
Data Analysis	48
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	51
Credibility	51
Transferability.....	52

Dependability	52
Confirmability.....	52
Study Results	52
Research Question 1	55
Research Question 2	65
Research Question 3	68
Summary	70
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	72
Interpretation of Findings	73
Limitations of the Study.....	78
Recommendations.....	79
Implications.....	80
Conclusions.....	81
References.....	82
Appendix A: GSRA Response.....	95
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	97
Appendix C: Interview Protocol.....	99

List of Tables

Table 1. A Priori Themes.....	40
Table 2. Participant Demographics.....	47
Table 3. A Priori Themes and Emergent Themes, and Subthemes.....	50
Table 4. Main Themes and Subthemes.....	54

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Leaders shape organizational culture and manage diversity by communicating their values, setting examples for ethical behavior, and engaging with and inspiring their followers. Lail, MacGregor, Steubs, and Thomasson (2015) found that organizational leaders generally set the organizational tone, which has an influence on employees' behaviors and attitudes. Rego, Sousa, Marques, and e Cunha (2012) asserted that a leader must exhibit intelligence, responsibility, integrity, ambition, sociability, self-confidence, emotional control, and diplomacy to motivate employees. Perrin, Perrin, Blauth, East, and Duffy (2012) posited that leaders must self-reflect and know their strengths to visualize the effects they have on their employees and how these workers might perceive managers' motivational strategies. Schoemaker, Krupp, and Howland (2013) stated that leaders must develop the ability to anticipate problems and envision successful outcomes while maintaining flexibility. Because leaders, through their actions, influence their employees' behaviors and attitudes, they must be ethical and transparent, exhibiting certain characteristics to motivate their employees, regardless of the economic climate.

A leader's characteristics are important for effectively motivating employees. Schoemaker et al. (2013) posited that leaders must develop strategic and critical thinking skills, such as challenging others, making effective decisions, staying resolute and flexible when working with others, and introducing necessary changes, to ensure organizational viability in all climates, including economic downturns. Bureaucratic characteristics, however, could result in an inflexible environment in government service,

and leaders might struggle to implement changes and provide employees with incentives as motivation. Motivating employees could be a more evident difficulty during a recession and the postrecession period when leaders strive to motivate their employees after implementing austerity measures to combat the effects of the recession.

Researchers have conducted numerous studies since Perry and Wise (1990) introduced and later developed the theory of public service motivation (PSM). Researchers have examined PSM to determine what motivated public-sector employees or why they chose employment in the public sector (Quratulain & Khan, 2015). However, no research is available about the effects of a recession and the resulting austerity measures on PSM. Government leaders introduced austerity measures, including mandatory furlough days, increased costs of nonwage benefits, and froze merit increases to cope with the Great Recession's effects on government agencies' budgets (Lee & Sanders, 2013). This study bridged the gap in the literature between previous research on PSM, job satisfaction, and public service employee retention through an exploration of the postrecessionary period after 2008. I explored the long-term effects of the austerity measures on actual rank-and-file public employees by interviewing retirees of state agencies in Georgia and exploring their lived experiences in the aftermath of the economic downturn.

This chapter presents the study's background and the guiding theory of PSM. Chapter 1 also includes the problem statement, purpose, research questions, and methodology and design. The definitions are the key concepts, followed by the assumptions of the study. The scope and delimitations section shows the specific aspects

of the research problems addressed in the study, with the limitations section identifying limitations related to the design and the methodological weakness. The significance portion shows the study's potential contributions for advancing knowledge of the discipline and the implications for social change. Chapter 1 concludes with a summary and a transition to Chapter 2.

Background of the Study

Scholars have developed numerous theories on leadership and management strategies in government agencies and government employee satisfaction. Gadkin, Parayitam, and Natarajan (2010) believed that job satisfaction is a combination of achievement, recognition, challenge, responsibility, and advancement. However, over time, even the most loyal and enthusiastic government employees can lose their enthusiasm, usually after experiencing inadequate employee incentives, bureaucratic rules and procedures, and a taxing chain of command. Meyer, Egger-Peitler, Hollerer, and Hammerschmid (2014) studied the relationship between PSM and its antecedents that constitute a moral commitment and found a relationship between PSM and the morale needed to serve others. However, after a recessionary period, government leaders might struggle to motivate public service employees due to mandated furlough days and financial incentive freezes, such as merit pay. The desire to serve others might not be sufficient motivation for employees facing stagnant salaries, rising living costs, and escalating food, gas, and health care expenses. Subsequently, government leaders could struggle to motivate employees who once felt inspired by the moral need and desire to serve others.

Employers of private companies can generally motivate their employees through bonuses or cash rewards; in comparison, public leaders must find nonfinancial ways to reward employees (Jensen, Patel, and Messersmith, 2013). Jensen et al (2013) noted that the concept of employee remuneration for quality work, not for company longevity, is not new; however, it is a challenge to uphold this concept in government agencies. Using nonmonetary rewards for motivation, such as public recognition and thank-you notes sent via e-mail, might have been effective rewards before the Great Recession. However, due to the escalating costs of essential goods and services combined with a lack of salary increases and mandated furlough days, Jensen et al. (2013) posits that employees could have viewed these rewards as less valuable. Lee and Sanders (2013) studied state agencies in Georgia, finding that although employees felt the furloughs had a significant effect on their financial burden, job satisfaction, morale, and work conditions, there was no significant change in work performance and productivity. PSM may cause public employees to continue to work normally despite financial burdens caused by economic distress, even when leaders introduce austerity measures to combat the effects of a recession.

During and after a recession, public leaders must continue to motivate and inspire employees to maintain optimum performance levels. According to Trinkka (2011), the most important criteria for successful leadership are honesty and integrity, combined with the ability to lead a group by communicating effectively and developing others. Government managers who develop successful leadership competencies improve a government agency's culture. Gadkin et al. (2010) posited that civil service employment

fulfills part of public employees' intrinsic needs; however, budget cuts caused by the economic downturn required government employees to perform their jobs with the same efficiency and less staff. The economic downturn also caused the private market to shrink, resulting in limited hiring; subsequently, the public sector became Americans' choice employer and the place to seek professional opportunities. According to data from the Bureau of Labor (Statista Portal, 2018), in February 2018, there were 126.40 million federal, state, and local government employees in the United States; therefore, public-sector leaders must retain and motivate employees during times of economic difficulty.

Government leaders play a role in maintaining their employees' work and life balance through motivation to achieve a healthy work and life balance (Khan, 2011). Amid budget and departmental cuts, leaders encourage employees to work longer hours and sometimes even forgo vacation to ensure that departments continue to function with less staff. By understanding the need to promote healthy and effective work and life balance, government leaders can attract new personnel and motivate present employees. Although previous researchers have explored PSM and the role of financial rewards in PSM, there has been little research on the effects of austerity measures during economic crises, such as decreased nonwage benefits. This study bridged the gap in the literature on the effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM and the PSM of public employees when there is no recession.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was the lack of research on the impact of the austerity measures implemented by public leaders during the Great Recession on public

employees' PSM. Leaders of government agencies implemented austerity measures to cope with the Great Recession's effects on their budgets. Despite significant research on PSM since Perry & Wise (1990) introduced the theory, there was a gap in the literature on the effects of the Great Recession on public employees' PSM. Even though the Great Recession ended in 2009, studying the effects of these austerity measures on public employees' PSM could provide helpful information for civic leaders and managers during times of economic difficulty.

To further understand this social issue, I used a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore retired state employees' perspectives on the impact of Great Recession austerity measures on their work-life balance. Participants were previous employees of various state agencies in Georgia before and during the Great Recession who had recently retired. Austerity measures put in place during the Great Recession presented difficulties for implementing any type of incentive, including annual performance raises (Lee & Sanders, 2013). Even though public service employees had some job security, pay levels decreased due to reduced health benefits coverage and costlier copayments. Further, the government required employees to take mandatory furlough days (time off without pay) and forgo salary increases while experiencing rising living costs.

PSM, introduced and developed by Perry and Wise (1990), was the guiding theory I used to test the effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public servants' work-life balance and PSM. There may be differing PSM motivators for public employees than for workers in the private sector (Perry, Brudney, Coursey, & Littlepage,

2008). Perry et al. (2008) defined PSM as the predisposition to feel motivated by working in public organizations and providing public service. Perry et al. posited that public service employees place greater value on serving the public than do their private-sector counterparts. However, the recession and mandated furlough days, financial incentive freezes, such as merit pay increase freezes, and budget cuts led to increased nonwage benefit costs affecting employees' financial, emotional, and physical well-being, including job performance and motivation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the perceived effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM. The austerity measures included furlough days, increased costs of nonwage benefits, and merit increase freezes. Government leaders implemented the austerity measures to cope with the effects of the recession on budgets. In this research, I conducted face-to-face interviews of 15 retirees of state government agencies in Georgia. The participants shared their lived experiences of austerity measures and the real-world effects on their PSM.

Research Questions

The study's guiding research question (RQ) was as follows:

What were the lived experiences of public employees of state agencies in Georgia whose public leaders or managers implemented austerity measures during the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009?

The following subquestions were also used:

RQ1: What was the effect of the Great Recession austerity measures on state employees' PSM?

RQ2: On which areas of state employees' lives did the Great Recession austerity measures have an effect?

RQ3: Which of the Great Recession austerity measures had the most effect on state employees' PSM?

Theoretical Foundation

There is significant research on why individuals choose employment in the public sector, whereas others seek work in the private sector (French & Emerson, 2014). French and Emerson concluded that the individuals who sought job security, career tenure, and retirement benefits chose to work in the public sector. Perry and Wise (1990) developed the PSM theory, which has three intrinsic motivational factors: the rational choice of individuals to participate in public policy for personal fulfillment, the desire and need to serve the public interest, and a genuine conviction about the social importance of patriotism. Since the theory's introduction, researchers have conducted numerous studies to understand the impact of PSM on work-relevant outcomes. In this study, I explored the effects of the austerity measures adopted by leaders in a recessionary period on public servants' lives.

With PSM, Perry and Wise (1990) described the intrinsic motivational factors for choosing employment in the public service. However, Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2012) found that extrinsic factors, such as salary and competitive health benefits, might also be reasons individuals seek public service jobs. These factors could also lead to

increased job performance, motivation, and job satisfaction, especially following a recession. Because the Great Recession affected the budgets of state and local government budgets, it also affected government employees (Levine & Scorsone, 2011). Government leaders attempted to cope with these effects by introducing measures such as modified work schedules, furloughs, increased employee contributions to medical and dental benefits, and pension reforms satisfaction. This study was the means of exploring the impact of these austerity measures on public employees' lives.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative phenomenological design was the approach used to conduct research. Phenomenology is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher attempts to identify the human experiences of a particular event or phenomenon as described by the participants (Creswell, 2009). The primary aim of phenomenology is to study and understand the experiences of individuals who have knowledge of a common event to understand the nature of the phenomenon (Tavellaei & Mansor, 2010). I conducted an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of 15 retired Georgia state agency employees with the austerity measures implemented by state agency leaders during the Great Recession. The participants provided insight into the effects of these austerity measures on public employees' PSM.

I chose the phenomenological design because I wanted to study, through the lived experiences of state employees in Georgia, the long-term effects of the austerity measures implemented by state agency leaders on public employees' PSM. The austerity measures studied included mandatory furlough days, frozen merit increases, and increased health

care costs. I also explored the experiences and impacts of the austerity measures on the employees.

The sample consisted of retirees of state agencies in Georgia whom I interviewed with open-ended questions to discover their opinions, reactions, and attitudes about the post recession and the long-lasting effects of the austerity measures employed during the 2-year recession. I also explored the effects of the austerity measures on the participants' lives in the years after the recession until their retirement.

Purposive sampling is a common sampling technique in which the researcher, who has good knowledge of the field, chooses the most relevant participants to answer the research questions (Barrett, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015). The chief concern when selecting the sample is to answer the research questions (Patton, 2002). This research was an exploration of the effects of specific Great Recession austerity measures on the lives of government employees.

No universal rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry exist; however, this type of research typically requires in-depth information from relatively small samples and sometimes even single cases (Patton, 2002). The population from which I chose the sample was members of the Georgia State Retirees Association (GSRA). I requested volunteers who had worked in Georgia State agencies before the Great Recession and had retired within the last 2 years. According to the Employees' Retirement System of Georgia, to qualify for retirement with full benefits, an employee must be either 60 years old with no fewer than 10 years of service or employed for 30 years regardless of age; reduced benefits were available for employees of any age upon reaching 25 years of

tenure. The desired volunteers were retirees between 55 to 70 years of age who had worked at state agencies in Georgia for at least 13 years. I chose 13 years as a requirement because the retirees would have worked for a state agency for at least 2 years before the Great Recession (2005) and 9 years after the Great Recession (2018). I could study the participants who employed during that time frame to establish whether the austerity measures had a long-term effect (lasting more than 2 years after the Great Recession) on their work-life balance. Work-life balance is the ideal split between employees' time at work and the time spent on other important aspects of their lives (Heathfield, 2018).

Definitions

Austerity measures: Measures taken by government officials to combat the effects of difficult economic conditions (Coope et al., 2015).

Axiology: The study of values and beliefs about reality, right or wrong, good, or bad (Farquhar, 2013).

Epistemology: The study of knowledge (Farquhar, 2013).

Intrinsically oriented: Motivated by internal factors (Olafsen, Halvari, Forest, & Deci, 2015).

Nonwage benefits: Benefits that are not wages or salaries, such as health care, dental insurance, and 401(k)s (Standing, 2014).

Ontology: The study of the nature of human beings' existence as individuals in society and the universe (Farquhar, 2013).

Great Recession of 2007-2009: The most significant economic downturn since the Great Depression. The Great Recession began at the end of 2007 and ended in 2010 (Christiano, Eichenbaum, & Trabandt, 2015).

