

# Motivations Affecting Singapore University Students' Public- and Private-Sector Job Choices

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**Abstract:** This article investigates whether university students' job motivations are different depending on their sectoral job choice. Using stratified random sampling, the author surveyed 253 students in Singapore (response rate = 48 percent). Logistic regression analysis results provided evidence that public service motivation is a significant motivator to Singapore university students who pursue public-sector careers. The results, however, do not exclude the importance of extrinsic motivators such as high salary or opportunity for advancement, which are important to both public- and private-sector job seekers.

**Keywords:** job motivation, Singapore, job choice

The public administration literature has emphasized differences in public and private management (Allison, 1979; Bozeman, 1987; Rainey, Backoff, & Levine 1976). Among the differences, public service motivation (PSM)<sup>1</sup> theory (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008; Perry & Wise, 1990) offers considerable evidence of motivational differences between public and private employees, especially in the degree of PSM (Crewson, 1997; Perry & Hondeghem, 2008; Vandenabeele, 2008). PSM research emphasizes the managerial implications of PSM, arguing that it positively contributes to job commitment (Crewson, 1997), job satisfaction (Naff & Crum, 1999; Romzek, 1990), job performance (Naff & Crum, 1999), and trust in government (Brewer, 2003).<sup>2</sup> All these empirical studies,

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1. In this paper, PSM is considered one of the job motivators of university students. Defined as the degree of appreciation for the opportunity to benefit society, it is used to measure altruism. This conception of PSM is more limited than that proposed by Perry and Wise (1990).

2. There are some empirical studies that do not support the positive role of PSM. Reasons

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however, target incumbent public or private employees. Little is known about the existence of a difference in job motivation among university students who may pursue either a public- or private-sector career after graduation.

PSM theory assumes that students with high PSM will be naturally inclined toward public-sector jobs upon graduation (Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2006, p. 613; Perry & Wise, 1990). The assumption is well described in the proposition that “the greater an individual’s public service motivation, the more likely the individual will seek membership in a public organization” (Perry & Wise, 1990). Not only the correctness of the proposition but also the complex extrinsic and intrinsic job motivators that influence university students should be counted.

Job choice and motivation of university students is an important research topic, especially in Singapore, which has enjoyed a high level of managerial efficiency in the public sector. In 2008, Singapore ranked fifth in the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitive Index, fourth in Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index, seventh in Foreign Affairs’ globalization index, and fourth under Brown University’s E-government Index. The Asian Barometer Survey of 2005 also indicates that trust in the Singapore government is 3.2 on a 4 point scale, which is higher than that of other Asian countries.

Singapore owes this administrative success to its government’s meritocratic public personnel management (Quah, 2010). Many talented employees have chosen to work in the public sector. Of course, private-sector jobs are also highly attractive in Singapore. Multinational companies account for almost 60 percent of the corporate sector’s total assets (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2001). They entice talented young Singaporeans by providing more attractive job opportunities than the public service does. Why university students choose public-sector jobs is an important question to the Singapore government, given the attractiveness of both public and private jobs in Singapore. The growing attractiveness of private-sector jobs has led the government to closely examine what job motivations are important to public-sector job seekers.

To contribute to the understanding of Singaporean university students’ job choices, and the structural differences between the job motivations of public- and private-sector job seekers, this article analyzes responses to a survey of 253 students. While PSM studies claim that there are different levels of PSM among incumbent public- and private-sector employees, the question of whether undergraduates with higher PSM

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include the lack of difference in job satisfaction between public and private workers (Gabris & Simo, 1995), relatively low job commitment of public employees (Lyons et al., 2006), and inconsistent findings on the relationship between PSM and performance depending on data source (Alonso & Lewis, 2001).

are more inclined toward choosing a public-sector career is less empirically tested.

This article also takes into account other intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Singapore's public servants are well paid and enjoy an excellent international reputation for their high levels of efficiency. More importantly, the Singaporean government has adopted result-driven management similar to that of private companies. Since the 1980s, private-sector personnel management tools have been widely adopted (Quah, 2010). Given these different institutions, job characteristics, organizational incentives, and work environments, known as "motivational context" (Perry, 2000, pp. 48-49), the different images of public- and private-sector employment might be blurred to university students.

