

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Innovating for the greater good: Examining innovation champions and what motivates them

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Abstract

Governments have increasingly tasked the not-for-profit sector with supporting the provision of public goods and services. Alongside this role, not-for-profits have faced increasingly challenging external contexts, including heightened competition and tighter funding regimes. This makes effective innovation critical for the successful delivery of social goods within this setting particularly, and in other public service-oriented organisations more broadly. However, we know little about how innovation occurs in such contexts and even less about the motivations of those who choose to expend the effort to drive innovation there. This study examines the motivations of a key innovation agent, the innovation champion, in the challenging and dynamic not-for-profit context. Via a multi-case study, qualitative approach with 46 interviews, we utilise self-determination theory to surface what motivates innovation champions to develop and drive new idea generation and implementation. The motivations for championing innovations

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in not-for-profits are varied, spanning intrinsic, prosocial, and other extrinsic drivers. With wider implications for public service-oriented organisations, our work also suggests that champions in such contexts are variably motivated throughout an innovation project and appear to be simultaneously intrinsically and prosocially motivated. We also find that boredom, or its avoidance, can motivate champions toward innovative activities.

- Innovation champions, with their passion for change and desire for stimulation, are a valuable agent to foster innovation and combat organisational inertia.
- Providing autonomous time, away from scheduled tasks and formal role requirements, can provide employees with the 'cognitive space' or 'slack time' required for innovative thinking.
- Fostering innovation championing can contribute to enhanced employee engagement and a sense of fulfilment in one's role.
- Innovation champions are not motivated in any one single way; their motivations span from self-interest to contributing to a 'greater good'. Where consistency exists, such individuals share an underlying passion for change and a desire to avoid boredom.
- Leaders can clearly articulate the organisation's mission as one way to enhance champion motivation, particularly where their work has longer term and/or indirect value to target beneficiaries.

KEYWORDS

innovation, innovation champion, not-for-profit, public service motivation, self-determination theory, workplace boredom

1 | INTRODUCTION

Many public service-oriented organisations are facing the twin demands of dynamic external environments and pressures for innovative responses to societal problems. For example, not-for-profit organisations in Australia and in many developed nations are operating under more restrictive and competitive funding regimes, are requiring more 'professionalised' operations, and face an increasingly diverse set of stakeholders (Butcher, 2019; Jaskyte & Liedtka, 2022; Svensson et al., 2020). These trends are accompanied by for-profit organisations increasingly moving into

service domains traditionally 'owned' by not-for-profits (Choi & Choi, 2014; McDonald, 1999; Shea & Wang, 2016; Shier & Handy, 2015b). To help facilitate organisational responsiveness within such challenging environments, innovation is generally understood to be a critical organisational activity and source of competitive advantage (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). For public service-oriented organisations particularly, innovation is a critical activity for navigating growing mission-market tensions that funding and competitive pressures impose (Ranucci & Lee, 2019; Shier & Handy, 2015a; Shin & Choi, 2019; Svensson et al., 2020). This means that such organisations must innovate if they are to maintain 'the ability to address root causes of the complex and evolving issues they confront' (Berzin & Pitt-Catsoupes, 2015, p. 361).

Broadly, however, there remain significant gaps in understanding how organisations can 'be more innovative' (Berzin & Camarena, 2018; Jaskyte & Liedtka, 2022; Meyer & Leitner, 2018). As organisational actors are important drivers of innovation (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010; Janssen et al., 2004), a particularly critical gap exists in understanding *why* individuals choose to undertake innovative activity. While positive innovation outcomes can enhance individuals' reputations and support wider organisational goals (Molloy et al., 2020), developing, supporting, and implementing new or adapted ideas is time consuming, can deplete individual resources (Moenkemeyer et al., 2012), can be frustrating (Todt et al., 2018), and comes with reputational risk in the event of failure (Bankins et al., 2017). Given the pressures faced by public service-oriented organisations to innovate, understanding what drives people to engage in these behaviours, despite the associated personal challenges and risks, is critical if not-for-profits and public sector organisations alike are to activate and leverage innovative activity.

Most research examining motivation for innovation generally focuses on why individuals choose to be creative, to the detriment of understanding motivations to implement those creative ideas. Recent studies examining such motivations suggest that the reasons why individuals act innovatively are likely complex, and include curiosity (Gino, 2018), personal interest (Lempiälä & Vanharanta, 2018), public service motivation (Miao et al., 2018), seeking to drive organisational outcomes (Bartlett & Dibben, 2002), and customer expectations (Griffin et al., 2009). Despite this diversity of reasons, there is general acceptance that intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, motivation is a fundamental driver of individual innovative activity (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013). This perspective appears built on the existing scholarly focus on motivations for creativity and a bounded view of what constitutes both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. However, drawing on contemporary motivational theories can help remedy the latter issue particularly. Self-determination theory (SDT) emphasises the importance of, and provides a framework for, a detailed examination of motivation (Chen & Bozeman, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020). SDT concretely outlines the differences between motivation to engage in a task purely out of enjoyment of the process (intrinsic motivation) and motivation to engage in a task for reasons other than inherent interest (Ryan & Deci, 2020). SDT also affords examinations of the heterogeneity of extrinsic motivators and the impacts these can have on workplace behaviour (Battaglio et al., 2022; Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Innovating in public service-oriented contexts, such as in not-for-profits, has unique characteristics that will shape individual motivations to innovate, and this reinforces the importance of employing a nuanced assessment of motivation in such contexts. In particular, such organisations have a driving mission focus to contribute to the greater good (Chen, 2014; Shier & Handy, 2015a), but can lack the internal resources that both facilitate innovation (Baines et al., 2014) and support individual motivation (Verbruggen et al., 2015). Utilising SDT also allows us to accurately disentangle the different motivational drivers of innovation agents operating in such settings, where service to the public and contributing to the greater good are important guiding values, but where currently such motivational drivers are not well identified. For example, the predominant view is that innovative activity is largely underpinned by intrinsic motivation, which SDT conceptualises

as behaviour regulated by enjoyment and/or interest in the task rather than the outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, it is unclear how this reconciles with public service-oriented contexts where individuals are often described as having strong prosocial motivations (Chen, 2014), which SDT conceptualises as an extrinsic form of motivation (Battaglio et al., 2022; De Cooman et al., 2011). This highlights a key problem in existing work when prosocial and intrinsic motivations are conflated, despite an SDT lens suggesting they should be assessed separately. Put another way, if we take prosocial drivers for behaviour to be a form of extrinsic motivation, per SDT, it raises the question of whether intrinsic motivation is indeed a primary motivator for innovation, particularly in public service-oriented contexts.