Work-life balance: Adequate, fulfilling, quality work that provides enough time for other important aspects of employees' lives (Gangwisch, 2014).

Assumptions

This study's guiding conceptual framework was the PSM theory by Perry and Wise (1990). Farquhar (2013) posited that scholars use ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology to guide their research. Ontology is a means to address the unspoken assumptions beneath the surface of the research; epistemology allows a researcher to explore knowledge; axiology allows inquiry into the relationships between the researchers and the research; and methodology serves as the guiding philosophy or philosophies for how to gather the knowledge (Farquhar, 2013). These research paradigms were used to guide my research.

Creswell (2013) posited that researchers merge a set of prior beliefs and their personal world views with underlying philosophical assumptions which can shape a research study. One assumption was that the framework with PSM as the guiding theory was an appropriate framework for the study design and approach, data collection and analysis, results, and contribution to social change. Truth is relative and dependent on individual perspectives, so I assumed the participants knew their PSMs and answered all the interview questions by providing insight into their behaviors during the phenomenon. Another assumption was that the open-ended interview questions enabled the participants

to express their thoughts and experiences about their lived experiences of austerity measures during the Great Recession. Using interpretive analysis to achieve an objective view of participants' lived experiences and truths about the phenomenon, I identified and analyzed themes, concepts, and categories. The overall patterns from the generalized data could provide information relevant for social change by showing the impact of Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the perceived effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM. I delimited my study to Georgia because my partner association, the GSRA, provided access to retirees of state agencies throughout the state. The target population was 15 GSRA members. Because government leaders implemented austerity measures in Georgia during the Great Recession, this study was a unique opportunity to explore the impact of those measures on state employees' PSM in Georgia. I conducted face-to-face interviews and posed the same prepared questions to all the participants. I designed the questions so the participants could openly discuss their feelings and the effect of these austerity measures on their PSM. Another delimitation was that my participants were recent retirees between 55 and 70 years old; I did not address younger employees' perspectives.

Limitations

Researcher bias is a significant limitation of phenomenological research (Hickman, 2015). I may have had difficulty avoiding the introduction of personal bias

while reviewing and analyzing the data collected from the interviews because I had been employed at a state agency before, during, and after the Great Recession. I recorded and transcribed the interviews to avoid including any of my experiences with the phenomenon.

Another limitation of this research was that my target population consisted only of members of the GSRA, who were retirees of state agencies of Georgia, between 55 to 70 years of age. The participants were employees of state agencies before and during the Great Recession, and there was no representation from public employees of a younger range bracket. Although the results could clarify the reactions and feelings of these state retirees, the research data may not have provided a clear resolution for the phenomenon but could be the basis for further research. The results could also have had limited external validity because the responses of the participants are not representative of the larger population of public employees.

Significance of the Study

Identifying the impact of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM was a step toward positive social change. Future government leaders could use the results of this study to promote employee motivation in the public sector during times of economic hardship. The results could also be used to better understand the implementation of austerity measures on the PMF of state employees.

Summary and Transition

There have been numerous studies on PSM, the reasons individuals become and remain public servants, and the job satisfaction of public service. However, there was a

need for more research on PSM during and after a recessionary period to gain a better understanding of the effect of austerity measures on PSM through difficult economic times. This study was an exploration of the long-lasting effects on public servants' lives and motivation of austerity measures implemented by leaders of Georgia state agencies to cope with the budget deficits of the Great Recession. This study was a way to identify a relationship between a downturn in the economy and PSM. Chapter 2 presents a literature review, including PSM themes identified in prior research. The next chapter also includes a review of the literature on PSM, the study's theoretical foundation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Following the Great Recession of 2008, scholars have investigated the economic downturn's effect on public service organizations. I focused specifically on the motivation of public employees after specific austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession. Public service leaders in many countries initiated austerity measures to alleviate the effects of the recession on their budgets (Kiefer, Hartley, Conway, & Briner, 2015). The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the perceived effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM. I explored the retirees' perceptions of the austerity measures implemented by state agency leaders in Georgia. These measures included furlough days, increased medical insurance costs, frozen merit pay raises, and layoffs of temporary and some permanent employees. Data collection entailed conducting semi structured interviews to understand the retirees' perceptions of the impact of the Great Recession's austerity measures on their lives and motivation.

This chapter presents the strategies used to search the literature on the subject and on PSM, the theoretical foundation. The chapter also includes a review of any major themes related to austerity measures implemented in a recession, as well as public employees' perceptions of the impact of those measures on their lives and motivation. Additionally, Chapter 2 presents the concepts related to the following components of PSM: compassion, self-sacrifice, civic duty, and attraction to policymaking, as identified by Clerkin and Cogburn (2012). Following are the topics explored in the literature:

recession, economic crises, need to do good for others and society, usefulness to society, cutbacks, effects of cutbacks on the lives and motivation of public employees, job satisfaction and commitment, increased employee dissatisfaction, low employee morale, work-related stress, and high employee turnover.

Literature Search Strategy

The primary sources searched were books, journals, and publications. I collected material electronically from the Walden University Library and Google Scholar using the ProQuest Central, EBSCO, Public Policy and Administration, and Academic Search Complete databases. The majority of sources were from peer-reviewed articles with full text and references published between 2012 and 2020.

The literature review consisted of an exploration of PSM, especially the effect of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation on PSM. The keywords used in the search were *public service motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, recession, postrecession, austerity measures, public employees, government employees, furlough days, nonwage benefits, rising medical costs, and public servants.*

Theoretical Foundation

There have been numerous studies on why individuals choose public service careers and optimum performance as public employees. Perry et al. (2008) and Anitha (2014) agreed that motivation affects an employee's performance and productivity and, when combined with ability and personal morality, an employee's performance. According to Perry et al., PSM is the energizing, directing, and sustaining force for employee behavior that includes individual needs and motives. Perry and Hondeghem

(2008) and Perry and Vandenberg (2008) believed that PSM includes the employee's beliefs, values, and attitudes that extend beyond self-interest and organizational interest. Wright, Christensen, and Isett (2013) posited that PSM is an employee's need to do good for others and society, commitment to civic duty, and feelings of societal obligations. The organizational environment also influences the service employee's motivation (Wright et al., 2013). Wright et al. believed that public employees felt motivated by the opportunity to learn new things, process interesting job content, receive recognition, and have the chance for self-development. The Great Recession affected the organizational environment of public service, which impacted PSM. Because of this impact, Prebble (2014) identified a need for more research to determine whether public service employees act differently than their private-sector counterparts when placed in similar circumstances, such as the economic downturn caused by the Great Recession.

I did not focus on the effects of any leadership style during the Great Recession; rather, I explored the impact of austerity measures implemented by leaders on public servants' work-life balance. Transformational leaders ask followers to put the public's needs before the followers' needs (Bottomley, Mostafa, Gould-Williams, & León-Cázares, 2016), in this case, public employees. The concept of a transformational leader supports PSM, which indicates that individuals seek public service employment to do good for others. Bottomley et al. (2016) believed that public employees with high PSM levels required less coercion from transformational leaders than their counterparts with low PSM levels. There has been further research on the long-term effects of the austerity measures implemented by public leaders, including transformational leaders, on public

employees' work-life balance after government leaders implemented austerity measures during the Great Recession.

Researchers have found that PSM is correlated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, and employee behavior (Prebble, 2014). Perry and Wise (1990), Belle (2013), and Homberg, McCarthy, and Tabvuma (2015) argued that employees with higher PSM levels were more productive and committed to their organizations than employees with lower PSM. Liu and Perry (2016) and Mostafa, Gould-Williams, and Bottomley (2015) found strong links between PSM and organization identification, job satisfaction, and employee behavior. Likewise, Liu and Perry (2016) concluded that public employees with high PSM levels identified more with their organizations' missions, values, and environments. Furthermore, public employees were more willing to work harder to achieve organizational goals (Liu & Perry, 2016). Liu and Perry (2016) also discovered job security and PSM positively correlated with job satisfaction and longevity. During the Great Recession, public leaders introduced mandatory furlough days to prevent layoffs. Although research showed that public servants with high PSM levels—which closely correlated with job security, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment—were motivated by intrinsic values, loss of income had a significant effect on work-life balance. Loss of income caused by economic downturns like the Great Recession could then have a great impact even on those employees with higher PSM values.

PSM and public service employment during and after a recession. Jobs that provide security are essential before, during, and after a recession. Some researchers

compared job security between the public and private sectors. According to Kopelman and Rosen (2016), the public sector provides more job security than the private sector. Kopelman and Rosen found lower rates of public-sector job loss during a recession than in the private sector, even during the Great Recession. Although the public sector is not recession-proof, it provides security for all races, genders, and educational groups. However, despite the increased job security likely among public-sector employees, the austerity measures implemented during the recession to relieve budget restrictions might have had lasting effects on motivation.

During the Great Recession, individuals with higher educational levels and PSM intrinsic motivators might have been drawn to public service employment regardless of the salaries (Bright, 2011). Some individuals consider public employees overpaid, although they generally have more education than their private-sector counterparts (Keefe, 2012). Keefe (2012) found that during the Great Recession, governors of 45 states introduced austerity measures to combat budget deficits caused by the economic downturn. These measures included pay freezes and cuts, benefit reductions, and privatization. Keefe also noted public employees to be undercompensated by 3.7% compared to their private counterparts in consideration of variables such as education, experience, hours of work, organizational size, gender, race, ethnicity, and disability. On average, state and local public employees have more education than their private counterparts (with 54% and 35% of employees holding at least a 4-year college degree in the public and private sector, respectively); however, state and local governments provided 25% less pay to their college-educated employees than do private companies

(Keefe, 2012). Thus, there is the assumption that those who choose to work in the public sector may have high PSM levels because they chose the public sector as their place of employment even though can be more educated and more underpaid than their private counterparts.

Major dimensions of PSM. Before the Great Recession, researchers found that intrinsic motivators, such as the need to do good for others and society, led individuals to seek public service employment. In the aftermath of the recession, Bullock, Stritch, and Rainey (2015) conducted a quantitative study using *t* tests and ordinary least squares regressions, discovering that public employees responded to altruistic and public service-oriented rewards more than private employees. Bullock et al. concluded that public employees' perceptions of their usefulness to society influenced their motives, rewards, and attitudes. Following a quantitative, longitudinal field study, Kiefer et al. (2015) noted that organizational changes due to the Great Recession affected public employees' well-being and attitudes. Thus, the budgetary changes caused by the Great Recession might have had adverse, long-term effects on public employees' PSM.

According to Clerkin and Cogburn (2012), PSM could show the ideal workplace for certain individuals; accordingly, the researchers posited that individuals based PSM on need fulfilled in different ways, one of which was joining the public service. Using a quantitative approach to investigate the relationship between individuals' PSM and work sectors, Clerkin and Cogburn identified four dimensions of motivation for working in the public service as a result of PSM: compassion, self-sacrifice, civic duty, and attraction to policy-making. The researchers found that individuals had certain PSM levels before

joining the public sector and that the values and cultures of the organizations they joined could have influenced their PSM levels. Clerkin and Cogburn concluded that self-sacrifice was the most important dimension for both men and women employed in the public service; as this dimension increased, so did the attractiveness of working in public service. The Great Recession caused many public organization leaders to introduce austerity measures to combat the effects of dwindling budgets, which could have affected the dimension of public employees' self-sacrifice.

Public leaders' and managers' decisions likely impact public employees' PSM. Coursey, Yang, and Pandey (2012) conducted a quantitative, longitudinal study to examine the relationship between public employees' PSM and public managers' attitudes toward employee participation. They focused on activities, such as alignment with PSM values, hypothesizing that PSM might not have been the primary motive of someone who chose the government as an employer. However, the results of their study supported previous research in that PSM affected public employees' attitudes, behaviors, and actions. Coursey et al. also believed that public managers' actions and decisions impacted their employees' attitudes, behaviors, and actions. Thus, the austerity measures implemented to combat the economic effects of the recession could have affected public employees' lives and motivation.

Public leaders and managers implemented specific austerity measures because of the Great Recession, actions that might have impacted public service employees' lives and motivation. According to Wright et al. (2013), the Great Recession caused a reduction in public-sector jobs, affecting workloads and resulting in changed perceptions of job

security and decreased nonwage benefits. Wright et al. used a quantitative, longitudinal research approach to examine the relationship between public employees' acceptance of change and personal values. Findings showed that public employees could draw upon the factors leading them to join the public sector to adapt to and support any organizational changes. Employees welcomed the changes made for program improvements more than adjustments caused by austerity policies. Wright et al. used ordinary least squares multiple regression models to test the relationship between PSM and commitment to change. The researchers concluded that salary freezes and increased employee-paid benefit costs had a negative effect on employees' PSM.

Studying how public leaders and managers can motivate public employees is beneficial for strong working relationships (Ritz, Brewer, & Neumann, 2016). Researchers found strong relationships between the types of people who chose to work in the public sector and their job commitment, individual performance, and tenure (Ritz et al., 2016; Vandenabeele, Brewer, & Ritz, 2014). Employers can use alternative reward systems, such as health care packages instead of bonuses or incentives, to improve employees' feelings of accomplishment and fulfill their intrinsic needs.

The organizational environment affects public employees' PSM. When public leaders implement austerity measures in response to a recession, these measures impact the organization's environment and its employees. Quratulain and Khan (2015) believed that bureaucratic rules and procedures and the length of employees' organizational tenure could harm public employees' PSM. The researchers also found that increased work pressure led to reduced PSM, whereas improved work experiences served to increase

PSM. The effects of the austerity measures implemented because of the Great Recession on PSM may or may not be reversible, even when the economy improves. Williamson (2014) argued that government leaders must understand the Great Recession's effect on employees to know how to cope more efficiently in future economic downturns.