## SINGAPORE CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM AND JOB MOTIVATORS

The Singapore public service system has been characterized by meritocracy, emphasis on clean government, competitive pay for civil servants, efficiency, and a limited role for bureaucrats in policy making (Cheung, 2003; Ho, 2000; Quah, 1984, 2007). Meritocracy in Singapore's civil service does not refer to having a standardized recruitment system such as a civil service entrance exam. In fact, the government attracts the best and brightest to join the public service by providing highly attractive scholarships to university students.<sup>3</sup> Once students win these competitive scholarships, they enjoy considerable benefits in recruitment, training, and promotion in public-sector jobs. This type of meritocracy results in the concentration of resources and opportunities within specific groups (Tan, 2008). Hence, unlike the meritocracies of other countries, which emphasize egalitarian aspects of recruitment, the meritocracy in Singapore's civil service is effective in recruiting good candidates but runs the risk of fostering elitism.

High salaries also characterize the Singapore public service. For instance, ministers' salaries are pegged at two-thirds the average income of the top eight earners in six professional fields.<sup>4</sup> The prime minister's salary was S\$3.04 million (US\$2 million) as of 2009, which is almost three times higher than that of the US president. Recent graduates with a bachelor's degree, starting a career in the government, earn an average

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3. Examples include the Public Service Commission Scholarship, Overseas Merit Scholarship, Singapore Government Scholarship, and Ministry Scholarship. These programs are mainly based on scholastic achievement measured by undergraduate grade-point average.

4. This system was introduced by Public Service Division's white paper titled *Competitive Salaries for Competent and Honest Government* in 1994.

yearly salary of S\$30,000, compared with S\$25,000 in the private sector.

The Singaporean government justifies the competitive salary on two grounds: fighting corruption and prevention of brain drain. Many politicians and scholars in Singapore have argued that underpaid public officials are more likely to engage in corruption, as other Asian governments have experienced (Lee, 2000; Quah, 1999), and justify high salaries for public officials as a means to prevent this. Also, high salary is regarded as a tool to entice competent employees to join and remain in the public service. As Singapore has a highly globalized labor market and hosts many multinational companies, job mobility is very high, and it is little wonder that the government tries to provide competitive salaries to recruit and retain talented employees.

The managerial efficiency of the Singapore public service system is also notable. Public officials have guided the country's economic development since the early 1960s and have introduced successful policies in public housing, urban planning, public health, and other areas. More importantly, instead of being caught in a success trap or organizational inertia, the Singapore government has initiated successive administrative reforms. In the 1990s, while other countries started administrative reforms to respond to external criticisms of their poor managerial efficiency (Barzelay 2001; Hood 1991; Kettl 1997), Singapore initiated administrative reform based on internal incentives to refine the role of the public service (Cheung, 2003). These successive efforts have ensured that the Singapore government has maintained a relatively small number of public employees and enjoyed a budget surplus for a long time. Due to such managerial efficiency, public officials have many job opportunities in the private sector after they leave office.

The Singapore public service is highly apolitical. It has been subordinated to a strong political leadership by the People's Action Party, which has held power since 1959. Whereas Singapore's public officials have the prerogative to implement policies, agenda setting and decision making are in the hands of cabinet members and politicians. Citizens also have very limited chances to participate in policy making (Ho, 2000). Although the Singapore government emphasizes the value of service, meaning "public officers should always do what is right and reasonable; with empathy and respect for the people that we serve" (Singapore Public Service Division, 2007), it is not certain if public officials can judge what constitutes "right and reasonable" in their everyday work environment.

These characteristics of the Singapore public service system result in some challenges. Firstly, the obsession with procedural equality tends to increase the risk of substantive inequality. While the idea of meritocracy emphasizes equal opportunities for prospective employees, Singapore's interpretation of meritocracy as based on educational qualifications does not lead to substantial equality in the recruitment of

civil servants. In the worst case, meritocracy might be undermined if the education system, on which public-service recruitment is based, reproduces and reinforces social inequality (McNamee & Miller, 2004; Tan, 2008). Given that only 23.6 percent of Singaporean high school students are admitted into universities in Singapore, the risk of increasing social stratification is considerable.

Secondly, the meaning of “merit” can be simply replaced by a diploma or academic transcript. For instance, the managerial level of government positions (Division I) is only available to candidates having a good honors degree from a reputable university. Since candidates’ academic achievements outweigh other characteristics that are important in public officials, including public spirit, the Singapore public service fails to recruit public officials who might possess better social skills and creativity.

Thirdly, the Singapore government’s gradual move toward market-driven governance (Haque, 2004) undermines other public values, such as equity, accountability, and participatory democracy. Public service in Singapore is characterized by an obsession with managerial efficiency, reinforced by a market-driven approach to management. Thus, increasing levels of public spirit among civil servants, while acknowledged as important, is less frequently placed at the top of the agenda.