Overall, the motivators for individual innovation in the aforementioned contexts require further research (Berzin et al., 2016; Schepers et al., 2005). Such insights are critical not only for better understanding innovation in not-for-profits, but also for better understanding innovation in public sector organisations, where conceptualising and examining the separation between intrinsic and prosocial forms of motivation is also important for developing a more accurate understanding of public service motivation (Battaglio et al., 2022). To do this, we focus on innovation champions to examine what motivates them to go 'above and beyond' to personally drive an innovation. Our research is guided by the following question: *How are innovation champions motivated in not-for-profit organisations?*

Through an in-depth, multi-case study approach within the Australian human services not-for-profit sector, we examine the motivations of innovation champions. By utilising SDT, we extend beyond other studies to provide a fine-grained analysis of innovation motivation within a sector strongly defined by public service, the Australian not-for-profit sector. This expands our understanding of the complex drivers of motivation in this context, particularly through surfacing the separate but complementary relationship between prosocial and intrinsic motivation (Grant, 2007). That is, while we focus on a not-for-profit context, our work can translate across similar sectors that are characterised by service to the public, particularly given the similar motivational profiles of employees operating in such settings (Bright, 2016). Practically, a better understanding of how these innovation champions are motivated will support both identifying and encouraging these individuals to boost innovation that is organisationally beneficial, facilitating continued delivery of social goods.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 | Australian not-for-profits: Setting the context

The human services sector in Australia is experiencing an evolving and increasingly competitive landscape, underpinned by the marketisation of service delivery over the past three decades (Davidson, 2018; Jaskyte & Liedtka, 2022; Svensson et al., 2020). Relatedly, not-for-profits, as do other public service-oriented organisations, often experience greater scrutiny and expectations to demonstrate outcomes to a wider set of publics than their for-profit counterparts (Jiao et al., 2022). This context has required an increasing emphasis on hybridisation, meaning the integration of commercially focused activities and decision making alongside the delivery of mission-focused outcomes (Mullins et al., 2018). This poses challenges for maintaining a mission focus whilst remaining competitive, particularly given the entry of for-profit providers into domains once occupied predominantly by not-for-profit organisations (Jiao et al., 2022). The challenges associated with hybrid organising have also been felt in the wider public sector where New Public Management initiatives, among other forces, have led to a 'retreat of "pure" public sector forms' (Denis

et al., 2015, p. 273). The ‘inter-sectoral blurring’ that has occurred as public sector agencies contract out aspects of public service provision to not-for-profits has also heightened hybridisation pressures in these organisations (Denis et al., 2015, p. 273). More broadly, social and demographic shifts are also creating a more complex service delivery landscape for not-for-profits (Xerri et al., 2019). For example, greater workforce participation by women, aging populations, and smaller households is increasing the demand for services previously provided informally within families and households, and this is shaping the requirements for, and nature of, the delivery of social and public goods (Davidson, 2018).

2.2 | Innovation in public service-oriented organisations

Walker (2008, p. 592) defines innovation as ‘a process through which new ideas, objects, and practices are created, developed, or reinvented, and which are new for the unit of adoption’. Despite this broad conceptualisation, innovation has predominantly been explored in for-profit domains, focusing on product and technological development (Al-Noaimi et al., 2022). Scholarly attention has, however, increasingly broadened to explore innovation across not-for-profit and public sector settings, and in doing so acknowledges the importance of innovation that is underpinned by an intention to drive positive changes within the community (Cinar et al., 2022). In not-for-profit organisations specifically, innovation can involve new program offerings that improve social outcomes for clients, new approaches to funding in response to increasingly competitive funding models, more efficient internal processes to enhance service delivery, and new-to-the-world approaches for addressing social issues (Meyer & Leitner, 2018; Shier & Handy, 2015a). Outcomes of such innovations are therefore social in nature and can vary in terms of direct or indirect impact on beneficiaries and in the scope of their social impact (Shier & Turpin, 2019).

The social value that can be achieved through innovation is clear (Huq, 2019), but investigating the role of established organisations in driving social change remains marginalised (Berzin & Camarena, 2018; Shin & Choi, 2019). Studies predominantly emphasise social entrepreneurship as a key avenue for innovation (Lenz & Shier, 2021; Marques et al., 2018), despite established not-for-profits and public sector entities possessing resources which, if effectively leveraged, could reduce the risk and cost of innovation (Berzin & Camarena, 2018; Berzin et al., 2016). The unique characteristics of not-for-profit organisations also make their drivers for innovation likely different from for-profit contexts (Svensson et al., 2020). For example, not-for-profit organisations place a greater emphasis on expressive values, which are associated with an ethical, moral, or religious ideology (Knutsen, 2013), or as Steane (1999, p. 196) described ‘affirming of one’s humanity’. The focus on such values underpins and steers not-for-profit activity, but we know little about how this focus might shape innovation (Ranucci & Lee, 2019). Overall, the values-driven, mission-focused nature of organisations such as not-for-profits and other public service-oriented entities means that innovation, and the reasons that individuals choose to act innovatively within such organisations, may be quite different than what occurs in other contexts (do Adro et al., 2022; Shier et al., 2019).

2.3 | Innovation champions: Key agents driving innovation

While many actors can be involved in organisational innovation, innovation champions are recognised as particularly critical for overcoming innovation barriers, such as organisational resistance

to change, to ultimately drive innovation (Bankins et al., 2017; Cinar et al., 2021; Howell & Higgins, 1990a; Molloy et al., 2020). Champions are individuals who are passionate in their beliefs about an idea, go above and beyond their role descriptions, persevere through organisational resistance, generate enthusiasm in others, and are highly knowledgeable, flexible, driven, and politically astute (Chakrabarti, 1974; Howell & Higgins, 1990a). While champion studies have focused on goods-producing, for-profit organisations, these individuals can operate across all industries and in firms of all sizes and technology levels (Markham & Griffin, 1998; Molloy et al., 2020). Champions contribute positively to specific innovation projects and can engender broader innovation outcomes at team and organisational levels (Howell & Shea, 2006) by resourcing projects (Markham, 2000), inspiring enthusiasm amongst peers (Bankins et al., 2017; Howell & Shea, 2006), and boosting team performance (Howell & Higgins, 1990a).

Achieving successful outcomes, while generally positive for organisations (Markham, 2000), does carry risk for individuals. This can occur through competing with organisational power structures, potentially generating stress for the champion and even adversely impacting career advancement and personal reputation (Howell, 2005; Howell & Higgins, 1990b). This begs the question of what motivates champions to act in ways that, although organisationally beneficial, can be personally risky. This reflects a key gap in the innovation literature, that despite the important role of motivation for spurring individuals toward achieving innovative outcomes, 'to a large extent the individual's motivations to innovate are taken for granted' (Rosenblatt, 2011, p. 207). We now turn to assessing existing work on championing motivation and contextualise this within the not-for-profit sector specifically.

2.4 | What motivates innovation champions?