Employees with high PSM levels feel a great need to help others. Esteve, von Witteloostijn, and Boyne (2015) found that employees with high PSM levels joined the public service to fulfill their desire to help people. Esteve, von Witteloostijn et al. believed that public organization leaders need to create an environment where they can nurture their employees' PSM levels. Esteve, von Witteloostijn et al. also found that employees with longer tenure had higher PSM levels and reacted differently to changes than employees who had shorter tenure and had achieved less bias and real-life experiences with that organization. Esteve, von Witteloostijn, et al. indicated that the Great Recession-inspired austerity measures could have had different effects on employees' PSM based on length of service. Any effects on the PSM of the public employees might not even be reversible after the downturn in the economy improves so it is extremely important that government leaders and managers understand the effects of the austerity measures on the employees' PSM to implement coping mechanisms.

Researchers found that PSM affected public employees' attitudes, behaviors, and actions and that employees with high PSM levels join the public service to fulfill the desire to help people. During the Great Recession, government leaders and managers were forced to implement austerity measures to combat the effect of declining budgets. These austerity measures may have adverse effects on public employees' PSM so public

leaders need to maintain an environment where they can continue to nurture their employees' PSM levels in future economic downturns.

Literature Review

Recessionary Austerity Measures and Job Satisfaction and Motivation

Finding ways to improve public service performance in an increasingly global society is important, especially during major economic downturns. Understanding the Great Recession's effects on public workers' PSM levels could be the key to formulating motivators for public employees, especially when economic disasters adversely impact their work-life balance. Andersen and Kjeldsen (2013) posited that motivation, commitment, and satisfaction affected organizational performance. Thus, public-sector leaders should understand the effects of the Great Recession on employees' PSM and work-life balance to prepare for future economic downturns (Williamson, 2014). Different PSM levels might have led to various reactions among public employees to the Great Recession austerity measures (Williamson, 2014). These austerity measures, implemented by many state agency leaders during the Great Recession, included mandatory furlough days, which affected salaries; increased costs of nonwage benefits, such as health and dental insurance; and layoffs. The austerity measures could have adversely impacted public employees' work-life balance and caused differing reactions based on the workers' PSM levels. Public leaders must determine and communicate effective employee coping mechanisms to prevent negative effects on the organizational environment.

PSM, which is one component leading individuals to seek public service jobs, correlates with job satisfaction and organizational commitment. According to Bakker (2015), PSM is an essential part of public employees' performance and well-being, especially in satisfying their feelings of compassion, self-sacrifice, civic duty, and attraction to policymaking. Bakker believed that PSM enabled public employees to better engage with their work, creating high enthusiasm and energy while performing their duties. Bakker posited that there was a difference between work energy and job satisfaction: Work energy is employees' excitement, energy, and enthusiasm for their tasks, whereas job satisfaction is employees' happiness and contentment in conducting day-to-day duties. Engaged public employees enjoy leisure activities outside of work, such as vacations, reading, sports, exercise, or dining out (Bakker, 2015). Thus, any long-term effects of the Great Recession on employees' financial ability to enjoy leisure activities likely affected their work engagement which is a component of their PSM.

Because PSM is a major contributing factor to public employee job satisfaction, performance, and engagement, managers and leaders must develop low-cost ways of motivating their employees, especially after an economic downturn such as the Great Recession. Public managers must learn how to foster and sustain high PSM levels in workers during stressful economic times to maintain stable organizational environments. In a quantitative study, Pedersen (2015) posited that simple or low-cost managerial PSM external interventions could have drastic effects on the way public employees invest their time and effort into organizational tasks. Public managers must derive simple yet

effective ways to encourage PSM in their employees when facing budget cuts that will likely impact their employees' financial situations.

Public leaders and managers must understand PSM and any possible effects of the austerity measures implemented because of the Great Recession on their employees' PSM levels. They need to comprehend PSM during and after economic downturns as preparation for introducing effective motivators if they are to alleviate the effects of any austerity measures, maintaining employees' PSM levels and stable organizational environments.

Christensen, Paarlberg, and Perry (2017) suggested that professionals from public organizations' human resources departments develop ways to attract and select potential employees with high PSM levels to ensure quality organizational performance from the outset. Public organization leaders should nurture their employees' PSM levels so the workers can handle any stressors during their tenure (Christensen et al., 2017). If public leaders and managers work to nurture their employees' PSM levels, there may be less stressful effects of austerity measures on employees' work-life balance.

The reasons for introducing austerity measures. The Great Recession started in the U.S. property markets in 2007 and spread rapidly to all global financial markets, with disastrous effects on public policy and governance still present in 2020 (Roberts & Townshend, 2017). Despite different measures taken to combat the effects of the recession in various countries, Roberts and Townshend (2017) noted that leaders of all countries and governments adopted austerity measures. Following a quantitative study, Cromwell and Ihlanfeldt (2015) found the recession led to fiscal stress and decreased

local budgets, causing leaders of various public agencies to introduce austerity measures, such as mandatory furlough days.

The austerity measures implemented because of the budget cutbacks of the Great Recession might still affect public employees. Despite studies after the recession on public service behavior, scholars did not examine a long enough time to capture the effects of the Great Recession on public service employees (Kim & Warner, 2016). Taylor and Taylor (2015) addressed three questions in their study on the economic factors of PSM levels in Malaysian public service employees: (a) Are the PSM levels of government employees significantly higher than private-sector employees? (b) Does the economy have an influence on employees' PSM levels? and (c) Is there a difference in the PSM levels of government employees and private-sector employees? Findings showed that a poor economy impacted public employees' PSM.

After the Great Recession, some government agencies operated with reduced budgets. Esteve, Schuster, Albareda, and Losada (2017) noted that scholars had not explored the relationship between greater public demands for quality service, organizational behavior, and austerity measures, such as salary cutbacks and freezes, in the years after the Great Recession. Esteve, Schuster, et al. conducted a public goods game simulation of public employees with a large group ($N = 263$) of first-year undergraduate students enrolled in a business program at a major university in the Netherlands. The researchers found only four studies on the effect of post recession cutbacks on public employees' well-being and attitudes. Esteve, Schuster, et al. explored the impact of wage cuts and increased work demands on the motivation and job

satisfaction of the European public sector in the years after the Great Recession. The researchers found that pay cuts and increased workloads hurt public servants' job satisfaction and motivation.

Public leaders and managers must concentrate on satisfying their employees after the budget cuts caused by austerity measures, such as cutbacks and frozen merit increases. In a quantitative study, Canterelli, Balardinelli, and Belle (2016) posited that leaders of public employees must ensure their remaining workers are able and willing to provide adequate essential services. To do so successfully, public leaders and managers must develop ways to ensure their employees feel satisfied with and committed to their jobs (Canterelli et al., 2016). However, there have been few qualitative studies on the subject. I conducted a phenomenological study on this subject because public leaders should understand the effect of austerity measures on their employees' work-life balance by hearing the perspectives of affected employees.

Researchers have identified policies and strategies for enhancing services yet ignored the effects of austerity measures on the well-being and attitudes of the employees providing those services (Kiefer et al., 2015). Kiefer et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study on how announcements of budget cuts affect public employees' well-being and attitudes, soliciting public employees' reports on the cutbacks and innovation-related changes in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Kiefer et al. also examined the possible positive and negative effects of the cuts and innovation-related changes on employees. Findings showed the cutbacks had adverse effects on public employees' attitudes and well-being; however, innovation-related changes had a positive impact.

With this study, Kiefer et al. contributed to the understanding of the effects of ongoing change on public employees.

In times of economic crises, public-sector leaders and managers tend to implement cutbacks to combat budgetary reductions while maintaining efficiency. Van der Voet and Vermeeran (2017) suggested such cutbacks could cause increased dissatisfaction with public service and low employee morale, increased work-related stress, and high employee turnover. In their study of the Dutch public service, Van der Voet and Vermeeran (2017) sought to better understand the relationship between cutbacks and employee well-being. Findings indicated that cutbacks harmed employee well-being in the public sector, showing that public managers should prioritize employee morale and well-being during economic downturns. Van der Voet and Vermeeran (2017) also found that although cutbacks adversely impacted employee well-being, the reductions did not have a similar effect on public-sector employees' work-related attitudes because of PSM. Van der Voet and Vermeeran (2017) posited that cutbacks could even affect the work-related attitudes of top-level management employees.

Summary

Chapter 2 presented PSM, the theory used as the study's theoretical framework. Perry and Hondeghem (2008) and Perry and Vandenabeele (2008) identified PSM as including employees' beliefs, values, and attitudes that extend beyond self- and organizational interest. Components of PSM include compassion, self-sacrifice, civic duty, and attraction to policymaking (Clerkin and Cogburn, 2012). The purpose of this

qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the perceived effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM.

The literature review was specific to the components of PSM and the impact of austerity measures on public servants' PSM. Chapter 3 will include a discussion of the qualitative approach used in the study, as well as the participants and selection method, interview questions, data organization, and data analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the perceived effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM. State agency leaders in Georgia implemented austerity measures from 2008 to 2011 to manage decreased budgets because of the Great Recession. These austerity measures included mandatory furlough days, increased costs of nonwage benefits, and frozen merit increases. I conducted a phenomenological study on the lived experiences of recent retirees of state agencies in the State of Georgia to ascertain the impact of the austerity measures on their lives and motivation.

Researchers conduct phenomenological studies for a deeper understanding of lived experiences by closely examining the experiences of individuals who have lived through a phenomenon (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). Scholars can gather phenomenological data using focus groups or interviews with small sample sizes, the latter because individuals can generate hundreds of concepts (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). Using a phenomenological interview strategy, I explored 15 GSRA members' lived experiences of the Great Recession austerity measures implemented during their employment at state agencies in Georgia. I anticipated that the results would provide a better understanding of the long-term effects of the measures on public employees' lives and motivation.

This chapter presents the research design, research rationale, and the role of the researcher. Also included are discussions of the methodology, including participants

selection, rationale for and selection of the research instrument, content validity, and the sufficiency of data collection from semi structured interviews. Additionally, Chapter 3 presents recruitment, participation, and data collection and analysis plans. Also included are the issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures, concluding with a summary of the chapter.

Research Design

I used a qualitative phenomenological approach for this study. I rejected the case study design, which scholars use to investigate a single entity (Creswell, 2002). In this study, I explored the effect of a phenomenon, which was the effect of the Great Recession's austerity measures on public employees' PSM. I took further justification for the phenomenological design from Tavellaei and Mansor (2010), who identified the purpose of phenomenology as to reduce individuals' experiences with a particular event to the level necessary to understand the nature of the studied phenomenon.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the perceived effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM. Leaders of bureaucratic agencies do not usually motivate their employees with monetary incentives except for annual job performance raises (Pedersen, 2015). The Great Recession that began in 2007 presented difficulties for implementing any incentives, including annual performance raises. One broad and three focused research questions guided the study to understand state employees' lived experiences.

The primary research question was as follows:

What were the lived experiences of public employees of state agencies in Georgia whose public leaders or managers had implemented austerity measures during the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009?

The participants answered broad questions, and I encouraged them to elaborate on their answers.

The following subquestions were also asked:

RQ1: What was the effect of the Great Recession austerity measures on state employees' PSM?

RQ2: On which areas of state employees' lives did the Great Recession austerity measures have the most effect?

RQ3: Which of the Great Recession's austerity measures had the most effect on state employees' PSM?

There is a significant amount of research on why individuals choose to work in the public sector while others gravitate to public organizations (see French and Emerson, 2014). French and Emerson (2014) found that public service attracted individuals seeking job security, career tenure, and retirement benefits. The theoretical concept of this study, PSM is a theory on individuals' rational choice to participate in public policy for personal fulfillment, the desire and need to serve the public interest, and a genuine conviction of the social importance of patriotism (Perry and Wise, 1990). I explored the effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public servants' motivation and their need to serve the public when faced with mandatory furlough days, increased costs of nonwage

benefits, and frozen merit increases. This study contributes to the literature by providing a better understanding of PSM during economic downturns.

Research Rationale

The quantitative approach was the method most frequently used to study PSM. According to Creswell (2013), scholars use quantitative methods to investigate the causes and effects of an outcome. However, the goal of this study was to generate information about the experiences of public servants' motivation in response to the Great Recession's austerity measures. I chose to use the phenomenological design, which is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher attempts to identify human experiences about a specific event or phenomena as described by the participants (see Creswell, 2009). Qualitative phenomenological research is a means of increasing the knowledge of a particular situation or circumstance (Kisely and Kendall, 2011). I gathered my data through interviews, triangulating data to ensure trustworthy and credible data.

To avoid bias, I conducted bracketing, the process of putting aside personal beliefs or prior knowledge of a subject while conducting research (see Chan, Fung, and Chien, 2013). Researchers conduct bracketing to improve the validity of data collection and analysis. Therefore, I put aside any prior knowledge, personal experience, or beliefs acquired as a public employee and allowed the participants to answer honestly without any prompting. I recorded and transcribed the interviews to capture the participants' responses accurately. I provided flexibility in the research by using a qualitative approach to study the phenomenon.