Finally, since the Singapore political system insulates public administration from politics, public servants are unable to effectively set the agenda and direction of certain government policies. All agendas are formulated from the top, especially by the leading politicians of the People’s Action Party, and civil servants are expected to implement the given policy. This may decrease their sense of self-importance (Perry, 1996) and, subsequently, job satisfaction. This dichotomy between politics and administration may discourage many talented young people who want to make a substantial political impact.<sup>5</sup>

Summing up, the Singaporean government is overly dependent in its hiring practices on academic achievement (strictly speaking, grade point average), designed for managerial efficiency, which is translated primarily as an ability to follow rules and regulations strictly. Such a business mentality in personnel management could make public-sector jobs less different from private-sector jobs. However, focus on efficiency in

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5. Bureaucrats in some Asian countries actively participate in the legislative process. For instance, in Japan, more than 90 percent of bills approved by the legislature are drafted by bureaucrats. In addition, a civil service career is a useful stepping stone for political advancement. In Japan, all 47 elected governors and majors are former bureaucrats of the central government, and 25 percent of Diet members are former bureaucrats (Nakamura, 2005, pp. 28-29). Similar opportunities for bureaucrats to exert legislative influence and advance politically are found in Taiwan and South Korea.

the public service could diminish public-service spirit among public-sector employees.

Given this context, university students' choice between public- and private-sector jobs and their motivations are more complicated than they are in Korea, where the sectoral differences in work environments are more apparent. Therefore, research on Singaporean students' job motivation can help clarify whether the motivational differences are still apparent in a country where business-oriented public personnel management prevails.

### **MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN PUBLIC- AND PRIVATE-SECTOR JOBS**

One challenge for this study is that students do not have real work experience, and thus their job-related perceptions and motivations are difficult to specify and measure. Nonetheless, we can indirectly specify university students' job motivators by reviewing the literature on incumbent public and private employees' job motivators and their differences.

PSM theory has gained currency among public personnel management scholars who emphasize distinguishable motivations of public and private employees. PSM is defined as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations" (Perry & Wise, 1990, p. 368).

In contrast to this emphasis on PSM as unique to public-sector employees, a broader notion of PSM has been supported by several scholars (Brewer, Selden, & Facer, 2000; Christensen & Wright, 2011; Houston, 2008; Rainey, 1982; Steen, 2008; Wright & Christensen, 2010). For instance, a recent study (Christensen and Wright, 2011, p. 724) explicitly states that "although much of the initial work on PSM implied that its applications are both specific to and generic across public-sector organizations, more recent research suggests that PSM is not only applicable to the private sector . . . but also that its effects may depend less on the sector of employment than on the organization's publicness."

Some studies have shown a relationship between PSM and the job choices of university students. For instance, Clerkin et al. (2009) suggests that students who have higher levels of PSM are likely to engage in volunteering and charitable activities. Other studies argue that students with high PSM are more likely to pursue careers in the public sector (Leisink & Steijn, 2008; Wright & Grant, 2010). More recently, some scholars have included PSM as an explanatory variable to test Perry and Wise's proposition (Christensen & Wright, 2011; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001; Leisink & Steijn, 2008; Vandenberghe, Hondeghem, & Steen, 2004).

**Table 1. Job Motivators Used in Comparisons of Public and Private Employees' Work Motivation**

Study	Motivators
Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007	Working hours, total commitment, salary, supportive work environment, self-development, responsibility, and work-family conflict
Cacioppe & Mock, 1984	Interesting work, group cooperation, participation, individual development, atmosphere, stress, quality of work group, manager/leader/supervisor, communication, clear expectations, near capability, creativity, frequency of meetings, concern, environment, intergroup cooperation, involvement, meets efficiently, manager/leader/supervisor's technical ability, resources, plan to stay, integral part, efficiency, manager/leader/supervisor's awareness, function in society, and concern about welfare
Crewson, 1997	Intrinsic (service): feeling of accomplishment, worthwhile accomplishment, useful to society, and helping others Extrinsic (economic): job security, high pay, promotion, and performance awards
Houston, 2000	High income, short working hours and ample free time, no danger of being fired, chances for promotion, and work that is important and gives a feeling of accomplishment
Jurkiewicz et al., 1998	Stable and secure future, chance to benefit society, chance to learn new things, chance to engage in satisfying leisure activities, chance to exercise leadership, chance to use my special abilities, chance to make a contribution to important decisions, freedom from supervision, freedom from pressure to conform both on and off the job, friendly and congenial associates, high prestige and social status, high salary, opportunity for advancement, variety in work assignments, and working as part of a team
Lyons et al., 2006	Extrinsic work values: salary, job security, and benefits Intrinsic work values: intellectually stimulating work, challenging work, interesting work, continuous learning at work, creativity in work, and using one's abilities at work Altruistic work values: work that makes a contribution to one's society, work that is consistent with one's moral values, and fairness in the application of policies and programs Prestige work values: authority, prestigious work, influence, and opportunities for advancement Social work values: friendly coworkers and a fun work environment
Rainey, 1982	Recognition from your organization, higher pay than you now make, a promotion, job security, respect and friendliness from your coworkers, a sense of worthwhile accomplishment, development of your abilities through your work, a good feeling about yourself as a result of your work, engaging in meaningful public service, making a good deal of money, doing work that is helpful to other people, making important decisions and exerting an important influence on your organization, and achieving status and prestige
Taylor, 2005	Organization: geographical location and high profile Management: skilled management Working conditions: flexible working hours Economic rewards: opportunity for promotion, good job security, high salary, fair salary, high prestige and social status, and attractive fringe benefits Internal rewards: opportunity for self-improvement and opportunity to benefit the wider community
Wittmer, 1991	Higher pay, being helpful to others, community service, status and prestige, coworker respect, coworker friendship, job security, and promotion