For innovation champions, factors such as personality (Howell & Higgins, 1990b), organisational context (Chrusciel, 2008), and role-taking behaviour (Markham et al., 1991) are broadly described in the literature as motivators, but their specific relationship to motivation for innovation is rarely specified. Intrinsic motivation is also generally expressed as a driver of championing, but the ways in which it does so remain inadequately explained (Howell & Boies, 2004; Taylor et al., 2011). Studies also may not disentangle motivations to drive positive personal outcomes via innovation from motivations to serve a specific mission-related cause or other positive organisational purpose (Markusson, 2010; Mumford & Harvey, 2014).

The importance of disentangling different motivational drivers is reflected in an emerging body of research that suggests more complex relationships exist here than previously supposed (e.g. Delmas & Pekovic, 2018; Griffin et al., 2009; Lempiälä & Vanharanta, 2018). For example, Griffin et al. (2009) highlight the role of intrinsic motivation but also find that extrinsic factors, such as solving customer problems, can drive innovative behaviour. Similarly, Lempiälä and Vanharanta (2018, p. 63) identify 'dual motivational drivers' that reflect the pursuit of a personally interesting project but that also generate organisational benefit. Mansfeld et al. (2010) compare the motivation of innovation champions and innovation promotors (a similar but distinct change agent) and uncover important variations in intrinsic and extrinsic motivators across both agents. Specifically, champions were intrinsically motivated while promotors were driven by outcomes associated with their behaviour, rather than the enjoyment of the activity itself (which SDT labels identified regulation, discussed in the next section). These differences in motivational profiles are not fully explained by the authors but, given the similarities between championing and promotor roles (see Rost et al., 2007), suggest the need for more detailed explorations of champion motivation.

The not-for-profit context, and indeed public service-oriented contexts more broadly, adds further complexity to questions of motivation, as championing in such arenas may be more precarious and difficult than in others. For example, risk aversion due to stricter and more prescriptive funding specifications than in other sectors and limited resource availability for innovation (Productivity Commission, 2010) make innovating challenging. As not-for-profits are tied to traditional values underpinning their mission (Knutson, 2013), this means that innovation champions face additional personal risk as their efforts to introduce innovations, particularly those perceived as market based, could be viewed as moving the organisation away from its mission.

The not-for-profit context not only influences the potential risk for champions but may also shape their motivations. Compared to their for-profit counterparts, not-for-profit employees are often described as more satisfied, motivated (Benz, 2005), and engaged, despite typically lower remuneration, more burdensome workloads (Jeworrek & Mertins, 2022), and less opportunities for pay incentives (Chen & Bozeman, 2013; De Cooman et al., 2011). Nevertheless, not-for-profit employees are shown to be loyal and willing to contribute beyond their paid obligations (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006; Jeworrek & Mertins, 2022). Light (2002) suggests that this may reflect the added meaning not-for-profit employees attach to their work. We should therefore not assume that identical motivators drive the innovative activity of those in not-for-profit and for-profit contexts. We now turn to introducing SDT as a motivational lens that helps uncover the complex and varying nature of motivation.

2.5 | Applying SDT to study innovation champions and their motivations

SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides a nuanced lens for understanding champion motivation, particularly given the features of the not-for-profit context. SDT is a theory that considers variation in the quality or type of motivation (Conway et al., 2015). That is, rather than assessing whether and to what extent an individual is motivated, SDT explores variation in the reasons why people choose to engage in particular activities (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

SDT identifies five types of motivation, distinguished along a continuum representing different external regulation levels, or the extent to which a behaviour is driven by a motivation that is internally or externally founded (Ryan & Deci, 2000). *Intrinsic motivation* is the most autonomous type of motivation and refers to behaviour regulated by enjoyment and/or interest in the task rather than the outcome. For example, an employee who develops a digital marketing campaign because she enjoys the process of working on new technologies at work. This form of motivation is self-determined as it is not driven by 'external prods, pressures, or rewards' (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 56). Like intrinsic motivation, *integrated motivation* is fully volitional, but is instrumental in nature in that it refers to behaviour that, even if not enjoyed by the individual, is underpinned by values fully internalised as 'part of the person's sense of self' (Gagné et al., 2010, p. 629). For example, this type of motivation is reflected in an employee who sees driving a digital marketing campaign as directly aligned with her identity of being a pioneer in the workplace. *Identified motivation* refers to behaviours regulated by individual values that are accepted and deemed important for personal goals, but are not fully internalised, as in integrated regulation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). For example, here the employee believes that driving the digital capability of the organisation will support her aspirations to be a successful digital marketer. Although integrated and identified motivations involve utility as a driver, they are also associated with 'a feeling of choice' and are thus understood as self-determined (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 60).

Introjected motivation refers to behaviours performed out of obligation or to avoid shame or embarrassment. For example, where an employee develops a digital marketing campaign because she wants to avoid being embarrassed at an upcoming performance evaluation. This form of regulation is associated with an individual's desire to maintain self-worth and, although it reflects an internalised pressure, is controlling rather than self-determined (Gagné et al., 2010). The least autonomous type of motivation is *external motivation* which, like the classical view of extrinsic motivation, refers to behaviours driven by external contingencies such as rewards and punishments (Gagné & Deci, 2005). For example, where an employee believes that developing a digital campaign will result in her being paid a bonus. Finally, SDT acknowledges '*amotivation*' as a state in which individuals lack intention to act because of disinterest or a sense of incompetence (Ryan, 1995). Here, the employee may not develop the digital marketing campaign because they see little value in the activity and there are no external prompts inducing the behaviour.

The nuance offered by SDT, and its conceptual flexibility for exploring the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation particularly, is critical in public service-oriented contexts. For example, not-for-profit employees are suggested to be more intrinsically motivated than employees in other sectors (Ben-Ner et al., 2011; Chen, 2014; Theuvsen, 2004). However, the representation of not-for-profit employees as intrinsically motivated and altruistic is not sufficiently empirically evidenced (Speckbacher, 2013), with Chen (2014, p. 738) arguing that research has 'disproportionately emphasised the intrinsic motivation' for such workers. This marginalises the role of not-for-profit employees' extrinsic motivations, particularly as evidence suggests their aspiration for financial compensation and job security may be no weaker than their for-profit counterparts (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006; De Cooman et al., 2011). Positioning intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as dichotomous thus fails to explore their potential co-existence within employees who operate in public service-oriented contexts (Chen, 2014; Grant, 2008). SDT also teases apart intrinsic and prosocial motivators as independent constructs (Grant, 2008). SDT positions prosocial motivation as either integrated, identified, or introjected (all extrinsic forms of motivation), depending on alignment and internalisation of personal values and the focal outcome, to facilitate a nuanced exploration of prosocial motivation. This is particularly relevant for the exploration of employees' motivation in both public sector (Demircioglu & Chen, 2019) and not-for-profit contexts as they are understood to work, at least in part, for 'ideological currency' (Chen, 2014). Put another way, when compared to their for-profit counterparts, public sector and not-for-profit employees are more focused on mission and overall demonstrate stronger altruistic tendencies (Light, 2002; Schepers et al., 2005).