I conducted in-depth interviews with 15 participants using semi structured questions. In comparison, scholars conducting quantitative research tend to distribute surveys to a large group of people (Van Loon, Vanabeele, and Leisink, 2015). I chose in-depth interviews because of their exploratory nature and because they provided me the opportunity to explore participants' attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs using questions relevant to the topic, adding impromptu and probing questions for clarification, if necessary.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was the data collection instrument because I interviewed the participants. Even though I am still presently a state employee, I did not have any professional relationship with any of the participants in my study as all my participants were retirees. I also did not offer any incentives for participating in my study. I recruited the participants by first sending an e-mail to the GSRA about the nature of my dissertation, providing a brief synopsis of my research. I asked the agency members to forward my e-mail to recent state retirees, who had been employed by a state agency from 2000 until retiring in the last 2 years, providing my e-mail address so interested individuals could contact me. I received a response from the GSRA administrative aide (see Appendix A) that the board members were willing to partner with me by sending my request for participation to their members. My request for participants and my information as well as the information on my study was included in the December 2019 GSRA newsletter. I chose the first 15 participants who responded and were able to set appointments for the interview to be held. The semi structured questions I developed

were based on my research questions and my literature review. To control any bias, I asked the 15 participants the same 17 questions that I had developed without commenting on their answers. I also emailed a copy of the transcript of their interviews to each participant to check for errors.

Methodology

While conducting the literature review, I discovered that the quantitative approach was the most frequently used method. Qualitative methodology, however, was appropriate for this study to explore the effects of the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession on the PSM of public employees. PSM, developed by Perry and Wise (1996), was the guiding theory for my research.

Participant Selection Logic

I used purposive sampling for my sampling strategy. I e-mailed the GSRA, informing them of my research and asking permission to forward my e-mail and contact information to their members. The GSRA agreed, putting the description of my study and contact information in the December 2019 newsletter. (I have attached a copy of their e-mail in Appendix A.) Data saturation is the most important factor to consider in determining sample sizes in qualitative studies (Mason, 2010). I selected the first 15 individuals who expressed interest, which proved to be enough to achieve saturation. In Georgia, the austerity measures were uniform directives from the governor, so there were no differences in which agency or which region of the state the retiree worked or lived.

There is no rule for determining the correct sample size in a qualitative study (Patton, 2002). Researchers should identify the sample by what they want to learn, as

well as the purpose, credibility, and available time and resources for the study. Yin (2013) noted that phenomenological studies typically entail small samples. Boddy (2016) noted that scholars should choose sample size based on the ability to make valid inferences about the studied populations.

In qualitative research, a larger sample size could result in a redundant study; however, the researcher could always add to the sample if required by the fieldwork (Patton, 2002). Credible, valid research is dependent more on information-rich cases and the researcher's observational and analytical skills than the sample size. Of additional importance is the flexibility of the qualitative approach, as the researcher can increase the sample size to fulfill the purpose of the study. Being able to describe, explain, and justify the sampling procedures indicates the acceptability of smaller sample sizes (Patton, 2002).

I ensured data saturation to establish the validity of the content. In qualitative studies, researchers achieve data saturation when, based on the data already collected, they deem further collection unnecessary (Saunders et al., 2017). If I had not reached data saturation after interviewing the 15 participants, I would have added more participants to the sample using the same sampling method.

I was not in an influential or financial position and did not offer any incentives to the participants to ensure the research's reliability and validity. I conducted all interviews at agreed-upon locations in recognition of participants' willingness to take part in the study and encouraged them to respond candidly to the interview questions.

Instrumentation and Materials

I conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews with the first 15 GSRA members who volunteered to participate by emailing me of their interest in participating. I then emailed them the consent forms which outlined the study and what is expected from them during the interviews. I composed the 17 semi structured questions, (see Appendix B) that I asked the participants which emanated from the literature review and the research questions. The wording of the questions was developed to allow the participants to openly discuss the long-term effects of austerity measures on their lives, allowing me to collect data to answer the research questions. (See Appendix B for the interview questions and Appendix C for the interview protocol.) The interviews took place either over the phone, or at locations of the participant's choice where distractions were minimal and privacy guaranteed, such as the participants' home office, or a private room at the local library of the participant's hometown. I recorded the interviews using a digital recorder for the face to face interviews and a voice recording program called Rev Recorder for the interviews that were conducted over the phone. I emailed a copy of the transcript of their interview to each participant when I was finished transcribing and asked them to check for accuracy and to return to me with any revisions by the end of the next day.

Data Analysis Plan

I audio-recorded participants' responses to account for reliability, validity, and accuracy. I also took notes during the interviews using paper and pen. Audio-recording and transcribing the interviews allowed me to ensure the accurate capture of participants'

words. I gave the participants as much time as they needed to answer the questions and repeated the questions, if necessary, to ensure clarity.

I used NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software to assist with the data management and coding process. NVivo 12 facilitated working with the data, classifying, arranging, and sorting through the information for insight and themes. NVivo 12 was also a means of minimizing coding errors for the validity of the study. I conferred with my committee member about the themes I had identified while analyzing the data.

I used coding to identify themes, concepts, and categories from the interviews by looking for keywords, phrases, consistencies, and similarities in participants' responses. I developed categories and subcategories based on these codes. I took the following steps to organize and analyze the data:

1. Transcribe the interviews into Microsoft Word, categorizing the data to address the research questions and crosscheck for discrepancies
2. Use NVivo software to organize the data, code the themes, and identify the concepts
3. Review the data repeatedly to ensure understanding
4. Summarize the data

I identified a priori themes, as well (see Table 1).

Table 1

A Priori Themes

Research questions	A priori themes
What were the lived experiences of public employees of state agencies in Georgia whose public leaders or managers implemented austerity measures during the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009?	Recession, economic crises, cutbacks
What was the effect of the Great Recession austerity measures on state employees' PSM?	Employee dissatisfaction, satisfaction, job commitment, work-related stress
On which areas of state employees' lives did the Great Recession austerity measures have an effect?	Need to do good for others, usefulness to society, high employee turnover
Which of the Great Recession austerity measures had the most effect on state employees' PSM?	Cutbacks

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research indicates confidence in the findings (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Researchers must fulfill four criteria to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is the connection between the participant's views and the researcher's representation of those views (Tobin & Begley, 2004). I conducted transcript checking to confirm the accuracy of the data and ensure the credibility of my study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I e-mailed each participant a copy of his or her interview transcript to check for errors and additional comments.

Transferability is the generalizability, or the ability perceived by readers to transfer the findings to other contexts (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The researcher is

responsible for providing rich, detailed descriptions so a reader can determine the transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I provided clear, detailed descriptions of the settings, culture, context, participant characteristics, and methods used in this study to achieve transferability.

A researcher ensures dependability by documenting, analyzing, and presenting the research process so other researchers can follow the process and produce the same outcome (Tobin & Begley, 2004). I documented the settings, participants, interviews, themes, and categories of the study to establish dependability.

Confirmability is ensuring a researcher derived the findings solely from the data without introducing any bias (Tobin & Begley, 2004). I achieved confirmability by describing the reasons for my theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices so readers could understand the reasons. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews to further prevent researcher bias.

Ethical Procedures

I did not collect or store in any form any of the participants' personally identifiable information. I taped and marked the interviews, which occurred at mutually agreed-upon locations, or on the telephone. I addressed the participants only by preassigned numbers. Before each interview began, I provided each participant with an informed consent document with full details on the study, including procedures for confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The informed consent also indicated that participants could stop the interview at any time and refuse to answer any questions with which they felt

uncomfortable. Upon confirming their understanding, participants signed the forms, either digitally or in person. In so doing, they also agreed to the audio recording of the interviews. I stored all audio recordings in a password-protected file on my password-protected home computer, using numbers instead of names to identify the participants. In accordance with Walden University policy, I will destroy the recordings and all other study materials 5 years after completing the study.

Summary

I used a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore whether the austerity measures implemented by public leaders and managers during the Great Recession had long-term effects on public employees' work-life balance. I conducted one-on-one, face-to-face, telephone, and Skype interviews to elicit open, honest answers from the 15 volunteer participants. I asked open-ended questions to encourage the participants to reveal the essence of the effects of the austerity measures on both their personal and professional lives. After transcribing the interview recordings, I used NVivo 12 to identify emergent themes and keep track of notes.

To guide the interviews, I used 17 interview questions (see Appendix B), designed to elicit data sufficient to answer the study's research questions. Major themes emerged during data coding and analysis of the effects of the austerity measures (e.g., increased costs of nonwage benefits, mandatory furlough days, and frozen merit increases) on public employees. Chapter 4 will present the emergent themes and their analyses.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the perceived effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM. I conducted face-to-face interviews with 15 recent retirees of state government agencies in Georgia. The participants revealed their lived experiences with the austerity measures and effects on their PSM.

I achieved the purpose of this study by exploring the perceptions of 15 GSRA members who had retired from state agencies throughout Georgia. I used the 17 interview questions (see Appendix B) to solicit information appropriate to address the foundational research question: What were the lived experiences of public employees of state agencies in Georgia whose public leaders or managers implemented austerity measures during the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009? The sub questions were:

RQ1: What was the effect of the Great Recession austerity measures on state employees' PSM?

RQ2: On which areas of state employees' lives did the Great Recession austerity measures have an effect?

RQ3: Which of the Great Recession austerity measures had the most effect on state employees' PSM?

Upon receiving approval to conduct the study from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB; approval number 11-11-19-0192026), I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the 15 GSRA members' perceptions of

the Great Recession austerity measures. This chapter presents the research setting, the relevant demographics of the 15 participants, data collection methods, data analysis, including coding strategies and emerging themes, and the study's trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a review of the findings and a chapter summary.

Research Setting

I conducted telephone and face-to-face interviews with 15 GSRA members who had worked at various state agencies in Georgia. After obtaining IRB approval, I sent an e-mail to the GSRA administrative assistant, requesting that she share the details of my study and my contact information with the GSRA members. She introduced my request at the next board meeting, providing the purpose and procedures as well as the anticipated benefits; the board members voted and agreed to place my request and information in their December 2019 newsletter.

The first interested participant contacted me on January 18, 2020, with 18 more individuals responding during that week. I e-mailed the interested individuals informed consent forms to either sign and e-mail back to me before the telephone conference or sign in person before the face-to-face interviews. Four prospective participants could not set interview times because of their work and personal schedules, but I set dates and times for either telephone or face-to-face interviews with 15 participants. Between January 24, 2020, and February 14, 2020, I conducted nine face-to-face interviews and six telephone interviews. I recorded the face-to-face interviews using a digital voice recorder and the phone interviews with the Rev Call Recorder application. I asked all the participants the same 17 questions (see Appendix B). I encouraged all participants to

speak openly, reassuring them of the confidential nature of the interviews and that I would not reveal their personal identifiers to anyone. At the end of the interviews, I reminded the participants that I would e-mail them copies of their interview transcripts for review. I sent the files after transcribing the recordings, with all participants responding to me within 1 day.

Demographics

I interviewed 15 people for this study. The inclusion criteria were GSRA members who had worked at state agencies before, during, and after the Great Recession and had retired in the last 2 years. I used purposive sampling to recruit individuals who saw a post about my study in the GSRA December 2019 newsletter. I used numeric identifiers to protect the participants' privacy (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, etc.).

The participants had worked at different state agencies throughout Georgia, including the Department of Children Services, Department of Administrative Services, Department of Motor Vehicles, and Department of Revenue. Participants ranged in age from 50 to 70 years; nine were men and six were women. Their longevity of state service ranged from 14 years to 34 years. Ten of the participants were married while employed at a state agency and five were single. The 15 participants were from different regions of the state of Georgia.

An overview of participant demographics follows in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Identifier	Gender	Years of service	Marital status	Region
Participant 1	Female	34	M	Henry County
Participant 2	Male	34	M	Fulton County
Participant 3	Female	20	S	Haralson County
Participant 4	Male	19	M	Gwinnett County
Participant 5	Female	15	M	Gwinnett County
Participant 6	Female	22	M	Henry County
Participant 7	Male	15	M	Fayette County
Participant 8	Female	14	S	Newton County
Participant 9	Male	15	M	Gwinnett County
Participant 10	Male	17	M	Paulding County
Participant 11	Male	15	M	Forsyth County
Participant 12	Male	16	S	Henry County
Participant 13	Male	16	M	Clayton County
Participant 14	Female	25	S	Rockdale County
Participant 15	Male	21	S	Paulding County

Note. Marital status: M = married, S = single

Data Collection

The participants contacted me during the second half of January 2020, and I completed the interviews in February 2020. I conducted nine face-to-face interviews and six telephone interviews. I asked all the participants the same interview questions (see Appendix B) in the same order. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix C) to guide the interviews.

Of the nine in-person interviews, five took place in the participants' home offices and four in private rooms in the local library. The interviews lasted between 35 minutes

and 1 hour. I recorded the phone interviews using the Rev Call Recorder application on my phone, recording the face-to-face interviews with a digital voice recorder. During the interviews, I took notes, listened closely to the answers, and noted each participant's expressions and gestures. After the interviews, I transcribed the recordings into Microsoft Word, using a numeric identifier (i.e., Participant 1 through Participant 15) to protect participants' confidentiality. After transcribing all recordings, I e-mailed each participant his or her typed interview to conduct transcript checking and ensure accurate capture of all responses. All participants responded within 1 day to confirm their agreement with the transcripts.

I coded the data using NVivo 12, identifying patterns, categories, and themes. I downloaded and stored all files on my personal computer, which I protected with a strong password. Additionally, I stored all notes, signed letters of consent, and the digital voice recorder in a locked, fireproof cabinet. I will keep all material for 5 years per Walden's IRB policy. I transferred the audio recordings from the Rev Call Recorder software to a USB flash drive, which I will also keep for 5 years. After this time, I will shred all physical files and delete all digital recordings.

Data Analysis

The analysis and interpretation of data in qualitative research must include a clear description of "unintended moments in the research" (Janesick, 2004, p. 24), informed intuitive hunches, any ethical concerns, and a description of the researcher's role during the study. There is no single way to analyze data, but researchers must find ways to apply the data to their thinking. I conducted thematic analysis as described by Lester, Cho, and

Lochmiller (2020), who posited that thematic analysis could result in either a theory-driven or data-driven set of findings through which the researcher must sort to identify similar words and phrases.