Source: Ko and Han, forthcoming.



Yet PSM is not sufficient to explain the job motivation of university students who choose public-sector jobs. General motivators such as salary, reputation, power, affiliation, esteem, and advancement are closely related to universal needs of human beings (Gabris & Simo, 1995, p. 38; Rainey, 2003, pp. 232-233). As shown in table 1, rather than solely measuring the unique motivators of public employees, most empirical studies testing public/private differences of individual motivations employ a list of motivators including general or public-spirit motivators (Buelens & Van den Broeck,

**Table 2.** Relative Importance of Motivators in the Public and Private Sectors

Motivators	More valued in public sector	More valued in private sector	No difference
Social status and prestige	Maidani, 1991	Jurkeiwicz et al., 1998; Lyons et al., 2006; Rainey, 1982; Wittmer, 1991	Newstrom et al., 1976
Job security	Baldwin, 1991; Bellante & Link, 1981; Jurkiewicz et al., 1998; Lewis & Frank, 2002; Schuster, 1974	Houston, 2000; Khojasteh, 1993; Newstrom et al., 1976; Wittmer, 1991	Frank & Lewis, 2004; Gabris & Simo, 1995; Karl & Sutton, 1998; Lyons et al., 2006; Rainey, 1982; Rawls & Nelson, 1975
High salary	Maidani, 1991	Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007; Cacioppe & Mock, 1984; Frank & Lewis, 2004; Houston, 2000; Jurkiewicz et al., 1998; Karl & Sutton, 1998; Khojasteh, 1993; Kilpatrick et al., 1964; Lawler, 1971; Lewis & Frank, 2002; Moon, 2000; Newstrom et al., 1976; Rainey, 1982; Rawls et al., 1975; Solomon, 1986; Wittmer, 1991	Crewson, 1997; Gabris & Simo, 1995; Lyons et al., 2006; Maidani, 1991; Schuster, 1974
Opportunities to benefit society	Buchanan, 1975; Cacioppe & Mock, 1984; Crewson, 1997; Frank & Lewis, 2004; Houston, 2000; Karl & Sutton, 1998; Kilpatrick et al., 1964; Lewis & Frank, 2002; Lyons et al., 2006; Rainey, 1982; Wittmer, 1991	Jurkiewicz et al., 1998	Gabris & Simo, 1995
Chance of promotion	Khojasteh, 1993	Crewson, 1997; Frank & Lewis, 2004; Jurkiewicz et al., 1998	Gabris & Simo, 1995; Houston, 2000; Karl & Sutton, 1998; Wittmer, 1991
Friendly coworkers	Jurkiewicz et al., 1998		Khojasteh, 1993; Lyons et al., 2006; Wittmer, 1991

Source: Ko and Han, 2009.



2007; Cacioppe & Moke, 1984; Crewson, 1997). Common among these motivators are job security, high salary, promotion opportunities, opportunity to benefit society, job significance, friendly coworkers, and high social status and prestige. In particular, Jurkiewicz, Massey, and Brown's (1998) survey encompassed most major motivators and was designed to compare the differences between private- and public-sector employees' motivation. This study therefore employs 15 motivators.

Empirical studies also provide different findings regarding motivators that are more important to public employees than to private employees. Despite the stereotype that public employees prefer job security over financial rewards, empirical evidence is not consistent (table 2): some studies conclude that public-sector employees value job security more highly than employees in the private sector, while other studies do not. On the one hand, the preference of public employees for job security could be a result of work environment and self-selection biases. As government agencies downsize less frequently than private organizations and are equipped with civil-service-exclusive protection such as lifelong tenure or pension, public service provides a high level of job security. This work environment, in turn, attracts prospective employees who value job security. On the other hand, as Maslow (1943) argues, job security is a fundamental need of all human beings. There are few reasons to believe that private employees value job security less than public employees.