Problematically, much research conflates intrinsic motivation with prosocial drivers (Speckbacher, 2013), with the latter often attributed to not-for-profit employees (Tidwell, 2005). However, as De Cooman et al. (2011) argue, past research may be inappropriately identifying prosocial drivers as a form of intrinsic motivation, contributing to potentially erroneous conclusions that not-for-profit employees are less extrinsically motivated than other workers. Research also identifies that individuals, at different times, can be motivated by one type of motivator (prosocial or intrinsic) but not the other and that the two types can be synchronously present (Grant, 2008; Grant & Sonnentag, 2010). More research is required to better understand how different types of motivation co-exist and shape innovative behaviour (Grant, 2007). Overall, by applying SDT to capture the complexity of individuals' motivations, our research examines how innovation champions are motivated in one type of public service-oriented organisation, the not-for-profit context.

3 | RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study forms part of a larger research project investigating innovation championing in Australian not-for-profit organisations, via interviews with champions and other organisational stakeholders. Our insights are based on a multi-case study, multi-respondent qualitative approach that explored championing motivation, behaviours, and impact within six human services not-for-profit organisations in regional Australia.

Case study sampling involved a 'two-tier process' of determining case number and within-case interviewees (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 99). While methodological guidance is broad, between four and 10 cases (Eisenhardt, 1989) are suggested. Initially, four cases were utilised in this study, with six to nine interviewees per case. This sample was subsequently supplemented with an additional two cases to ensure comprehensive coverage of the phenomena. In total, the study comprised six cases and 46 interviewees. Methodological rigour was further achieved through engaging multiple investigators (e.g. joint interviewing in 17 out of the 46 interviews), affording complementary insights, richer interpretations of the data, and ultimately stronger and more rigorous findings (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Selecting 'information-rich cases' affords qualitative research its 'logic and power' (Patton, 2015, p. 53) and case selection was based on identifying organisations operating in a similar context to facilitate and enhance the investigation of innovation champions. Case organisations were identified based on the following criteria: they were classified as a not-for-profit; they operated primarily in the human services sub-sector; they were medium sized (>20 but <200 employees); they operated within the same region in Australia; and an innovation champion was identifiable.

As identifying innovation champions is a complex task, a robust identification process was followed. The researchers worked with a key informant who identified potential champions within their organisation. These nominations were confirmed (or not) via self-identification and from at least two other interviewees. The researchers then confirmed an identified individual as a champion based on these data and definitions of the role in the champion literature. We followed the approaches of Bankins et al. (2017) and Day (1994) and did not constrain champions to be operating at any particular organisational level. In total, nine individuals were confirmed as champions from 13 initial identifications (see Table 1 for details).

Between six and nine interviews were conducted within each case, including at least one board member, the CEO, champion(s), and individuals identified as working closely with the champion. Data triangulation was therefore achieved by involving multiple interviewees within each case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), to provide diverging and converging insights to enhance understanding of the phenomena. This paper focuses explicitly on champion motivation and draws predominantly from interviews with identified champions; however, insights gained from other informants are also integrated into the analysis.

Data analysis followed a top-down, bottom-up (Dubois & Gadde, 2002) approach to allow for the generation of emergent and theoretically derived codes. This meant that codes were developed from champion and motivation literature but were also data derived to generate context-sensitive insights. Initial coding involved descriptively identifying all data referring to champion motivation. This included commentary from the champions themselves and colleagues' perspectives on the focal champion's motivation. From here, interpretive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was undertaken which involved analysing the descriptive codes through the lens of SDT. Where relevant, motivation quotes were allocated to one of the motivation styles identified in SDT (e.g. 'intrinsic' or 'integrated regulation'). In addition, references to motivation that did not clearly align

TABLE 1 Champion identification process

Organisation	Interviewee profile	Champions identified	Self-identified	Confirmed as a champion by other participants	Confirmed as a champion by researchers
Harchfield	1 × Board member 1 × CEO 7 × employees at various organisational levels	Guy—CEO	Yes	1 × board member 4 × employees	Yes
Neiland	1 × Board member 1 × CEO 6 × employees at various organisational levels	Chad—lower-level employee Peta—CEO	Yes Yes	3 × employees 1 × board member 3 × employees	Yes Yes
Crosston	1 × Board members 1 × CEO 4 × employees at various organisational levels	Alice—middle-level manager Kelly—middle-level manager Jane—middle-level manager	Yes Yes Yes	CEO 2 × employees 1 × employee All interviewees	Yes No—activity focused on operational activities. No relevant self-description of champion-related behaviours provided. Yes

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Organisation	Interviewee profile	Champions identified	Self-identified	Confirmed as a champion by other participants	Confirmed as a champion by researchers
Tarrafield	1 × Board member 1 × CEO 6 × employees at various organisational levels	David—CEO Audrey—CEO	Yes	None	No—described by all interviewees as inhibiting innovation. No instances of champion behaviour described by interviewees.
		Liam—middle-level manager	Yes	1 × board members CEO 3 × employees	Yes
		Lisa—lower-level employee	No	1 × employee	No—described as a supporter of others' championing, strong implementer.
Elevate	2 × Board members 1 × CEO 4 × employees at various organisational levels	Neil—CEO	Yes	2 × board members 3 × employees	Yes
Shoreton	1 × Board member 1 × CEO 5 × employees at various organisational levels	Tori—lower-level employee	Yes	2 × senior managers	Yes
		Simon—senior-level manager	Yes	1 × board member 1 × employee	No—descriptions focused on facilitating innovative activity of others only.

Note: Champion identification followed champion literature: 'An individual, who more than others has made a decisive contribution to a particular innovative idea, product, or process by actively and enthusiastically promoting its progress through critical stages of the innovation process. This individual goes above and beyond their role description to promote a particular innovation or multiple innovative ideas. They are the key driver of efforts to sell the idea to organisational members, often displaying persistence and high levels of commitment' (Chakrabarti, 1974; Howell & Higgins, 1990a; Howell & Shea, 2006).