I followed the data analysis plan outlined in Chapter 3. After the interviews, I transcribed the recordings and read the documents numerous times for clarity. I also compared the transcripts to the notes I took during the interviews. Researchers code data by breaking down the information, seeing what it produces, and making something new. I conducted coding by identifying pieces of the data and assigning them descriptive labels. I imported the transcripts into NVivo 12 and developed codes and themes based on the frequency of words and phrases used in the participants' answers. I next reread the interviews and the codes numerous times, resulting in an initial 29 themes. After reading the interviews and analyzing the resulting codes, I was able to further compile them into nine major themes and 25 sub themes. I next compared the themes and sub themes to the 10 a priori themes that emerged from my literature review and recoded my interviews using those themes as a basis (see Table 3 below).

Table 3

A Priori Themes and Emergent Themes and Sub themes

Research Questions	A priori themes	Emergent themes	Sub themes
What was the effect of the Great Recession austerity measures on state employees' PSM?	Employee dissatisfaction, Employee satisfaction, Job commitment, Work-related stress	Employee dissatisfaction, Employee satisfaction, Interviewee 1: "I still did my work. I could have smile more while working, and I could have been happier or tried harder." Also, "I would have been more motivated, less stressed without the austerity measures."	Effect on overall lifestyle, Affected job motivation, Affected life outside the job, Lack of cost-of-living adjustments, Effect on job duties, Affected job satisfaction
On which areas of state employees' lives did the Great Recession austerity measures have an effect?	Need to do good for others, Usefulness to society, High employee turnover	Job commitment, Had to supplement income, Allowed family time, Work-related stress, Usefulness to society Interviewee 3 said," The austerity measures some frustration. They did not affect my work ability but changed the way I viewed state employment."	Length of service, Satisfied with job overall, Benefits, Bills to be paid, Stable job
Which of the Great Recession Austerity measures had the most effect on state employees' PSM?	Recession, Economic crises, Cutbacks	Austerity measures, Recession, Interviewee 11 said, "The furlough meant less money in paychecks, so I had to cut back on spending."	Furlough, Frozen merit wages, hiring freeze, Employees laid off, Reduction of supplies, Travel restrictions, less money to spend

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is how researchers convince themselves and their readers of the quality of their research (Nowell et al., 2017). Researchers establish trustworthiness by meeting four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is the connection between the participant's views and the researcher's representation of those views (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Credibility

I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix C) to ensure the study's credibility. I conducted transcript checking to check the accuracy of my interview transcriptions, further improving credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All participants received a copy of their interview transcript to check, providing their approval of the transcript within 1 day.

Transferability

Transferability is the generalizability or the ability of the readers to transfer the findings to other contexts (Tobin & Begley, 2004). It is the researcher's responsibility to provide rich, detailed descriptions so the readers can determine the transferability of the findings to similar situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance transferability, I provided clear, detailed descriptions of the settings, culture, context, participant characteristics, and methods used in this study.

Dependability

According to Tobin and Begley (2004), researchers establish the dependability of a study by clearly documenting, analyzing, and presenting the process for other researchers to follow and arrive at the same outcome. I established dependability by documenting the study's settings, participants, interviews, themes, and categories. I also closely followed the interview protocol when I interviewed the 15 participants.

Confirmability

Confirmability occurs when the researcher derives the findings solely from the data without introducing bias (Tobin & Begley, 2004). I achieved confirmability by describing the reasons for my theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices so readers could understand. I audio-recorded and took notes during the interviews to alleviate researcher bias.

Study Results

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the perceived effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM. I sought to understand the perspectives of retired employees of different state agencies in Georgia to achieve this objective. I conducted semi structured interviews with 15 retired GSRA members. During these interviews, I asked the participants 17 open-ended questions (see Appendix B) so they could freely discuss their lived experiences of the austerity measures implemented by state leaders during the Great Recession.

During the data analysis using NVivo 12, a total of nine major themes and 25 subthemes surfaced. Theme 1, employee dissatisfaction, had the most references by

participants. The subthemes of Theme 1 were effects on overall lifestyle, effect on life outside the job, effect on job motivation, effect on job duties, lack of cost-of-living adjustment, and effect on job satisfaction. Theme 2, austerity measures, included the subthemes of furlough, frozen merit wages, hiring freeze, employees laid off, travel restrictions, and reduction in supplies. Theme 3, employee satisfaction, had seven subthemes: no effect on job duties, no effect on job satisfaction, no effect on overall lifestyle, did not affect job satisfaction, no effect on life outside the job, communication from management, and implemented advancement programs. Theme 4, job commitment, had the subthemes of length of service, satisfied with job, benefits, stable job, and bills to be paid. Theme 5, recession, had the single subtheme of less money to spend. Without subthemes were the final four themes: Theme 6: supplement income; Theme 7: allowed family time; Theme 8: work-related stress; and Theme 9: usefulness to society (see Table 4).

Table 4

Main Themes and Subthemes

Theme	%	Emergent themes	Subthemes
1	70	Employee dissatisfaction	Effect on overall lifestyle, affected job motivation, affected life outside the job, lack of cost-of-living adjustments, effect on job duties, affected job satisfaction
2	38	Austerity measures	Furlough, frozen merit wages, hiring freeze, employees laid off, reduction of supplies, travel restrictions
3	32	Employee satisfaction	No effect on job duties, no effect on job satisfaction, no effect on job motivation, no effect on overall lifestyle, communication from management, no effect on life outside the job, implemented advancement programs
4	19	Job commitment	Length of service, satisfied with job overall, benefits, bills to be paid, stable job
5	17	Recession	Less money to spend
6	3	Had to supplement income	
7	5	Allowed family time	
8	4	Work-related stress	
9	4	Usefulness to society	

Note: Column 2 (%) is the percentage of participants who mentioned the theme.

This section presents the findings for the research questions based on the themes and subthemes that emerged from data analysis of the interview transcripts. Table 4 shows the main themes and subthemes that emerged from the data to answer the primary research question and the three sub questions; these were as follows:

Primary RQ: What were the lived experiences of public employees in state agencies in Georgia, whose public leaders/managers implemented austerity measures during the Great Recession of 2007-2009?

RQ1: What was the effect of the Great Recession austerity measures on state employees' PSM?

RQ2: On which areas of state employees' lives did the Great Recession austerity measures have the most effect?

RQ3: Which of the Great Recession austerity measures had the most effect on state employees' PSM?

Research Question 1: What was the effect of the Great Recession austerity measures on state employees' PSM?

The following themes emerged from the data in response to RQ1.

Theme 1: Employee dissatisfaction. Almost all participants expressed some dissatisfaction or frustration with the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession. However, 70% of respondents reported high levels of dissatisfaction and disruption in their lives because of the austerity measures.

Six subthemes emerged from the participants' answers related to Theme 1.

Effect on overall lifestyle. The participants mentioned the subtheme of effect on overall lifestyle the most. Participant 1 stated that because of these austerity measures, “[I] had to put off retiring for a longer period because I knew how much pension I wanted.” She also recalled the austerity measures led her to work longer hours, which “caused more stress in my household.” Participant 2 said that the furlough days had the

most significant effect on his overall lifestyle “because it meant that there was no money to spend on my family, bills, mortgage, and even food. Management had less employees, so there was more work for everyone, [and] no new hires”; as a result, his workload increased. Participant 3 said that the austerity measures caused some frustration and influenced her personal life. She became “more aware of any unnecessary spending. I had to do more consideration for traveling and going out with friends.”

Participant 4 identified the furlough as having the greatest effect on his overall lifestyle. He explained, “Furlough meant less money because it affected my take-home pay. It affected my way of living because it affected my social life. My family had to choose home meals instead of eating out.” Participant 5 remembered that her workload increased, and she felt stressed out, which affected her and her family. She said, “The austerity measures affected my life outside of the job by lowering my self-esteem [since] I could not even feed my family as usual.” She felt that the austerity measures also limited her social life with her family. Participant 6 recalled having less money to spend because of the austerity measures: “I could not go on vacation like I used to, and I had to cut down on entertainment. Health insurance increased, but there were no pay raises, no raise in [the] cost-of-living allowance, and promotions were frozen, also.” She said that she had to budget more, reduce her spending, cut back on necessities, and not go out to eat as frequently.

Participant 7 said, “During the Great Recession, insurance [costs] went up—both health and car insurance—the price of daycare increased, and there was no increase in pay, so times [were] challenging.” He recalled that the frozen merit wages had the most

significant impact on his overall lifestyle. He had to budget more and be more vigilant with his spending because all his living expenses had increased. Participant 8 attributed the greatest impact to “the hiring freeze. There were not enough employees after the layoffs, so I had to take on administrative duties as well as my regular duties,” having more work but less pay. The biggest effect on Participant 12’s overall lifestyle was “the lack of promotions and [no] increase in wages, plus the increased [costs of] medical insurance while the cost of living kept going up.” He stated that, at the time, he had less discretionary income, so he had to cut back on entertainment and gifts to his family. Participant 13 recalled the recession impacting his lifestyle because prices went up while his paycheck stayed stagnant without pay increases or promotions. Participant 13 reported that he and his family members could not go on vacations or seek outside entertainment. He joked that he “was forced to create my own austerity budget.”

Effect on life outside of the job. Participants referred to the subtheme of effect on life outside of the job almost as much as the first subtheme. Participant 1 mentioned that, due to the frozen merit raises, she could not save for her retirement, “so I had to stay on the job longer than I expected.” Participant 2 said that the austerity measures affected his personal life; because he had to spend much more time at home doing job-related work, he had less time for his family. He stated, “Everybody looks forward to a raise, so [I] felt disappointment, emptiness, and sulky when there were no raises.” Participant 4 recalled the austerity measures having a significant impact on his life outside of work, openly sharing his recollections. Because there was not enough money, he shared, his family had limited activities: “We had to cut out going out to eat, and we couldn’t pay for

outside activities for the kids.” He remembered feeling depressed; his wife was not working, and his children were unhappy because he could not afford their extracurricular activities.

Participant 5 also recalled feelings of unhappiness during the Great Recession because of the austerity measures. She said, “The furlough had dropped my work week by 2 days, which gave me less take-home pay.” The first thing she paid was rent, dividing the rest of her income between bills and food. “My standard of living was negatively impacted. I had to focus on paying my rent, and my social life was out. I reached a very low point working for a state agency.” Participant 10 mentioned that due to the austerity measures, he “provide[d] less for my family.” Participant 12 coped with the austerity measures “by cutting back on spending, going out less, and leasing my car instead of buying one.” The furlough days had the most effect on him because his paychecks were smaller, causing him to reduce spending and eat at home more often.

Effect on job motivation. The participants who felt the austerity measures affected their job motivation all answered with sincerity and without any hesitation, regardless of whether they interviewed in person or over the telephone. Two of the participants asked me to confirm the confidentiality of the interviews and that I would not reveal their identities before openly describing the effect of the austerity measures on their motivation. Participant 1 said that during the implementation of the austerity measures, she “continued to do my work,” although she felt that she could have smiled more and tried harder. When Participant 3 first started working at her agency, she and her friends had marveled that she “got a good government job, but as the recession hit and

the austerity measures were implemented, I wondered what happened.” The way she viewed state employment changed. Participant 4 remembered that the austerity measures affected his motivation. He said, “I tried my best, but when you don’t know what will happen, you become unsure of your future, so your spirits get low.” Even though I conducted Participant 5’s interview over the telephone, I could hear her becoming upset as she recalled that period. She said that the austerity measures “totally disabled me financially and diminished my self-esteem because my social life was greatly reduced. My morale was lowered, so I did not perform at my full potential.” She said she felt she was working for free, which adversely impacted her work ethic.

Participant 6 said she did not feel motivated while working under the austerity measures, recalling, “The furlough meant a pay cut, but we still had to do the same job.” She said that her lack of motivation caused her to perform at the bare minimum. Participant 7 also stated that the lack of promotion and increase in pay “affected my motivation and was reflected in my performance.” Participant 8 remembered that the austerity measures affected her motivation because she did not earn enough money and refused to overperform. Participant 12 stated that the austerity measures had a significant impact on his motivation because the cost of living kept increasing, and he had to keep dipping into his savings or make drastic cuts to his essentials. He shared, “I felt that some employees got preferential treatment, [while] others were overworked. I suffered a lack of motivation and dedication during the recession when the austerity measures were implemented, especially when I had to cut back on expenses.” Participant 14 said that she

continued to do her job, “but I was not motivated and contemplated leaving. Everything was increasing, except [for] my income.”

Effect on job duties. Participant 2 said that he was used to performing his duties. However, due to the recession, his workload doubled, yet he did not receive extra time to complete the extra work; as a result, he was not as precise because he had so much to do. Participant 4 stated, “I wanted to work, but my performance was affected.” Participant 6 said, “I felt overworked and underpaid when I did not get a pay increase.” She said the employees were furloughed but still had to make production. Participant 8 said that because the furlough days cut her salary, “I lessened my work production because I felt I was getting less compensation than I deserved when compared to employees in the private sector.” As a result, she put in less effort and tried not to overextend. Participant 12 remembered that after the implementation of the austerity measures, he viewed his duties “in a negative light, especially when no one could use state vehicles and office equipment was audited.” Participant 14 recalled that because of the freeze on hiring, “more duties were added, and some of the employees became disgruntled and left the agency.”