It should be remembered that, as most of these studies focused on incumbent employees, we cannot directly use them to infer university students' job motivations.

Of course, some motivators are less important to public employees than to private workers. The desire to be recognized by others, social status and prestige, and a high salary weigh more significantly in private employees' job motivation. While recognition and social status are common needs of most human beings, they are stronger among private employees. One hypothetical explanation is that private employees regard high salary as an indication of social status and recognition from their organization. Also, individuals selecting private jobs are highly motivated by high salary.

However, if public organizations provide higher salaries than private organizations, salary may not be a stronger motivator to private-sector job seekers than to public-sector ones. As such, the Singapore government, which pegs the salaries of its public officials to salaries in the private sector, is a good case study.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Variables and Survey Instrument

Given the multidimensional and interconnected nature of job motivations, I first defined a set of motivators and measured their relative importance. Each of the studies summarized in table 1 employed a different set of motivators. This survey used Jurkiewicz et al.'s (1998) 15 motivators. Of these, it used "opportunity to benefit society" as a major proxy of PSM, which was derived from a review of empirical sources. Finally, rather than designating the absolute importance of each motivator, the survey asked respondents to rank them. The rank approach is appropriate in that one often has to give up one motivator for another.

Differentiating between sectors is not always clear-cut. Some respondents might regard government-linked companies, which account for around 13 percent of GDP in Singapore, as part of the public sector, while others might deem them part of the private sector. While there are variations in this regard, students generally refer to typical public organizations such as the Ministry of Education or Ministry of Finance as being in the public sector. As government-linked companies in Singapore focus more on commercial activities, students generally regard them as part of the private sector.

This study also includes the nonprofit sector. However, as this sector is very small in Singapore, only 11 out of 253 respondents (4.3 percent) indicated it as their potential job choice. Due to the small sample size, their descriptive statistics are reported here but excluded from the logistic regression model.

Gender is used as one of the important control variables. PSM studies have reported conflicting findings regarding the role of gender. Some report that female students have a lower preference for public jobs (Frederickson, 1967) and score lower on public interest and self-sacrifice than male students (Perry, 1997). In contrast, a study by Lewis and Frank (2002) suggests that gender difference in the preference for a government job is not statistically significant. Some research also shows that women are more ethical (White, 1999) and attracted to policy making (DeHart-Davis et al., 2006) and meaningful work (Houston, 2000). Hence, this study included gender in the model to avoid omission bias and to aid a better understanding of its role in explaining PSM levels.

Year in the university is also controlled, given that university education can change students' attitudes, job motivations, and sectoral job choices. Some studies have suggested that higher education levels facilitate the development of PSM (Houston, 2000; Lewis & Frank, 2002; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007).

Yet, the number of years of education does not count the subject of education. As students have no work experience, they may learn about public organizations from their academic studies. In this line of thought, we can expect that students taking public-administration-related courses may prefer public-sector jobs. Hence, I controlled for public administration education.

## **Data Collection and Methods**

Samples were obtained from university students taking courses in the Department of Political Science at the National University of Singapore, although the pool of future public officials is not necessarily limited to this population. University students are a major target group in Singapore's civil service recruitment because of their talents. Singapore, a small city-state, currently has three publically funded tertiary educational institutions: the National University of Singapore, Singapore Management University, and Nanyang Technological University. Of the three, only the National University of Singapore offers both public administration and policy courses in the Department of Political Science.

Similarly, including students in other departments, such as business and engineering, who rarely take public administration and policy courses, would make it difficult to distinguish the effect of students' major and public administration education on their PSM. Limiting the sample to students majoring in political science provided an exogenous sample selection that is dependent on an independent variable, the major. In such a case, the estimates of the ordinary least squares are unbiased and consistent (Wooldridge, 2009, pp. 607-608). Of course, as political science students may have higher levels of PSM than students in other departments, the absolute rank of PSM might be overestimated. The chance of bias should be noted in interpreting results.

The survey employed a stratified sampling method. To control for the year of academic training and major, I selected five classes (Introduction to Political Science, Comparative Public Administration, Public Sector Organizational Behavior, Political Inquiry, and International Politics of Northeast Asia) from first-year to fourth-year classes. Introduction to Political Science is a first-year introductory class open to all students in the National University of Singapore.

