Nicola Bellé’s article “Experimental Evidence on the Relationship between Public Service Motivation and Job Performance” is insightful and provides an evidence-based understanding of staff work motivation and job performance in public sector organizations. The article suggests that the values of staff who work in public service influence behavior. The sound conceptual foundation shows the individual but related contributions of activities and mandate characteristics to job motivation and performance of staff in the public sector. This also holds true in international public service organizations or intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), where staff generally are more motivated to perform their job when they clearly understand the challenging tasks that they consider important and attainable.

Regarding the influence of an organization’s mandate on public service motivation, the evidence correlates to the reality in most IGOs, especially those with a humanitarian and developmental mission. The value that employees see in the mandate of their organization influences their job motivation and increases the importance placed on their individual work. It is clear that in a majority of IGOs, intrinsic rewards rendered by the mandate or mission of the organization are more important to staff than performance-related pay extrinsic rewards.

Although some public sector institutions have introduced and implemented performance-related pay or bonuses—that is, extrinsic rewards that are contingent on performance and may have effects on the work motivation of staff—there are other aspects that are equally or more important to staff. Staff will look to their managers to clarify performance expectations so that they know what they should do and how they should do it—expected results and competencies that need to be demonstrated, and why they should do their job. This type of dialogue and communication from managers is important in facilitating staff work motivation, and managers are accountable for this. It is clear from Bellé’s study that explaining performance expectations with regard to results/outcomes and processes can foster staff behavior toward the most desired tasks, which, in turn, ensures that behavior is sustained by lifting staff confidence in their skills and capabilities. Managers should also look at an organization’s mandate as a motivational driver, especially in multicultural institutions.

At times, the motivation of public service is taken for granted. It should be harnessed. A catalyst for this is communication, which ensures that the mission of the organization is strengthened and that staff members “breathe it.” Managers should serve as role models and inspiration to staff so that employees are able to measure how their performance affects the values of the organization and of society at large.