Lack of cost-of-living adjustment. The lack of cost-of-living adjustments for employees and retirees of state agencies was also a contributing factor to employee dissatisfaction. Participant 1 said that “the lack of cost-of-living adjustments decreased my retirement, which caused me to work 4 years after I originally wanted to retire.” Participant 3 reported feeling unhappy during those years “because the cost of living kept going up, but the cost-of-living adjustment stayed stagnant.” Participant 4 remembered

that because the cost of living went up without a corresponding cost-of-living salary adjustment, “I was unable to provide fully for my family.” Participant 5 recollected that when the cost of living went up, “My income was fixed and then reduced by the furlough days, and so that affected the way I was able to put food on the table for [my] family.” Participant 6 said that the lack of cost-of-living adjustment caused “me to cut back on spending, and I became more cautious and aware of what I was spending my money on.” Participant 7 said the cost-of-living adjustment he should have received added up to thousands of dollars. Participant 12 explained that despite increased living costs, there were no promotions, cost-of-living adjustments, or wage increases, “so it seemed as though I was working harder for less pay.”

Effect on job satisfaction. Even though more participants stated that the Great Recession austerity measures affected their job motivation, their answers indicated that the rules had less of an effect on their job satisfaction. Participant 1 recalled that she felt less satisfied and more stressed at work during the Great Recession. Participant 4 said that the austerity measures harmed his job satisfaction. Participant 8 remembered being dissatisfied with her job after the implementation of the austerity measures, especially because of the low pay. Participant 14 stated that she did not feel satisfied with her job because she felt overworked and underpaid.

Theme 3. Employee satisfaction. The participants’ answers to the interview questions indicated that not everyone felt entirely dissatisfied with the Great Recession austerity measures. Some participants stated that the austerity measures had an effect on their motivation but not on their satisfaction or how they viewed their duties, which could

indicate that employees with different PSM levels could have had various effects by varied factors.

No effect on job duties. Participant 1 stated that the austerity measures did not affect how she viewed her duties: “I continued to do my job to the fullest even when raises were cut.” Participants 2 and 3 said the austerity measures did not impact how they viewed their duties, with Participant 2 saying, “It was a government job, so I just took the pay cut and kept on going on.” Participant 4 recalled finding the austerity measures “demoralizing.” The managers at his agency “tried to encourage and motivate us, but if you cannot feed your family, motivational speeches [are] not enough.” Participant 9 explained that the austerity measures did not have an impact on his job performance because his department leaders took care not to lay off more people than needed, which “made me feel more committed to doing my job.” Participants 10, 11, and 15 also stated that these measures did not affect how they viewed their duties.

No effect on overall lifestyle. Participant 6 said that the Great Recession austerity measures affected her finances but not her overall lifestyle. Participant 8 recollected that the austerity measures did not have an impact on her life outside of the job because “I did not have children, and I always budgeted.” Participants 10 and 15 both said that they did not feel that the Great Recession austerity had much of an effect on their overall lifestyles; they just had to cut back a little on their spending.

No effect on job satisfaction and no effect on job motivation. I combined the two subthemes of no effect on job satisfaction and no effect on job motivation because the participants who said that the austerity measures did not affect them mentioned both

outcomes together. The two subthemes also had the same number of references.

Participant 3 stated that the austerity measures did not affect her job satisfaction or motivation. Participant 9 said that he remained satisfied with his job and “appreciated management even more. My motivation stayed the same because I did not get fired.”

Participant 10 also recalled the austerity measures having no impact on either his satisfaction with the job or motivation to do his work to the best of his ability. Participant 11 shared that he still felt satisfied with his job after the implementation of the austerity measures because “I had friends who were getting laid off, and I still had my job.”

Participant 13 explained that the austerity measures did not affect his job satisfaction or his motivation because “management explained everything to the employees, and the recession was the cause of [the austerity measures] anyway.” Participant 15 also recalled that the austerity measures did not impact either his job satisfaction or motivation.

No effect on life outside of the job. Participant 8 said she did not believe the measures affected her personal life because “I didn’t have to work overtime, so I had a really good work-life balance.” Participant 10 also reported no effects on his life outside the job. Participant 13 did not feel impacted by austerity measures during the recession “because management explained the measures fully to the employees.” Participant 15 was also unaffected by the austerity measures outside of work because his wife was employed, and the austerity measures did not affect their finances.

Communication from management. A few participants felt their leaders and managers were transparent with the employees and tried to alleviate any harsh effects of the austerity measures. Participant 7 said his division had regular staff meetings, “where

the employees were informed of any decisions or measures [to] be implemented.”

Participant 10 recalled that during the recession, “There was agency-wide communication letting everyone know what was going on. After the recession, monthly staff meetings were initiated.”

Implemented advancement programs. Participant 6 recalled that her employer provided certain advancement and mentoring programs before the recession. After the recession, the employer reintroduced these programs.

Theme 4. Job commitment.

Length of service. Although some of the participants admitted having looked for different jobs during the recession, most reported staying in their positions because of tenure. Participant 2 stayed with the agency until he retired “because of my age and the length of time I had put in. I also didn’t want to change jobs because I was a creature of habit.” Participant 6 said she stayed because “I was looking forward to my pension, and I was only a certain number of years away from retirement.” Participant 12 said he had already invested a significant amount of time with his agency and “did not want to be looking for a job at my age.” Participant 14 stayed with her agency because “I had invested too much time there to seek other employment.” Similarly, Participant 15 reported staying because “I was there for too long a time to leave.”

Satisfied with job overall. Participant 1 reported staying with her state agency until retirement because “my first 20 years were good and the next 10 years were not bad, so I stayed because I was satisfied overall with my employer.” Participant 9 remained through retirement because he “loved the job.” Participant 10 finished his career with his

state agency because “I was not dissatisfied with my job.” Participant 13 reported staying until his retirement because he “loved my job and my management team, and [the] supervisors were very helpful.”

Benefits. Participant 5 remained at her agency until she retired because “it was a stable job with good retirement benefits.” Participant 7 stayed because of “the other benefits, and because I was a teleworker, I was able to pick my kids up after school and cut out daycare.” Participant 8 remained with her agency until retirement because “I believed that I would not find the same benefits somewhere else and the[re was] also [the] possibility of eventual promotion.” Participant 11 reported staying because “I had gotten used to it, the benefits were good, and I did not have to work crazy hours.” Participant 13 said, “I was a member of the team because the benefits were good, and management was understanding and helpful.”

Stable job. Participant 4 said he stayed with the agency until retirement because “it was a stable job, and I was already at a certain age.”

Bills to be paid. In discussing why she stayed with the state agency until she retired, Participant 3 said, “I realized that having a job is better than no job at all. The bills still had to be paid.”

Research Question 2. On which areas of public employees’ lives did the Great Recession austerity measures have the most effect?

The following themes emerged from the data in answer to RQ2:

Theme 5: Recession. Participant 13 said that he felt that the recession was the cause of the austerity measures, so “I had to create my own austerity budget to balance work and family issues during the recession.”

Less money to spend. All the participants agreed on one point: The austerity measures resulted in less money in their paychecks and, therefore, less money to spend, whether on family, bills, or just life in general. Participant 3 said that due to the 5 years of frozen yearly pay raises and cost-of-living adjustments, “I needed to find myself a side hustle to be able to pay all [my] bills.” Participant 5 noted that the austerity measures resulted in less money for the employees. Participant 11 said he had to spend more carefully due to the austerity measures. Participant 15 recalled, “I had a cut on my paycheck and had to buy necessities only” due to the Great Recession and the austerity measures.

Theme 6: Had to supplement income. Due to the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession, a few participants had to seek additional employment. Participant 3 said, “I found a second job, which lessened my free time and affected my work-life balance but did not affect my work ability.” Participant 4 said, “I had to drive rideshare [like Uber] to supplement my income.” Participant 5 recalled that during the recession, she tried unsuccessfully to get a second job and “even did hair to put food on the table.” Participants 6, 7, and 9 also had to find part-time positions to supplement their income during the recession. During the recession, Participant 11 supplemented his income by “creating widgets online.”

Theme 7: Allowed family time. According to the participants, the austerity measures affected their family time because they had to work longer hours to complete job-related duties with fewer employees. Managers allowed them to take any necessary time off to take care of family matters, or they had less money to spend on entertainment with their families. Participant 1 did not have to work overtime or weekends, so she could balance her work life and family life. She said, “I made sure to focus on things other than work, like my church, biological family, and extended family.” Participant 2 said that although he had excess work, he tried not to let it overlap with family time. He explained, “My wife worked full time and my kids were grown, so my family life and finances weren’t affected much by the austerity measures.” Participant 6 remembered that during the recession, “Management was understanding about employees having to take leave, and [the] employees could bring their children to work for a day or two if they needed to.” Participant 10 also remembered lenient management when he needed time off to take care of family members. During the recession, he said, “I spent time with my family doing things that did not cost a lot of money. My wife worked, and her job was not affected by the recession.” Participant 11 said that during the recession, the managers tried to support the employees’ need to balance work and family issues by “offering opportunities to telework and by also approving leave whenever it was needed.”

Theme 8: Work-related stress. The workforce reduction in state agencies during the Great Recession caused the remaining employees’ work-related stress. Participant 1 said that she felt “as though I was being whipped for doing my job. I was told to pull back by the higher-ups, and all the politicking made me feel demotivated.” She said that

she tried not to stress out but to keep a healthy balance. Participant 5 recalled that due to the austerity measures, “I became financially stagnant and lived in constant fear of being laid off.” Participant 14 said, “I tried not to become stressed and relied on my faith in God.”

Theme 9: Usefulness to society. Participant 1 said she felt as though she was part of a team because “I traveled throughout the state to speak on behalf of the agency and to help others, and I train[ed] new employees to do the same.” Participant 11 said that before and during the recession, “My department just worked as a team to make sure the public continued to be served despite the austerity measures.”

Research Question 3. Which of the Great Recession austerity measures had the most effect on state employees’ PSM?

The following themes emerged from the data in answer to RQ3.

Theme 2: Austerity measures. The leaders and managers of state agencies in Georgia implemented austerity measures during the Great Recession. These measures were a source of dissatisfaction for most of the participants. All the participants remembered furlough days, which are mandatory days off without pay.

Furlough. All the participants recalled the Great Recession austerity measure of furlough days. Participant 4 said, “State employees were struggling to make ends meet during that time, and that was all because of the furlough days.” Participant 5 said that she felt that there were too many furlough days, so she “became dissatisfied with my job and . . . tried to get another job in the private industry.” Participant 9 remembered that the furlough days had the most effect on his overall lifestyle because he had limited finances.

Participant 14 said she received less income because of the furlough days, but “I did not have a family to take care of, so I just supplemented it with my savings.”

Frozen merit wages. The second-most mentioned austerity measure implemented during the Great Recession was frozen merit wages. Participant 1 recalled that frozen merit wages had the most effect on her. Participant 2 said, “The employees never complained, so they never received raises during the recession.” He said he was disgruntled at the time but that “regular government employees never quit. They just stayed until they retired, [and] they just absorbed the punishment and waited for retirement.” Participant 3 said that she missed the yearly increases and “started looking for a job with more income.” Participant 6 reported that although she still enjoyed the job, “I did not like the lack of pay raises and the furlough [days] because they affected my finances.” Participant 7 felt unappreciated even though he knew about the recession, saying, “I felt that we should have still gotten raises.”

Hiring freeze. The hiring freeze and layoffs during the Great Recession created an increased workload for the remaining employees of state agencies. Participant 2 remembered that his employer also laid off most of the temporary employees. He said, “A lot of the employees were depressed because they had excess work to do because of the layoffs.” Participant 5 recalled that she was “not too happy at the time because my workload was doubled, but I was glad to have a job.” Participant 14 stated that although her agency was highly understaffed because of the layoffs and the hiring freeze, her management team told the employees “that they were lucky to have a job.” She said they “were told to come to work and get the job done and were barely given time off.”

Employees laid off. A few of the employees remembered many layoffs at their agencies. They generally described feeling overworked but grateful that they had jobs, and they tried to cope with the situation as best as they could.

Reduction of supplies. Participants 2 and 13 recalled reduced or rationed office supplies during the Great Recession.

Restrictions in travel. Participants 10 and 12 both said that, at their agencies, “travel was restricted for field officers.” Participant 10 stated, “Field officers were no longer allowed to go distances of more than 75 miles, and management prohibited out-of-state travel.” Participant 12 remembered that “field officers were not allowed to use state vehicles to go into the field anymore. They had to use their personal vehicles.”

Summary

I used the overarching research question for this study to explore the lived experiences of employees of state agencies in Georgia whose public leaders or managers had implemented austerity measures during the Great Recession. All 15 participants reported some degree of dissatisfaction or acceptance with the austerity measures based on the effects on their job motivation, job satisfaction, overall lifestyle, life outside the job, and job duties. However, their responses indicated that more participants felt dissatisfied with the austerity measures and their effects than those who felt satisfied. The austerity measures had the most impact on their finances, which, in turn, affected their family lives and their overall lifestyles. More than 70% of the participants had obtained outside employment to supplement their incomes. An interesting observation was that there were differing perceptions of the Great Recession based on whether the participants

were married, single, or had children. The austerity measure that had the most significant adverse impact on the participants' lives was furlough days.

This chapter presented the setting, participant demographics, and data collection and analysis procedures, as outlined in Chapter 3. The chapter also included evidence of trustworthiness. Chapter 5 will present an analysis of the findings and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the perceived effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM. The austerity measures included furlough days, increased costs of nonwage benefits, and merit increase freezes. Government leaders implemented these measures to cope with the budgetary impacts of the recession. For this study, I examined retired state employees' perspectives on the effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on their work-life balance. These retirees had worked in various state agencies in Georgia before, during, and after the Great Recession and had recently retired. Exploring the retirees' lived experiences produced insight into the effects of the Great Recession austerity measures on state employees' work-life balance and PSM.

The study's guiding research question was as follows:

What were the lived experiences of public employees in state agencies in Georgia whose public leaders or managers implemented austerity measures during the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009?

The following subquestions were also investigated:

RQ1: What was the effect of the Great Recession austerity measures on state employees' PSM?