After installing a survey instrument on each class's coursework website, I asked each lecturer to introduce the survey to students. Of 608 students who enrolled in these five classes, 48 percent responded to the survey. Some either failed to complete the survey or gave invalid answers that assigned the same rank to more than one motivator. We might suspect that the group with incomplete or invalid answers might be less altruistic and committed to social values. However, there was no systematic pattern

**Table 3.** Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender		Year of admission					PA training		Total
		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	No	Yes	
Female	N	1	12	28	19	62	76	46	122
	%	25.00	54.55	53.85	51.35	44.93	44.71	55.42	48.22
Male	N	3	10	24	18	76	94	37	131
	%	75.00	45.45	46.15	48.65	55.07	55.29	44.58	51.78
Total	N	4	22	52	37	138	170	83	253

Note: PA training refers to students who had already taken or were taking public-administration-related modules at the time of the survey.

distinguishing this group from those who gave complete and valid answers.<sup>6</sup> Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the final sample of 253 students after excluding incomplete responses.

As shown in table 3, around 51.78 percent of respondents were male. Given that 50.6 percent of students registered in the Department of Political Science at the National University of Singapore are male, we can conclude that there is no gender bias in sampling. Of students who responded, 32.8 percent were enrolled in a public administration course, which does not deviate from the target population. However, the sample is biased toward first-year students (54.5 percent of total respondents). As Introduction to Political Science is a mandatory class for political science majors, a large number of freshmen are enrolled in it. Since the freshmen have less university education and less clear ideas about their future jobs, I used this group as a reference in linear models and controlled for years of academic training.

Another problem threatening the validity of an online survey is the sincerity of respondents; some might give arbitrary answers to save time. To check the influence of sincerity on the response pattern, I measured the response time of the survey and tested the relationship between the response time and the job choice. While the median response time of public-sector job seekers was slightly longer than that of private-sector job seekers (2.4 minutes vs. 2.25 minutes), the difference is not statistically significant. Gender, years of academic training, and public administration training are also statistically not associated with the response time. Therefore, we can conclude that the sincerity level of respondents has not resulted in a systematic bias.

6. A comparison of the two groups' responses to "job security" and "benefit to society" found no statistically significant differences. The mean and its standard error for the responses to these two options by the incomplete- and complete-answer groups were 10.9 (0.9) vs. 11.2 (0.3) and 9.9 (0.7) vs. 8.2 (0.3), respectively.

## RESULTS

The overall differences in the motivation structure were tested using the average rankings between public- and private-sector job seekers. As shown in table 4, the correlation coefficient of average rankings of the two groups is 0.83 ( $p < 0.01$ ), which is significantly high. Also, both public- and private-sector job seekers chose the same on four out of the five most important motivators (stable and secure future, chance to learn new things, high salary, and opportunity for advancement). Regardless of sectors, respondents considered a stable and secure future as one of the most important motivators in their selection of a job. The result is surprising given that the unemployment rate in Singapore for the last five years has been less than 4 percent, indicating

**Table 4.** Rank Order of Job Motivations by Sector

Variable	Private sector (N=135)		Public sector (N=85)		Nonprofit sector (N=11)	
	Mean	Std error	Mean	Std error	Mean	Std error
Stable and secure future**	10.67 (2)	0.40	12.15 (1)	0.40	9.82 (4)	1.35
Chance to learn new things	9.21 (4)	0.34	9.14 (5)	0.38	10.00 (3)	0.80
Chance to benefit society**	6.64 (13)	0.39	9.61 (3)	0.44	12.91 (1)	1.02
Chance to exercise leadership	7.34 (8)	0.31	6.81 (10)	0.44	5.91 (14)	0.95
Working as part of a team	5.69 (15)	0.28	5.51 (15)	0.39	6.27 (11)	1.10
Variety in work assignments	7.30 (9)	0.32	6.60 (13)	0.42	7.36 (8)	0.97
High prestige and social status**	7.97 (7)	0.38	6.69 (11)	0.47	3.36 (15)	0.87
Friendly and congenial associates	8.13 (6)	0.33	8.56 (7)	0.42	8.82 (7)	0.78
High salary**	11.59 (1)	0.32	10.48 (2)	0.39	6.73 (10)	1.39
Chance to use my special abilities	7.20 (10)	0.37	7.14 (8)	0.47	9.18 (6)	1.40
Chance to make a contribution to important decisions	8.23 (5)	0.31	8.71 (6)	0.42	10.73 (2)	0.95
Freedom from supervision	5.94 (14)	0.35	5.58 (14)	0.42	6.00 (12)	1.26
Chance to engage in satisfying leisure activities	6.72 (12)	0.36	6.84 (9)	0.44	6.00 (12)	1.42
Freedom from pressure to conform both on and off the job	6.96 (11)	0.35	6.69 (11)	0.44	9.64 (5)	1.37
Opportunity for advancement*	10.41 (3)	0.31	9.48 (4)	0.42	7.27 (9)	1.22

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate rank of motivator. Pearson correlation between public and private sector = 0.83 ( $p < 0.05$ ), private and nonprofit = 0.08 ( $p = 0.77$ ), and public and nonprofit = 0.52 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Bold numbers represent the top five motivators for each sector.