Intrinsic	Chad	<i>"My every day job is too boring" "... that's just personality ... Yeah, he just loves those innovative ideas"</i>
	Alice	<i>"I like to be and I am used to being busy" "I will just go and do some research... If I am waiting... If I have got some stuff held up somewhere ... I will look for something else to do."</i>
Integrated Regulation	Peta	<i>"She also believes and I love this about her ... genuinely believes in it and that's why she takes the time at all those things." "I think the CEO's role in an organisation like mine, in the current economic climate, is to encourage everyone to drive innovation."</i>
	Tori	<i>"We are not just doing it for the sake of doing it, we are not just doing it for the monetary sense, we are doing it to make a difference to employment outcomes for our (target beneficiaries)." "You are not going to be rich being in (this specific area of work), so it's definitely not income it's definitely not the money so... I think for me it's about the passion."</i>
Identified Regulation	Guy	<i>"I don't think you can do this job if you didn't have an inherent sense of drive to keep improving, keep changing. With the ultimate goal of helping the client." "I see myself as being able to drive change, being able to think about the change and ... discuss what I want in terms of the Board ... But also I rank myself as never quite doing it properly."</i>
Intrinsic & Integrated Regulation	Audrey	<i>"People say "oh you must have a passion for (the target beneficiaries)", nup no I don't, but I have a really passion for ideas ... I should be really putting my efforts into aged care, but the ideas ... we're ideas people, we really thrive on it." "She is very passionate, you know? Passionate about (the target beneficiaries) and passionate about what we do."</i>
	Liam	<i>"I really like the idea of um, of applying an idea that's out of that sector, like trying to work out, see how things work in a different sector." "I've got compassion for people and empathy from where they're at."</i>
	Noel	<i>"Noel is a very good driver of innovation ... and he is really into the community context" "His belief in the cause of, you know, why we are here ... he could leave here, get a job in the commercial world and make a whole lot more money, but he really believes in the cause so. I think that's what motivates him."</i>
	Jane	<i>"She is enthusiastic about the sector, about helping people." "What motivates me? I think it's just you've got this new challenge out there, the fact that the sector's changing and I like a challenge and for me it's like why not take that challenge head on."</i>

FIGURE 1 Coding structure and illustrative quotes

with the motivation profiles within SDT were coded. This was most relevant for commentary on the role of boredom being a driver for championing. Figure 1 overviews the coding structure and presents illustrative quotes for each champion.

4 | FINDINGS

Our results are presented by discussing each champion and their motivation and then locating these discussions within the SDT framework by identifying each champions' primary motivation(s). Champion motivation categorisations are also summarised in Figure 2. We utilise pseudonyms for champions and provide only high-level descriptions of the innovations championed to maintain participant anonymity.

4.1 | Champions motivated primarily by intrinsic motivation

Alice's and Chad's championing motivations closely aligned with intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Chad was driven by the desire to be involved in change itself and a keen interest in exploring new ideas. He explained that if he could not source new ideas and develop new projects, he would become bored: 'The everyday mundane that we do would drive me crazy five days a week'. He enjoyed working on something he could 'sink his teeth into, dedicate some time to, research, find out about'. Kylie, his manager, identified that Chad was naturally 'that type of person' and so she purposefully directed new project ideas towards Chad. The social outcomes of his not-for-profit were not important to Chad, as exemplified in this statement: 'Oh look I don't think the fact that it's not-for-profit makes any difference to me at all'. Chad primarily drove process

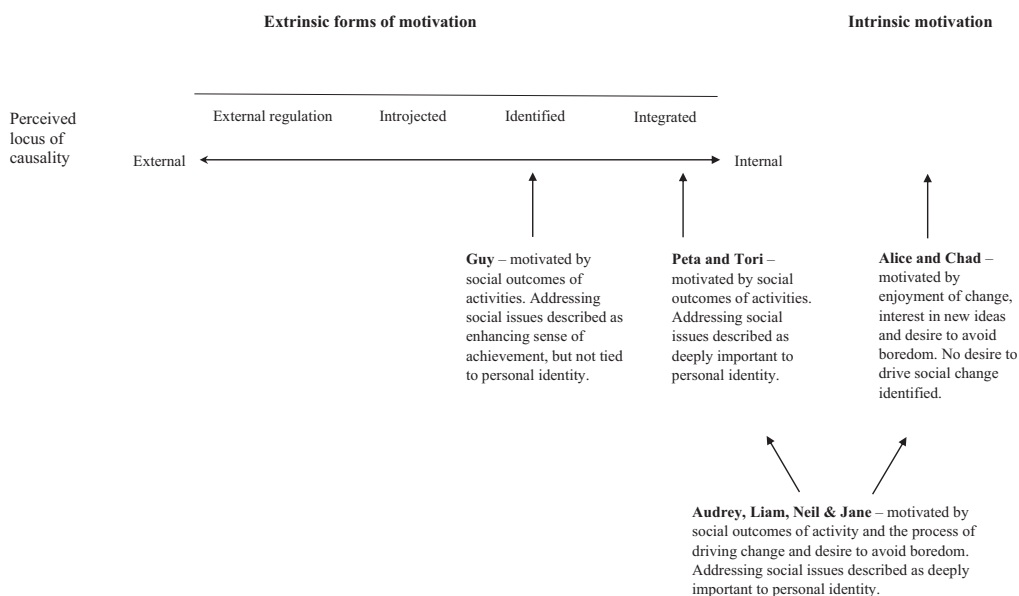


FIGURE 2 Innovation champion extrinsic and intrinsic motivational profiles: Applying self-determination theory

innovations that were internally focused, particularly the introduction of technology to enhance internal efficiency and reduce costs. Although internally focused, the changes that Chad championed ultimately drove positive outcomes for the clients of his not-for-profit through improved service provision.

Alice also expressed no clear interest in the social outcomes of her work, nor identified social goals as a championing motivator. Instead, personal interest in innovation and the challenges that the process of innovation engendered were important drivers: ‘I guess I like doing that type of stuff, I like to be challenged, I like to learn stuff’. For Alice, working in what she viewed as a slow-paced not-for-profit was also formative. She explained that, in part, she undertook innovation because she felt her job would otherwise become wearisome: ‘It’s probably self-interest that keeps me interested ... I like to be, and I am used to being, busy’. The three major innovation activities that were the focus of Alice’s championing all involved the introduction of new services for target beneficiaries and one had the potential for a more significant shift in the housing service delivery model. All three activities also involved Alice creating partnerships between her not-for-profit and for-profit organisations. These partnerships were essential in building the capacity of Alice’s not-for-profit to deliver the newly introduced services.

For both Alice and Chad, their primary desires were for challenging work and avoiding boredom. Both acknowledged that ‘self-interest’ (Alice) compelled them to go ‘above and beyond’ (Alice) and that without being able to act as an innovation champion, their roles would become unfulfilling. They expressed a clear interest in novelty seeking, learning, and pursuing challenges, and although they were aware of the potential social benefits of their activities this was not described as a driver for championing.

4.2 | Champions motivated primarily by integrated regulation

Peta and Tori described their championing as driven principally by the social outcomes of their activities. Throughout her interview, Tori expressed a clear focus on ‘the cause’ as a driver of her championing. Being passionate about her work shaped her behaviours and made the work feel ‘easier’: ‘it wasn’t a hard process. If it was an area you weren’t interested in, obviously ... your attitude would be different’. Tori did not express an interest in innovation for its own sake, but was clear that her actions were guided by optimal social outcome provision. Improving the lives of the target beneficiary group was also personally significant for her. Tori’s championing was focused on driving partnerships between her not-for-profit and external providers—both other not-for-profits and government agencies. Through these partnerships Tori was able to implement innovative service delivery models that, in the view of representatives from Tori’s not-for-profit, were more client centred and culturally appropriate than previous approaches and unique in their human services sub-sector.