RQ2: On which areas of state employees' lives did the Great Recession austerity measures have an effect?

RQ3: Which of the Great Recession austerity measures had the most effect on state employees' PSM?

In answer to RQ1, almost all participants expressed some dissatisfaction or frustration with the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession. However, 70% of respondents reported high levels of dissatisfaction and disruption in their lives because of the austerity measures that were implemented during the Great Recession. In answer to RQ2, the data revealed that the areas of the participants' lives that were most affected was their finances and the fact that the reduced finances affected their family life. In answer to RQ 3, the data also revealed the participants recalled that the austerity measure that had the greatest impact on their PSM was the implementation of the furlough days.

This chapter includes the interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, the practical and social applications of the results, and a conclusion.

Interpretation of Findings

This section contains a descriptive interpretation of the effects of the Great Recession austerity measures. The 15 participants provided rich information about their experiences as state employees during 2007 to 2009 economic downturn, when government leaders implemented austerity measures. The data that emerged from the interviews was consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. I developed the emergent themes using selective coding and thematic analysis, which showed that the 15 interviewees' perceptions aligned with the reviewed literature. Nevertheless, a few occurrences indicated the need for further study. First, I could not address the a priori theme, employee turnover, because the participants were retirees of state agencies and

GSRA members. All the participants stayed with their state agencies until their retirement. Second, participants had different recollections based on if they were married or single or had children. I did not address these subjects because I felt they were outside the scope of this study.

In answer to RQ1, the theme that emerged most consistently was employee dissatisfaction. Each of the employees reported feeling displeased with the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession. The subtheme with the most references (16) was effect on overall lifestyle. As indicated in Chapter 2, Perry et al. (2008) posited that PSM is the energizing, directing, and sustaining force behind employee behavior that includes individual needs and motives. Anitha (2014) posited that motivation affects an employee's performance and productivity and, when combined with ability and personal morality, an employee's performance). Wright et al. (2012) believed that public employees felt motivated by the opportunity to learn new things, process interesting job content, receive recognition, and have the chance for self-development so when the ability to provide these perks, the motivation of public employees is also negatively impacted.. When the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession affected state employees' overall lifestyles, there was an effect on employees' PSM and job satisfaction, as well. There were also four references to job-related stress. Some participants reported experiencing different forms of work-related stress when the austerity measures affected their PSM.

In answer to RQ2, the austerity measures affected the state employees' lives outside of the job. The subtheme had 14 participant references, which indicated impacts

on the employees' personal and family lives. PSM includes an employee's beliefs, values, and attitudes that extend beyond self-interest and organizational interest (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008; Perry & Vandenaabeele, 2008). When the austerity measures affected the state employees' personal and family lives—their lives outside of their jobs—there was also an effect on their PSM. The remaining subthemes were effect on job motivation, which had 12 references; effect on job duties, which had 11 references; and the effect on job satisfaction, which had seven references. Andersen and Kjeldsen (2013) posited that motivation, commitment, and satisfaction affected organizational performance. Because of this, it is extremely importance that government leaders and managers are cognizant of this and try to maintain high levels of PSM in their employees especially after having implemented austerity measures.

The third subtheme was that the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession influenced the state employees' job motivation. During the interviews, there were 12 references to the fact that the austerity measures had negatively impacted job motivation. PSM is a major contributing factor to employee satisfaction, motivation, and performance; therefore, public service leaders must develop low-cost ways of motivating their employees, especially in the presence of austerity measures.

There were 11 references to the fourth subtheme, effect on job duties. Some participants felt the austerity measures hurt the way they viewed their job duties. Bakker (2015) posited that job satisfaction is an employee's happiness and contentment for conducting day-to-day tasks. Therefore, if the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession adversely affected how the state employees viewed their job duties, then

public managers and leaders must develop low-cost ways of motivating their employees during economic downfalls. As shown in the literature review, public managers should learn how to foster and sustain employees' high PSM levels during stressful economic times to maintain stable organizational environments.

To answer RQ3, the austerity measure that had the most effect on the state employees' PSM was furlough days, a subtheme referenced 14 times. Cromwell and Ihlanfeldt (2015) found the recession led to fiscal stress and decreased local budgets, causing leaders of various public agencies to introduce austerity measures, such as mandatory furlough days. All the state agencies represented by the participants had furlough days during the Great Recession. The participants all agreed that furlough days led to reduced wages and financial hardships. Most interviewees recalled supplementing their incomes to provide for themselves and their families. Frozen merit wages also affected the participants financially and was a subtheme referenced nine times. According to the participants, the hiring freeze, a subtheme referenced five times, caused strained work environments. The participants reported doubled workloads and felt uneasy, not knowing if they had job stability. Esteve, Schuster, et al. (2017o) explored the impact of wage cuts and increased work demands on the motivation and job satisfaction of the European public sector in the years after the Great Recession. The researchers found that pay cuts and increased workloads hurt public servants' job satisfaction and motivation thereby impacting their levels of PSM.

The lack of cost-of-living adjustment, a subtheme referenced 10 times, was another contributing factor to the state employees' dissatisfaction. Taylor and Taylor

(2015) found that a poor economy impacted public employees' PSM. This study showed that the austerity measures also affected the public employees' PSM. Public leaders must incorporate low-cost and innovation-related changes, such as teleworking and flexible working schedules, to accommodate employees who are single parents or who might struggle to pay for childcare or eldercare. This study also showed that the state employees who felt that the austerity measures did not affect their PSM or their job satisfaction, motivation, personal life, and the way they viewed their job duties were the ones with high PSM levels. These participants said they felt grateful for their jobs and content to continue working. One important thing to note was that all the participants were retirees; therefore, they remained committed to state employment until they retired.

Ripoli and Breugh (2019) addressed the lack of research on economic stressors, PSM, work motivation, and unethical judgement in the public sector. They posited that unethical behavior can be influenced by certain motivations like financial stress and job insecurity. They used data from the European Social Survey to develop a path to test the hypotheses and found that PSM and work motivation are influenced by the economic stressors, financial stress and job insecurity which in turn influences unethical judgements. The participants of my interviews recalled that the austerity measures which impacted them the most were the furlough days because it decreased their salaries, this was followed by the frozen merit wages, the hiring freeze, and the employees being laid off. These austerity measures, which created financial stress and job insecurity for public employees during economic downturns in the economy negatively impacted the state employees' PSM.

Presently, little research has been conducted on the effects of the Great Recession on job satisfaction. Pilipec, Groot, and Pavlova (2020), investigated the changes in job satisfaction before, during and after the Great Recession in the Netherlands. They found that job satisfaction decreased before the recession, increased during the recession, and decreased after the recession. They explained that the increase in job satisfaction during the recession was because of the change in the worker composition due to layoffs and employee turnover. My research found that there were seven references to the negative effects of the austerity measures on job satisfaction and five participants mentioned that the austerity measures had no effect on their job satisfaction, because they were grateful to be employed and to be able to pay their bills. Based on this, it can be concluded that job satisfaction among state employees in Georgia did not increase during the Great Recession and that the PSM of state employees was negatively impacted by the implementation of the austerity measures during the Great Recession.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations to trustworthiness that I identified in Chapter 1 remained the same throughout the study. I did not introduce any personal opinions or comment on the participants' answers to limit research bias during the data collection and analysis process. I also recorded and transcribed the interviews, e-mailed copies to each participant for transcript checking.

Another limitation was that my target population consisted of GSRA members who were retirees. Therefore, I did not represent the perceptions of younger state employees who had worked before, during, and after the Great Recession. The challenges

study participants faced could have been different because they were members of an older population, in regard to being single or married with possible families.

Recommendations

I limited this study to an analysis of retired public service employees' (GRSA members') lived experiences of the Great Recession austerity measures. The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of the austerity measures on public employees' PSM. There were not generalizable findings in this study beyond the age group of the participants. However, I recommend future researchers to conduct studies with a wider, more representative population that includes younger public employees who worked before, during, and after the Great Recession.

Future researchers could broaden this population to include employees with younger families and young children who might have faced different challenges than the participants of this study. Scholars could conduct qualitative studies to explore the relationships between the themes identified in this study and the themes of a population with different demographics.

My study did not explore the impact of the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession on employee turnover. This is because my population consisted of retired employees of state agencies, meaning that they stayed with their state agencies until they retired. Future researchers could also explore the lived experiences of employees who were employed by the state before and during the Great Recession and who resigned state employment and found employment in the private industry.

Quantitative studies could be conducted by widening the literature search to include other states and maybe even nonprofit agencies.

Implications

In this study, I explored the effect of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM by soliciting their lived experiences. Ultimately, recognizing, identifying, and understanding the impact of the Great Recession austerity measures on public employees' PSM was a step toward affecting positive social change. The implications for social change from this study include maintaining and possibly improving public employees' PSM during economic downturns, when government leaders must implement austerity measures to supplement declining state budgets. Maintaining and improving public employees' PSM during economic downturns could result in happier and more productive employees, which could create better working environments thereby reducing possibly high employee turnover and ensuring a workforce with high PSM to interact with the public.

The social implication in the case of governance is that public leaders and managers could compare the themes regarding employee dissatisfaction to the themes specific to employee satisfaction (see Table 2), referring to the comparisons when they need to implement austerity measures and reduce budgets during economic downturns. The study results also showed that leaders should consider employee demographics when implementing austerity measures because the impact of these measures could differ for employees with families.

My study is extended to focus on helping future government leaders to use the results of this study to promote employee motivation in the public sector during times of economic hardship. My study will be published during the Covid 19 pandemic which is not only creating havoc with the health of the world's population, but with local and global finances on a grand scale. Every industry has been affected (Williams, 2020). Large and small businesses globally were forced to close their doors indefinitely to comply with their countries' "stay in place laws." This eventually caused numerous companies to close their doors permanently and their employees to be unemployed. Government agencies are also affected by the pandemic and are once again forced to implement austerity measures to combat the decrease in their budgets caused by the pandemic. The results of my study are timely because they could also be used to better understand the implementation of austerity measures on the PMF of state employees in times of economic difficulty such as the one caused by the pandemic.

Conclusions

The focal point of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to understand the effects of the implementation of the Great Recession's austerity measures on public employees' PSM. Such austerity measures included furlough days, higher costs of nonwage benefits, and merit increase freezes. Government leaders implemented the austerity measures to cope with the budgetary impacts of the recession. Government leaders could use the study's results to promote employee motivation in the public service during times of economic hardship when austerity measures are implemented.

Exploring the lived experiences of the participants in this study, led to insights into the impact of the austerity measures, which were implemented during the Great Recession, on the PSM of state employees in the state of Georgia. The most dominant theme that emerged from the data was employee dissatisfaction. Although all of the 15 participants reported some degree of dissatisfaction with the austerity measures or acceptance of the austerity measures, the extent of dissatisfaction was based on the impact on their job motivation, job satisfaction, overall lifestyle, life outside the job, and their job duties. The responses of the participants also indicated that the austerity measure which affected them most was the implementation of furlough days which impacted their finances, thereby, affecting their families and their overall lifestyles.

This study was a timely contribution to the literature because, at its conclusion, there was a pandemic of unprecedented, drastic proportions. There may be a severe downturn in the world's economy due to global business closings. Employees and leaders at public agencies once again face declining budgets, requiring leaders and managers to implement austerity measures. By reviewing the results of this study, government leaders and managers can see the impact of the austerity measures that were implemented during the Great Recession and modify them in an effort to implement austerity measures for use during a perceived 2020 economic downturn. In this way, they can attempt to maintain the PSM of their employees during the pandemic.

References

- Andersen, L., & Kjeldsen, A. (2013). Public service motivation, user orientation, and job satisfaction: A question of employment sector? *International Public Management Journal*, *16*, 252-274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2013.817253>
- Anitha, J. (2014). Determinants of employee engagement and their impact on employee performance. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, *63*, 308-323. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPPM-01-2013-0008>
- Bakker, A. (2015). A job demands-resources approach to public service motivation. *Public Administration Review*, *75*, 723-732. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12388>
- Barrett, M., Ferris, J., & Lenton, S. (2015). Hidden populations, online purposive sampling, and external validity: Taking off the blindfold. *Field Methods*, *27*, 3-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X14526838>
- Belle, N. (2013). Experimental evidence on the relationship between public service motivation and job performance. *Public Administration Review*, *73*(1), 143-153. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02621.x>
- Boddy, C. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. *Qualitative market research: An International Journal*, *19*, 426-432. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-06-2016-0053>
- Bottomley, P., Mostafa, A. M. S., Gould-Williams, J. S., & León-Cázares, F. (2016). The impact of transformational leadership on organizational citizenship behaviours: The contingent role of public service motivation. *British Journal of Management*, *27*, 390-405. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12108>

- Bright, L. (2011). Does public service motivation affect the occupation choice of public employees? *Public Personnel Management, 40*, 11-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/009102601104000102>
- Bullock, J., Stritch, J., & Rainey, H. (2015). International comparison of public and private employees' work motives, attitudes, and perceived rewards. *Public Administrative Review, 75*, 479-489. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12356>
- Canterelli, P., Balardinelli, P., & Belle, N. (2016). A meta-analysis of job satisfaction correlates in the public administration literature. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 36*, 115-144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371x15578534>
- Chan, Z., Fung, Y., & Chien, W. (2013). Bracketing in phenomenology: Only undertaken in the data collection and analysis process? *Qualitative Report, 59*(18), 1-9.
Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/chan59.pdf>
- Christensen, R., Paarlberg, L., & Perry, J. (2017). Public service motivation research: Lessons for practice. *Public Administration Review, 77*, 529-542.
doi.org/10.1111/puar.12796
- Christiano, L., Eichenbaum, M., & Trabandt, M. (2015). Understanding the Great Recession. *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics, 7*(1), 110-167.
<https://doi.org/10.1257/mac.20140104>
- Clerkin, R., & Cogburn, J. (2012). The dimensions of public service motivation and sector work preferences. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 32*, 209-235.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371x11433880>