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$  (F-test of the private and public differences)

a generally low risk of unemployment.

Most students gave a low rank to “exercise leadership”—an average of 7.34 and 6.81 for private- and public-sector job seekers, respectively—whereas it is ranked as the second most important factor to private-sector employees in research by Jurkiewicz et al. (1998, p. 235) in a US context. A recent study of Chinese university students’ job motivation also shows that both the private- and public-sector job seekers rank leadership as the fifth most important motivator (Ko & Han, forthcoming).

Job seekers do not expect the “chance to make a contribution to important decisions” from a public-sector job (ranked sixth among public-sector job seekers). In contrast, this motivator was ranked highest by public-sector employees participating in the research of Jurkiewicz et. al. (1998, p. 235). The difference is strongly related to the characteristics of the Singapore government, which regards public officials as technocrats implementing decisions made by politicians. The low rank given to exercising leadership and participating in important decisions suggests that Singapore students have the same image as other Singaporeans of public officials as technocrats.

The survey results also indicate that “high salary” is still an effective tool for attracting students regardless of sector. Except for nonprofit-sector job seekers, both private- and public-sector job seekers rank it as the most or second-most important factor. The result is different from previous studies in the United States, which found high salary to be a greater motivator for private-sector employees. The finding also reflects the unique context of the Singapore public service, in which salaries for public officials are more attractive than private-sector salaries.

Despite the similar job motivation structure between public- and private-sector job seekers, PSM plays a significant role in distinguishing them. Compared to private-sector job seekers (6.64), public-sector job seekers regarded the “chance to benefit society” as a more important motivator (9.61). Notably, nonprofit-sector job seekers ranked this as the most important factor.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, an ANOVA test reveals that the two groups show a statistically significant difference in ranking job security, chance to benefit society, prestige and social status, and high salary at the 5 percent significance level. This result is the same even if we apply the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test.

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7. As the sample size of nonprofit-sector job seekers was small (4.76 percent of all respondents), we might reserve a conclusion that nonprofit job seekers have higher PSM than other job seekers. However, given the growing interest in gender equality, environmental issues, and community service among Singapore students, this result reflects a substantial reality in Singapore. In addition, the higher PSM among nonprofit-sector employees is also reported in other PSM studies (e.g., Lyons et al., 2006).

### Logistic Regression

The simple descriptive analyses results described above are not sufficient to determine which motivators are more significant in explaining students' sectoral job choices, because other variables affecting job choice are not fully controlled. To address this issue, I ran a logistic regression of public-sector job choice after controlling for other variables such as public administration course, gender, and years in the university. Table 5 shows the logistic regression results including 14 motivators and other control variables.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 5.** Binary Logistic Regression of Sector Choice (Public Sector = 1)

Parameter	Estimate	Std err	Wald chi-square	Pr>chi square	Odds ratio
Intercept	5.87	5.61	1.09	0.30	353.10
Stable and secure future	0.04	0.06	0.45	0.50	1.04
Chance to learn new things	-0.11	0.07	2.28	0.13	0.90
Chance to benefit society**	0.13	0.05	5.96	0.01	1.14
Chance to exercise leadership	-0.06	0.07	0.72	0.40	0.95
Working as part of a team*	-0.12	0.07	2.72	0.10	0.89
Variety in work assignments**	-0.14	0.07	4.74	0.03	0.87
High prestige and social status*	-0.11	0.07	3.06	0.08	0.89
Friendly and congenial associates	-0.02	0.06	0.15	0.70	0.98
High salary*	-0.11	0.07	2.95	0.09	0.89
Chance to use my special abilities	-0.07	0.06	1.32	0.25	0.93
Chance to make a contribution to important decisions	-0.01	0.06	0.03	0.87	0.99
Chance to engage in satisfying leisure activities	-0.07	0.07	0.91	0.34	0.94
Freedom from pressure to conform both on and off the job	-0.09	0.08	1.21	0.27	0.92
Opportunity for advancement	-0.06	0.06	1.05	0.31	0.94

8. Since rankings are used to measure the relative importance of 15 motivators, one motivator is likely to be explained by the linear combination of the 14 other motivators. Because of the violation of full rank assumption, the least important motivator in both sectors, “freedom from supervision,” was excluded from the model to avoid linear dependency.