Similarly, Peta’s motivation to innovate related to the social outcomes of her activities, and she explained that she had always possessed a personal interest in assisting others. Innovation was viewed by Peta as a tool, not an inherent motivator, for her championing: ‘I feel like I am the custodian of an organisation that has thousands of clients ... and I feel it is my role to position us as best as I can for the reforms and to do that requires innovation’. Peta further emphasised that her inter-organisational championing, which saw her contributing to external socially-focused bodies (such as other not-for-profits and welfare-focused government programmes), was driven by her desire to give back to the community, outside the direct charter of her not-for-profit: ‘I think it’s a way that I am putting back into the community as well. So I personally think places like (*her organisation*) should put something back into the community as well’. Like Tori, a core part of Peta’s championing was the creation of unique partnerships that facilitated innovative service delivery models.

Both champions clearly articulated the personal importance of undertaking work that delivered community benefits, indicating that their motivation best reflects integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Unlike other champions motivated by social outcomes (discussed later), neither Peta nor Tori was motivated by the process of championing. For them, acting as a champion was a means for achieving positive social outcomes, rather than to obtain satisfaction from the act of championing.

4.3 | Champions motivated primarily by identified regulation

Guy’s championing also related to social outcomes, but these were discussed in a manner indicating that they were not tied to his identity, in contrast to Peta and Tori. He explained: ‘I still think the ultimate is doing something properly and seeing the rewards’, but he also stated that it is ‘more rewarding seeing a service to someone that needs it, than delivering a window and door set to someone’. The emphasis on outputs derived from his work, rather than an inherent interest in the work process, suggests that he was not intrinsically motivated in these endeavours. Unlike champions demonstrating integrated regulation, Guy linked the prosocial outcomes being achieved to his own ‘sense of achievement by identifying where you can improve and building a continuous improvement program’, rather than expressing a deep sense of meaning being derived from driving social outcomes. Further, Guy explained his decision to take on his role in a

non-profit in this way: 'I would have said in the first couple of years, because I needed a job and I needed the money'. Overall, the values he described, both in terms of work quality and social outcomes, appear to be ones that are internally directed and performed of his own volition. A focal innovation of Guy's championing was driving a highly innovative approach to service delivery in his specific area of service provision. This innovation required significant collaboration with external parties and was pushing the boundaries of existing policy. This idea had the potential to dramatically shift service delivery in his area, but given its radical approach was yet to come to fruition.

4.4 | Champions motivated primarily by both intrinsic and integrated regulation

Finally, four champions explained their motivation in ways that suggested both intrinsic and integrated regulation were drivers of their activities, separately but simultaneously. Audrey emphasised the significance of social outcomes to her innovation, believing that because she was 'in a position to be able to do something' about the social injustices she perceived, it was important to her that she set her own boundaries around what was morally acceptable: 'to draw a line in the sand and say, stepping over that's not right'. Audrey's prosocial championing motivation was clear to her staff and her Board who appreciated and were inspired by her social focus: 'she has got all these ideas that are at the best interests of (*the target beneficiary group*) and what we can do to be able to make life easier for them. And that's her inspiration' (Bob, Board member). Indeed, Audrey used strong language to express the deep, personal importance of her work: 'I absolutely whip myself to death when I hear of (*an issue related to the target beneficiary group*), coz that's on my watch, I take that really personally'. Nevertheless, Audrey admitted that keeping her work interesting was also a core driver. She explained the importance of 'the soldier ants' who could pick up what she viewed as more mundane work activities to allow her to avoid becoming 'bored' and pursue her 'real passion for ideas'. However, Audrey's statement, 'could we put ourselves into the aged care environment or early childhood? We could you know, we could—innovation's innovation', suggests that social impact, in whatever field, was fundamental for her being intrinsically motivated to champion. Most of the innovations driven by Audrey involved the introduction of new services for the target beneficiary group. One of the core features of Audrey's championing was drawing on insights from international service delivery models and reconfiguring those to implement in her region, which often required partnerships with other not-for-profits. Audrey also focused her championing on building sustainable revenue streams for her not-for-profit.

Similarly, for Jane social outcomes had always been important. She explained that at the start of her working life she had 'tried to work for an accounting company for about (*a number of*) weeks and I walked out of there' because the work lacked substance. Jane had previously worked in a 'hands on' service role working closely with beneficiaries, which she had found meaningful but 'very draining'. She expressed that her championing remained underpinned by social outcomes: 'I feel like I am still ... you know our staff are out there doing the face-to-face but I still feel like [I am] making a difference'. Essentially, Jane felt that in being the driver of new ideas internally, she was enabling others to deliver innovative social solutions. Indeed, 'supporting' the 'really good team' who 'are all very passionate, all very dedicated' was also, in addition to the broader social outcomes achieved, an important motivator for Jane. Like Audrey, however, Jane emphasised her enjoyment of the process, also stating 'what keeps me going? yeah, I like the challenge'.

Jane's championing extended across both internal process improvements to drive greater internal efficiencies and the introduction of new services. Her championing, like many others, included building new partnerships with other not-for-profits to augment her own internal resources and enable more innovative service delivery.

Liam consistently emphasised his enjoyment of championing, explaining that he was motivated primarily by solving problems, forming relationships, and making connections: 'what I like to do, what I love to do, I love to find out what people want and need and find it for them. That's what I love doing ... that's my thing'. The social outcomes of his work were, however, integral to his enjoyment of the innovative process. Liam expressed his strong belief in 'the outcome that I'm fighting for' which drove him to find solutions 'at any cost'. He went on to articulate that the perceived unjust treatment of his target beneficiary group 'just isn't right, it shouldn't be like that for them ... I really struggle with that'. Liam's championing was externally focused, particularly toward the introduction of new projects that deepened the core offering of the target beneficiary group for his not-for-profit. Like many of the other champions, Liam drew on the partnerships he created to facilitate these activities.

Finally, Neil was highly motivated by the social outcomes of his work, but equally a desire for learning and novelty. That the 'organisation's goals and its core business aligned with [his] own personal values' was fundamental to Neil. His prosocial motivation was respected by his staff and the Board members interviewed, who valued that he was 'really into the community context' (Kevin—Board). Neil explained that his championing was to a large extent driven by his desire to counteract recent government policy changes which he believed were allowing for-profit organisations, who lacked any social focus in his view, to take work that not-for-profits (such as his own organisation) were better placed to undertake. Perhaps even more so than Audrey, Jane, and Liam, Neil acknowledged that his desire for change and dislike of routine were at least as important as the social outcomes: 'Of course the community benefit. But I suppose to be really blatantly honest ... really bored, really easily ... like in anything [laughs], so I am very restless'. Like the others, Neil also believed that although he was motivated by a need for variation and challenge, the community benefit was critical for him to feel satisfied. The most significant innovation championed by Neil related to the extension of his organisation's service offering. This major new programme extended the reach of his organisation to new client groups and created a sustainable funding stream.