- Coope, C., Donovan, J., Wilson, C., Barnes, M., Metcalfe, C., Hollingworth, W., . . .
Gunnell, D. (2015). Characteristics of people dying by suicide after job loss, financial difficulties, and other economic stressors during a period of recession (2010–2011): A review of coroners' records. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 183*, 98-105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2015.04.045>
- Coursey, D., Yang, K., & Pandey, S. (2012). Public service motivation (PSM) and support for citizen participation: A test of Perry and Vandenberg's reformulation of PSM theory. *Public Administrative Review, 72*, 572-582. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2011.02581x>
- Creswell, J. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cromwell, E., & Ihlanfeldt, K. (2015). Local government responses to exogenous shocks in revenue sources: Evidence from Florida. *National Tax Journal, 68*, 339-376. <https://doi.org/10.17310/ntj.2015.2.05>
- Esteve, M., Schuster, C., Albareda, A., & Losada, C. (2017). The effects of doing more with less in the public sector: Evidence from a large-scale survey. *Public Administration Review, 77*, 544-553. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12766>

- Esteve, M., von Witteloostijn, A., & Boyne, G. (2015). The effects of public service motivation on collaborative evidence: Evidence from three experimental games. *International Public Management Journal*, 18, 171-189.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2015.1012573>
- Farquhar, J. D. (2013). Philosophical assumptions of case study research. In *Case study research for business* (pp. 15-29). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446287910>
- Fernandez, S., & Moldogaziev, T. (2012). Using employee empowerment to encourage innovative behavior in the public sector. *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory*, 23(1), 155-187. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mus008>
- French, P., & Emerson, M. (2014). Assessing the variations in reward preference for local government employees in terms of position, public service motivation, and public sector motivation. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 37, 552-576. <https://doi.org/10.2753/PMR1530-9576370402>
- Gadkin, L., Parayitam, S., & Natarajan, V. (2010). An empirical study of attitudes toward recognition among civilian municipal employees in a US city. *Journal of Organizational Culture: Communications and Conflict*, 14, 51-59. Retrieved from <https://www.abacademies.org/journals/journal-of-organizational-culture-communications-and-conflict-home.html>
- Gangwisch, J. (2014). Work-life balance. *Sleep*, 37, 1159-1160.
doi.org/10.5665/sleep.3826

Heathfield, S. (2018). The importance of achieving work-life balance and how to do it.

Balance Careers. Retrieved from <http://www.thebalancecareers.com>

Hickman, C. (2015). *Strength and limitations of a qualitative research design from the perspective of a PhD student*. Walden University.

<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3765.6406>

Homberg, F., McCarthy, D., & Tabvuma, V. (2015). A meta-analysis of the relationship between public service motivation and job satisfaction. *Public Administration Review*, 75, 711-722. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12423>

Janesick, V. (2004). *“Stretching” exercises for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.).

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Jensen, J., Patel, P., & Messersmith, J. (2013). High-performance work systems and job control: Consequences for anxiety, role overload, and turnover intentions. *Journal of Management*, 39, 1699-1724. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311419663>

Keefe, J. (2012). Are public employees overpaid? *Labor Studies Journal*, 37, 104-126.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0160449X11429263>

Khan, A. (2011, August 19). Managers play an important role in employees' work/life balance. *FCW*. Retrieved from <http://fcw.com>

Kiefer, T., Hartley, J., Conway, N., & Briner, R. (2015). Feeling the squeeze: Public employees' experiences of cut back and innovation-related organizational changes following a national announcement of budget reductions. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 25, 1279-1305.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muu042>

- Kim, Y., & Warner, M. (2016). Pragmatic municipalism: Local government service delivery after the great recession. *Public Administration, 94*, 789-805.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12267>
- Kisely, S., & Kendall, E. (2011). Critically appraising qualitative research: A guide for clinicians more familiar with quantitative techniques. *Australasian Psychiatry, 19*, 364-367. <https://doi.org/10.3109/10398562.2011.562508>
- Kopelman, J., & Rosen, H. (2016). Are public sector jobs recession-proof? Were they ever? *Public Finance Review, 44*, 370-396.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1091142114565042>
- Lail, B., MacGregor, J., Steubs, M., & Thomasson, T. (2015). The influence of regulatory approach on tone at the top. *Journal of Business Ethics, 126*, 25-37.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1992-8>
- Lee, S., & Sanders, R. (2013). Fridays are furlough days: The impact of furlough policy and strategies for human resource management during a severe economic recession. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 33*, 299-311.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X13477426>
- Lester, J., Cho, Y., & Lochmiller, C. (2020). Learning to do qualitative data analysis. A starting point. *Human Resource Development Review, 19*, 94-106.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484320903890>

- Levine, H., & Scorsone, E. (2011). The Great Recession's institutional change in the public employment relationship: implications for state and local governments. *State and Local Government Review, 43*, 208-214.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0160323X11428811>
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Liu, B., & Perry, J. (2016). The psychological mechanisms of public service motivation: A two-wave examination. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 36*, 4-30.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X14549672>
- Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 11*(3). Retrieved from <http://nbnresolving.de/urn:de:0114-fqs100387>
- Meyer, R., Egger-Peitler, I., Hollerer, M., & Hammerschmid, G. (2014). Of bureaucrats and passionate public managers. Institutional logics, executive identities, and public service motivation. *Public Administration, 92*, 861-868.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j1467-92992012.02105.x>
- Mostafa, A., Gould-Williams, J., & Bottomley, P. (2015). High-performance human resource practices and employee outcomes: the mediating role of public service motivation. *Public Administration Review, 75*, 747-757.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12354>
- Nowell, L., Norris, J., White, D., & Moules, N. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>

- Olafsen, A., Halvari, H., Forest, J., & Deci, E. (2015). Show them the money? The role of pay, managerial need support, and justice in a self-determination theory model of intrinsic work motivation. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, *56*, 447-457. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12211>
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pedersen, M. (2015). Activating the forces of public service motivation: evidence from a low-intensity randomized experiment. *Public Administration Review*, *75*, 734-746. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12325>
- Perrin, C., Perrin, P., Blauth, C., East, A., & Duffy, R. (2012). Factor analysis of global trends in twenty-first century leadership. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, *33*, 175-199. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731211203474>
- Perry, J., Brudney, J., Coursey, D., & Littlepage, L. (2008). What drives morally committed citizens? A study of the antecedents of public service motivation. *Public Administration Review*, *68*, 445-458. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2008.00881.x>
- Perry, J., & Hondeghem, A. (2008). Building theory and empirical evidence about public service motivation. *International Public Management Journal*, *11*, 3-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967490801887673>
- Perry, J., & Vandenabeele, W. (2008). Behavioral dynamics institutions, identities, and self-regulation. In *Motivation in public management. The call of public service* (pp. 56-79). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

- Perry, J. L., & Vandenabeele, W. (2015). Public service motivation research: Achievements, challenges, and future directions. *Public Administration Review*, 75, 692-699. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12430>
- Perry, J., & Wise, L. (1990). The motivational bases of public service. *Public Administration Review*, 50(3) 367-373. doi:10.2307/976618
- Pilipec, P., Groot, W. & Pavlova, M. (2020). A longitudinal analysis of job satisfaction during a recession in the Netherlands. *Social Indicators Research* 149, 239-269 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-019-022.33-6>
- Prebble, M. (2014). Has the study of public service motivation addressed the issues that motivated the study? *American Review of Public Administration*, 46, 267-291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074014554651>
- Quratulain, S., & Khan, A. (2015). How does employees' public service motivation get affected? A conditional process analysis of the effects of person-job fit and work pressure. *Public Personnel Management*, 44, 266-289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026014568461>
- Rego, A., Sousa, F., Marques, C., & e Cunha, M. P. (2012). Authentic leadership: Promoting employees' psychological capital and creativity. *Journal of Business Research*, 65, 429-437. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.10.003>
- Ripoli, G. & Breugh, J. (2019). At their wit's end? Economic stress, motivation, and unethical judgement of public servants. *Public Management Review* 21(10) 1516-1537. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2018.1561929>

- Ritz, A., Brewer, G., & Neumann, O. (2016). Public service motivation: A systematic literature review and outlook. *Public Administration Review*, 3, 414-426.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12505>
- Roberts, M., & Townshend, T. (2017). Urban design in an age of recession. *Journal of Urban Design*, 22, 133-136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2017.1295787>
- Schoemaker, P., Krupp, S., & Howland, S. (2013). Strategic leadership: The essential skills. *Harvard Business Review*, 91, 131-134. https://www.harvardbusiness.org/sites/default/files/HBR_Strategic_Leadership.pdf
- Standing, G. (2014). Understanding the precariat through labor and work. *Development and Change*, 45, 963-980. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12120>
- Starks, H., & Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17, 1372-1380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732307307031>
- Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartham, B., . . . Jinks, C. (2017). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality or Quantity*, 52, 1893-1907.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8>
- Statista. (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.statista.com>
- Tavellaei, N., & Mansor, A. (2010). A general perspective on role of theory in qualitative research. *Journal of International Social Research*, 3, 570-577. Retrieved from http://www.sosyalarastirmalar.com/cilt3/sayi11pdf/tavallaei_abutalib.pdf

- Taylor, J., & Taylor, R. (2015). Does the economy matter? Tough times, good times and public service motivation. *Public Money Management*, 35, 333-340.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2015.1061168t>
- Tobin, G., & Begley, C. (2004). Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48, 388-396.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.13652648.2004.03207.x>
- Trinka, J. (2011). What's a manager to do? *GovLeaders*. Retrieved from
<http://govleaders.org>
- Vandenabeele, W., Brewer, G., & Ritz, A. (2014). Past, present, and future of public service motivation research. *Public Administration*, 92, 779-789.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12136>
- Van der Voet, J., & Vermeeran, B. (2017). Change management in hard times: Can change management mitigate the negative relationship between cutbacks and the organizational commitment and work engagement of public sector employees? *American Review of Public Administration*, 47, 230-252.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074015625828>
- Van Loon, N., Vanabeele, W., & Leisink, P. (2015). On the bright and the dark side of public service motivation: The relationship between PSM and employee wellbeing. *Public Money & Management*, 35, 349-356.
- Williams, A. (2020). Covid -19 could be deadly for American small businesses. *New York Amsterdam News* 111(12) 13. Retrieved from
<https://search-ebshost-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org>

- Williamson, A. (2014). Emerging from the great recession: The view from local government. *State and Local Government Review*, 46, 232-235.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0160323X14565909>
- Wright, B., Moynihan, D., & Pandey, S. (2012). Pulling the levers: Transformational leadership, public service motivation, and mission valence. *Public Administration Review*, 72, 206-215. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540.6210.2011.02496.x>
- Yin, R. (2013). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix A: GSRA Response

RE: Introduction to your members

H

.
.
.
.

Tue 9/18/2018, 9:27 AM

You

.

Ms. Benn,

GSRA is an Association of primarily retired state employees. In some cases, we have information on when our members retired, but not in all.

If you can send me a brief description of your purpose and what information you would like to collect, including how involved the interviews would be - I'll forward that information to members identified as working from 2008-2010. The members would be able to contact you directly to participate should they choose to do so.

Donna Buffum, GSRA Administrative Aide

-----Original Message-----

From: "Judith Benn" >

Sent: Friday, September 14, 2018 9:02am

To: " " < >

Cc:

<Subject: Introduction to your members

Good morning,

My name is Judith Small-Benn-Wright, I am a present employee of the Department of Revenue and a PhD student with Walden University. At present, I am writing my dissertation which is entitled "The possible long-term effects of the austerity measures, which were introduced during the Great Recession, on the lives of state public servants.

As part of my research, I need to interview 15 to 20 state employees who were employed during the recessionary period of 2008 to 2010. I would like to know the protocol that I would have to go through in order to be able to send an e-mail to your members to ask for volunteers to participate in my interviews. I would also like to assure them that they would not be identified in my study and their names would not be revealed in any way.

I thank you in advance for any help you could provide me in reaching out to your members.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Small-Benn-Wright
PhD student, Walden University
Phone #:
School e-mail address:

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows 10

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What year did you start working at your state agency?
2. What year did you retire?
3. Tell me about the austerity measures taken by your state agency leaders during or after the recession.
4. Describe the effect of those austerity measures on the way you viewed your duties at your agency.
5. Describe the effect those austerity measures on your life outside of the job.
6. Which austerity measure had the greatest effect on your overall lifestyle?
7. In what way did that austerity measure have an effect on your overall lifestyle?
8. Did the austerity measures implemented during the recession have an effect on your satisfaction with your job?
9. What effect did the austerity measures implemented during the recession have on your personal life?
10. In what ways did the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession have an effect on your motivation to do your job to the best of your ability?
11. How did the lack of a cost of living adjustment for state retirees and employees affect you?
12. What caused you to finally stay with your agency until retirement?
13. Tell me about the things your agency leaders did to make you believe that you were part of a team before the implementation of the austerity measures.

14. Tell me about the things your agency leaders did to make you feel that you were part of a team during the recession.
15. Tell me about the things your agency leaders did to make you feel that you were part of a team after the recession.
16. What steps did managers take to support your need to balance work and family issues when they had implemented the austerity measures?
17. What steps did you take to support your need to balance work and family issues when there were austerity measures implemented?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Date:

Place of interview/telephone:

Name of participant:

State agency previous employed by:

Opening remarks:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study.

Description of research:

Research questions:

Informed consent:

Closing remarks:

Once again, thank you for participating in my study by allowing me to interview
you

Assure participants of confidentiality

Reminder of follow-up transcripts by e-mail