Parameter	Estimate	Std err	Wald chi-square	Pr>chi square	Odds ratio
Year 2004	-13.01	716.60	0.00	0.99	0.00
Year 2005	-0.58	0.83	0.49	0.48	0.56
Year 2006	-0.73	0.59	1.50	0.22	0.48
Year 2007	-1.29	0.59	4.81	0.03	0.28
Public administration (yes = 1)	-0.52	0.56	0.86	0.35	0.60
Female**	0.83	0.35	5.52	0.02	2.30

Note: N = 219, R-square = 0.31, Wald chi-square for model fit test = 38.72 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$

Students with high PSM are more likely to choose public-sector jobs. As the estimated coefficient shows, a one-point increase of the ranking of “chance to benefit society” will increase the relative probability of choosing a public-sector job over a private-sector job (odds in statistical term) by around 14 percent. In contrast, students valuing “working as part of a team,” “variety in work assignment,” “high prestige and social status,” and “high salary” prefer private-sector jobs, which is consistent with the empirical results shown in table 2.

Other control variables are not statistically significant except for gender. Other things being equal, female students are 130 percent more likely to choose public-sector jobs than male students. The number of years spent studying in the university does not explain job choice, and there is no statistically significant evidence that students taking public administration courses prefer public-sector jobs.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The central question of this study is whether university students seeking public-sector jobs have higher PSM than private-sector job seekers. Based on the analyses of Singapore university students' motivation and their sectoral job choice, the answer is yes. The finding is noticeable in that Singapore society has expressed concern about weakened PSM due to efficiency-driven public management. Despite this concern, Singapore university students with high levels of PSM view public-sector jobs as more attractive than private-sector jobs. The Singapore government should bring these students into public service rather than basing its recruitment entirely on candidates' academic achievements.

Another significant finding is that PSM is only one of several motivators. Public-

sector job seekers still value extrinsic motivators such as high salary and advancement. One might claim that the government may not need to be concerned about recruiting university students with high service spirit, since they are likely to voluntarily and naturally choose a public-sector job. However, this interpretation can be mistaken, because potential public-sector job seekers may prefer private-sector jobs if their other extrinsic motivators are not satisfied in the public sector.

This analysis found the job motivation structure to be quite similar regarding the ranking of motivators between students seeking public- and private-sector jobs. As such, if the private sector provides better salaries, higher job security, and more opportunities for advancement than the public sector does, even students with higher PSM may be willing to choose a career in the private sector. This suggests that PSM is not a sufficient condition in determining whether university students select a public-sector job. Therefore, public personnel managers designing the recruitment system should not ignore the extrinsic motivators that influence university students.

The other notable variable is gender. Although this analysis uses gender as a control variable and does not discuss its importance in depth, the results show that female students are 130 percent more likely to choose public-sector jobs if other things are equal. Moreover, they emphasize "chance to benefit society" more frequently than male students. To some extent, this public job orientation of female students may reflect the active role of female civil servants in Singapore. As of 2008, around 62.3 percent of managerial and executive (Division I) civil servants are female. More research is necessary to explain the cause of high PSM levels and preferences for public-sector jobs among female students.

This study also found that the job motivation structure of students reflects the unique characteristics of Singapore's public administration. The apolitical nature of Singapore's public service leads students to think that meaningful and important decisions are not made in the civil service. Interviews with students after finishing the survey also showed that many students regard civil servants as docile implementers rather than active decision makers. Thus, public-sector job seekers in Singapore are less motivated by the opportunity to exercise leadership. Rather, they perceive the civil service as a place providing a secure future and a high salary. Once these factors are considered in their entirety, the image of Singapore public officials as technocrats emerges.

This empirical finding reveals an important challenge facing the Singapore government. On one hand, many students still want to pursue a career in the public sector (36.8 percent), and they understand, to some extent, the importance of PSM. Their overall motivation structure, however, reflects a more passive and technical nature. As public-sector job seekers are not much motivated by chances to exercise leadership

and to make important decisions, they tend to attach values to rules and regulations and then find that they are unable to overcome the rigidity of the civil service. The motivation structure is closer to that of implementers, not entrepreneurs and interpreters of public values. This suggests that the Singapore government can easily recruit students who can “get things done” but may find it hard to find those who can and desire to “get the right things done.”

Limitations of this study should be noted. First, as the sample was limited to Singapore students, the findings may not be applicable to other countries. Second, it focuses on intentions to work for the public or private sector, and students' actual choices might be different. Third, while this study used years in school as a stratum of sampling and controlled this in the logistic regression, more inclusion of junior and senior students is necessary.

As this study shows, students' job motivation is closely related to the country's administrative context. Further comparative PSM research is needed to determine how levels of PSM differ from one country to another and how the administrative context is linked with university students' job motivation.

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