Overall, Jane, Audrey, Liam, and Neil were intrinsically motivated to undertake championing. For them, it was the enjoyment of seeking out challenges, developing new relationships, creating new approaches to service delivery, and learning that were primary drivers of their championing. Unlike Alice and Chad, however, the social outcomes of their championing were also fundamental to their enjoyment and enactment of the behaviour. In this way, the social basis of their championing underpinned their intrinsic motivation and their interviews suggest that they would otherwise not have experienced the same positive outcome if there was not this adjoining social basis to their work. Audrey and Neil particularly described periods in which they were not intrinsically motivated, but felt compelled to continue with a project because the social outcomes being pursued were significant. Integrated regulation was then, at these times, their primary motivator. Interviews with Jane, Audrey, Liam, and Neil highlight the dynamic nature of motivation, as intrinsic motivation for these champions was augmented by the social outcomes of their work, with their motivations fluid and changing throughout their activities.

5 | DISCUSSION

5.1 | Implications for theory and context

Our exploration of championing motivation in a public service-oriented context, through the lens of SDT, provides a theoretically grounded investigation of champions in this unique setting. We offer several contributions centred on challenging stereotypical views of not-for-profit, and by extension other public service-oriented, employees as being largely motivated by 'doing good', spotlighting the role of boredom as a force for innovation, and surfacing the complex and interrelated nature of various motivational forces driving innovation champions.

Our findings that demonstrate the potential for the dual presence of intrinsic and prosocial motivations are particularly novel and valuable for not-for-profit and public sector leaders alike. We found that champions could be motivated by both prosocial and intrinsic factors at the same time, but also at different times for the same project. This insight reinforces the value of exploring intrinsic and prosocial motivations as potentially symbiotic, but also separate, forms of motivation (Battaglio et al., 2022; De Cooman et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Speckbacher, 2013). For some champions, prosocial motivation was integral to maintaining their innovative activity, where knowing that it was 'the right thing to do' was sufficient to sustain their championing until their intrinsic satisfaction returned. Although champions acknowledged that these instances had been tiring, their persistence was supported by, rather than reduced because of, their prosocial motivation. This supports findings that autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation (of which prosocial motivation can be classified) can engender a focus on longer term outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000), acting synergistically to not only support individuals during times of intense work, but potentially boosting performance (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010). This insight extends Amabile and Pratt's (2016) findings regarding synergistic forms of extrinsic motivation in two ways. Firstly, we show how synergistic extrinsic motivators can exist beyond creativity and are relevant to the broader processes of innovation. Secondly, we extend what might constitute a synergistic extrinsic motivator of innovation beyond reward and recognition (Amabile & Pratt, 2016), to include prosocial motivation. This novel finding also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of public service motivation, which often conceptualises an individual's intrinsic motivation as being synonymous with their 'altruistic need to serve the public interest' (Bright, 2016, p. 407). Overall, our insights add to the motivation literature by demonstrating that these two forms of motivation can co-exist (Grant, 2007; Lempiälä & Vanharanta, 2018) and operate in a complementary, rather than antithetical, way (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Grant, 2007).

We also identified that although prosocial outcomes were important for most champions, none of our champions were in 'frontline' roles nor in direct contact with beneficiaries. Some champions drove future-focused innovations which did not generate immediate impact but, for example, were aimed at securing the future survival of the not-for-profit. This 'prospective championing' was underpinned by a desire for the not-for-profit to continue generating social outcomes well into a future that was being increasingly shaped by a dynamic funding landscape (Ebrahim et al., 2014). Here, our insights differ from Grant's (2007) suggested relationship between beneficiary contact and motivation to drive prosocial outcomes. Our champions remained motivated by current and future prosocial outcomes that positively affected target beneficiaries, despite a lack of direct contact with them, further weakening the connection between present activities and outcomes. These findings respond to Grant's (2009) call for research investigating the relationship

between contact with beneficiaries and sustained prosocial motivation and are important for not-for-profit and public sector leaders. As different types of public service-oriented organisations are driven to become more 'business-like' in their operations (King, 2017), individuals who can drive innovation in a way that is supportive of the organisation's mission, despite not being 'close' to the social outcomes or direct beneficiaries, will likely become more critical.

In finding that champions were variously motivated, we challenge the broadly accepted relationship between intrinsic motivation and innovation (Auger & Woodman, 2016). We found that motivation was more variable and complex than previously described in champion and not-for-profit literatures (Chen, 2014; Howell & Higgins, 1990a). We found that personal, organisational, and prosocial outcomes were variously influential in the decision to champion. While we found, as suggested in other work (e.g. Howell & Higgins, 1990a), that championing was also motivated by a desire to achieve positive organisational outcomes, these outcomes were inextricably linked to bettering service delivery and therefore were underpinned by the resulting prosocial goals. Indeed, most champions viewed organisational improvement as a vehicle for enhancing organisational performance, which ultimately enhances social service provision. Some champions were also driven, at least in part, by self-interest. This differs from the general depiction of champions as selfless individuals, working tirelessly to drive innovation for the good of the organisation or the community (Howell & Higgins, 1990a; Markusson, 2010). This finding also supports Markham and Aiman-Smith's (2001) contention that champions may be less altruistic than typically described.

Most champions acknowledged that avoiding boredom was a strong motivator for their championing. For these individuals, it was necessary to move beyond their prescribed role to maintain work engagement. Past research has mostly identified and explored negative outcomes of individual boredom at work, such as job dissatisfaction (Kass et al., 2001) and withdrawal (Spector et al., 2006). However, for these champions boredom was a motivator for driving innovation, which in turn was viewed positively by participants. Boredom has received little attention in innovation research, but as evidenced here it may be an important, but yet unrecognised, individual affective state that drives innovation. For example, our findings link boredom with what Galperin and Burke (2006, p.333) define as 'constructive deviant behaviours', which are focused on organisational wellbeing through innovation. This may be particularly relevant for innovation in not-for-profit and wider public service contexts, as many of these organisations are experiencing environmental dynamism (Smith, 2018) that demands effective innovation for service and social good delivery (Ranucci & Lee, 2019). However, not-for-profits and public sector entities have been characterised as organisations that are rule bound, less likely to challenge the status quo, can become complacent and inert, and may fail to effectively adapt to changing environments (Dover & Lawrence, 2012; Eadie, 1997; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). In this context, champions, with their aversion to boredom and desire for stimulation, constitute a potentially unique and valuable agent to stimulate innovation and to combat organisational inertia.

Uncovering the positive outcomes of boredom (i.e. championing) is novel (van Tilburg & Igou, 2017) and suggests an avenue for public service-oriented organisations to respond to external environmental challenges via a critical innovation agent. These findings also support van Tilburg and Igou's (2011) argument that boredom could be linked to prosocial intentions. This link reflects that boredom, being associated with feelings of meaninglessness, can stimulate behavioural change (Mann & Cadman, 2014) and prompt individuals to seek purposeful activities (van Tilburg & Igou, 2011). It may be that in public service-oriented contexts, there is a more natural association between boredom and behaviours that are directed towards seeking meaning, given the organisational emphasis on mission (Fyall et al., 2018), rather than the often-cited negative

outcomes of boredom in other contexts (van Hooff & van Hooft, 2014). Moreover, it may be that meaning-seeking championing activities allow individuals to connect to the mission-related values that often reflect not-for-profit and public sector employment (Douglas & Prentice, 2019). However, generating this connection may become more difficult to maintain for entities that are increasingly grappling with mission–market tensions (Sanders, 2015). Relatedly, in operating as a mechanism to avoid boredom, championing may also contribute to increased employee engagement (Levitats et al, 2019). That is, the opportunity to champion appeared to act as a means for enhancing an employee’s sense of fulfilment in their role, which is understood to have several positive work outcomes such as higher productivity and lower turnover (Hameduddin, 2021). Our insights also indicate further exploration of the relationship between public service motivation and employee engagement is warranted (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2013). Some champions (primarily those motivated intrinsically) were focused more intensely on generating cognitive interest in their work and less on creating emotional alignment with an organisational mission focused on the ‘greater good’. This suggests that for employees in such socially-focused contexts, the importance of generating a public good may not always be a contributor to their engagement at work. In particular, the motivational orientation of an individual may shape how the level of emotional attachment to their work influences employee engagement (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2013).

5.2 | Practical implications

Our findings offer insights on ways to utilise a critical human asset, innovation champions. Boredom as an important motivator of championing cannot be underestimated. As well as offering a guiding organisational mission, public service-oriented organisations can also look at how they afford employees sufficient ‘freedom’ to experience autonomous forms of motivation (Gillet et al., 2013), while also providing sufficient space to experience boredom (which can spark innovative activity). Such ‘letting go’ may be challenging for organisations that are being asked ‘to do more with less’ (Chen et al., 2018; Ebrahim et al., 2014; Onyx et al., 2016), but it may also be a fundamental ingredient for the introduction of innovation which might counteract such a demanding climate (Delmas & Pekovic, 2018).

Relatedly, affording individuals the space to engage in meaningful work is a potential antidote to burnout (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2013), which is arguably critical in the demanding operational environment faced by many public service-oriented organisations. Here, leaders will play an important role in clearly communicating the organisational mission to employees and, in doing so, fortifying employees’ public service motivation (Bright, 2016). As not-for-profits and public sector organisations face increasing public scrutiny, this internal reinforcement of an organisation’s mission may neutralise any adverse impacts that negative public perceptions might have on champion motivation and engagement (Hameduddin, 2021). Further, as mission–market tensions increase leaders may support champion motivation by articulating the alignment between public service motivation (Hameduddin & Engbers, 2022) and championing toward positive social outcomes, even where those outcomes may be long term and indirect.

Beyond the focus on social goods, most of our champions expressed an intrinsic motivation for their innovative activity, indicating that public service-oriented organisations might seek out individuals who have an underlying passion for change and a desire to avoid boredom. This reinforces the importance of an organisational mission acting as a guide for the selection and implementation of innovation (McDonald, 2007; Wright, 2007), rather than individual-level motivation. Overall, we show how organisations can stimulate various types of motivations that can ultimately

generate social outcomes, whether that be directly to beneficiaries or indirectly through improving organisational efficiencies.

5.3 | Limitations and future research directions

Although this study sought to understand the motivation of champions in the not-for-profit sector, all case organisations were human services not-for-profits. Future research in other not-for-profit sub-sectors is required to understand if and how various not-for-profit missions shape champion motivation. More broadly, investigating champion motivation in the public service will also be valuable for better understanding if and how the motivational profiles of these agents differ across work contexts and across organisations with more or less obvious social foci. This study did not capture objective measures of innovativeness or champion performance. Quantitative research that measures motivation types and outcomes of championing will help to better understand how different types of motivation might relate to championing outcomes and the precise mechanisms through which this occurs.

Our data were also captured at a single point in time. Champion motivation was found to be varied and fluid, but we could not track fluctuations in real time. Longitudinal studies are important for exploring the temporal shifts in champion motivation and will help uncover whether these shifts are intra-personal or are related to other contextual factors such as the stages of an innovation being championed (Standing et al., 2016), organisational contextual variations such as leadership behaviours (Andersen et al., 2018), and broader macro-level changes to government funding and policy (Molloy et al., 2020). We further support Howell and Shea's (2006) call for further research exploring the influence of organisational context on innovation championing. Specifically, research that examines how job design (and how this influences prosocial motivation; Grant, 2007), resource availability (particularly incorporating time as a resource; Lawson, 2001), and organisational culture (Büschgens et al., 2013) shape innovation championing will be instructive. Relatedly, examining how organisations can educate individuals to become more active in driving innovation (van der Wal & Demircioglu, 2020) will help generate more concrete and practical guidelines to support organisational innovation. Understanding motivational shifts over time and the influence of context will also provide better insights into what triggers championing, what sustains motivation through the championing process, and how organisations can support champion motivation (Kanfer, 2009).

While we uncovered boredom as a driver for some champions, we did not explore if those individuals were also 'boredom prone'. Prior research has found that individuals differ in the extent to which they are more or less likely to experience boredom (Skowronski, 2012). It may be that champions in this study, or indeed most champions, are prone to boredom. Future research could examine the relationship between boredom proneness and championing to help organisations better understand how to encourage and steer existing champions toward generating organisationally beneficial outcomes. How public service-oriented organisations identify, harness, and guide innovation champions towards generating organisationally and societally beneficial outcomes will remain critical as such organisations seek to balance the maintenance of their mission in the midst of an increasingly turbulent environment.

6 | CONCLUSION

Our examination of what motivates a key innovation agent, innovation champions, shows these individuals are not singly motivated over the course of even a single project. Their motivations for championing are varied, and defy stereotypical assertions of predominantly altruistic motives, and span intrinsic, prosocial, and other extrinsic drivers. Workplace boredom, often associated with negative outcomes, also surfaced as an interesting and unexpected driver of champions' innovative activity, either by spurring activity to avoid it or providing the 'cognitive space' to progress innovative work. Understanding and creating the conditions to effectively innovate is increasingly important for many public service-oriented organisations tasked with the delivery of social goods, given the importance of their work and the challenging external conditions they face. Our work helps inform strategies to create these conditions within these critical organisations.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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