

WHEN GOVERNMENT IS NO LONGER EMPLOYER OF CHOICE: WHAT MAY THE SECTOR PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC MANAGERS BE LIKE AFTER THE ECONOMY RECOVERS?

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In today's economic climate, government is now considered by many to be the "employer of choice." However, employers at all levels of government may eventually lose their recent gains in the war for talent, as the economy improves. Accordingly, it is important to explain how public sector managers viewed the relative advantages and disadvantages of government employment before the economic downturn along specific parameters, including opportunities for women and minorities, managerial autonomy, and employee talent and innovativeness. This paper assesses these views for state-level public managers across a broad range of public services, using survey data that preceded the economic downturn. Specifically, it examines how their past public and private sector career experiences, controlling for their contemporaneous government work experiences, affect their views of the public and private sectors. The study emphasizes career experiences not because past work experience are the only or the most important predictors of sector perceptions generally, but because career trajectory may be the most important consideration for developing strategy for response to government workforce dynamics once the economy improves. Thus, the findings are explained in terms of the related processes of workplace socialization and attitude formation and change, which see public and perhaps also private sector occupational norms and expectations and experiences, past and present, amalgamating to render personal values conducive to favoring one sector over the other. The importance of sector perceptions for human resources management and for broader government workforce concerns as the economy recovers are discussed, as well theory development regarding the career trajectories of public managers.

Keywords: public service careers, public-private sector differences, attitude formation

In today's negative economic climate, government is now generally considered to be the "employer of choice." However, employers at all levels of government may eventually lose their recent gains in the war for talent, as the economy improves. Accordingly, it is important to explain how public sector managers viewed the relative advantages and disadvantages of government employment before the economic downturn along specific parameters, including opportunities for women and minorities, managerial autonomy, and employee talent and innovativeness. Such explanation is important for anticipating future sector perceptions as the economy improves.

However, it is not enough to provide a description of public managers' sector perceptions before the economic downturn. Past research already does this, demonstrating generally that stereotypes pervade public managers' perceptions of the public and private sectors (Weiss, 1983; Stevens et al., 1988). The anticipation of what may be the views of the private and public sectors by public managers after the economy improves additionally must be sensitive to the different career experiences of public managers, since the troubled economy has seen an influx of workers with private sector career experiences into government positions. Thus the current study is focused on providing such an understanding of public managers' sector perceptions, using survey data that not only precedes the economic downturn, but also enables a theoretic model that presumes sector perceptions to be based in part on past career experiences.

The use of older survey data that precedes the economic downturn is important to develop a "baseline" understanding of what may be the sector views of public managers after the economy recovers because economic difficulties



such as increases in unemployment and decreases in the public-private sector pay differences have been historically shown to increase interest in working for government (Krueger, 1988). The time period when the data for this study was collected – 2006 – is characterized with relative economic stability and prosperity, and captures the tail end of a period of relative economic calm before the housing and credit crises unfolded, starting in 2007.

The use of data that additionally enables a theoretic model of sector perceptions that emphasizes past career experiences in addition to contemporaneous public sector work context and values is equally important for developing a baseline understanding of what may be public managers' sector perceptions once the economy improves. The economic downturn has seen an increased number of private to public "sector switchers" (Light, 1999), and, due to the changed makeup of the government workforce in terms of pre-public service career experiences, views of the public and private sectors may not simply "return" to what they were before the downturn, but rather may be different based on the relatively diverse career experiences of the post-downturn public service. Thus the data in this study also track the different career experiences, past and present, public and private, of public managers, which have been shown to be imperative for understanding worker attitudes (Songer-Nocks, 1976; Petty & Krosnick, 1995).

The overarching expectation of this study is that public managers with private sector work experience will have different views of employment in the public and private sectors than their career-bureaucrat counterparts (i.e., public managers without private sector work experiences). The rationale underlying this expectation is that the norms and expectations of the private sector are in many ways different than those of the public sector (Bozeman & Rainey, 2000; Perry & Rainey, 1988). Private sector work experience, moreover, may have residual effects on workers that are not nullified upon their departure for the public sector, perhaps not even after having spent some years outside of the private sector. In contrast, if differences in sector perceptions indeed are the products of professional socialization in different contexts, then characteristics of the contemporaneous public sector workplace too should affect the sector perceptions of public managers, regardless of the presence or absence of private sector job experience and regardless of inherent structural or environmental differences between sectors.¹ Accordingly, the proposed theoretical framework and analysis account for contemporaneous attitudes and factors in addition to past work experiences.

Though past study, including a recent descriptive study by Feeney (2009),² is focused on describing general differences in sector perceptions (e.g., favorable vs. unfavorable) across public managers, due to the need to develop strategy for responding to government workforce dynamics once the economy improves, the present study attempts to be more specific and predictive. The focus is on discrete sector perceptions, e.g., opportunity for minorities, worker talent and innovativeness, and managerial autonomy. Responses to workforce dynamics in an improving economy may not see different career experiences affecting all sector perceptions uniformly across all public managers. The current study is also more predictive in that it isolates career trajectory as the primary antecedent to sector perceptions, though also controlling for the contemporaneous work attitudes and experiences emphasized in prior study. This does not mean that past work experiences are the only or even the most important predictors of sector perceptions, but that career trajectory may be among the most important considerations for developing strategy for response to government workforce dynamics once the economy improves. This research also controls for other types of antecedents to worker attitudes emphasized by formal theories of worker attitudes and perceptions (Boardman et al., 2010).

The emphasis on past work experiences implies that individuals will perceive the sector with which they have the "most" (e.g., most recent, most overall) experience more positively than the sector from which they are further removed or lacking in experience altogether. This line of reasoning is derived from more general studies of attitudes and socialization from applied and occupational psychology. But this does not account for the nature of the discrete experiences that individuals have had in each sector that may explain, for example, the specific motivation (e.g., promotion, public service motivation, dissatisfaction with the private sector) for switching from the private sector to the public sector. Because the motivation to work in the public sector may be important for explaining sector perceptions, elements of public service motivation are accounted for in this analysis. However, career trajectory here is emphasized in an explanation of variable sector perceptions across public servants insofar that transitioning to a job that expects different roles and behaviors than those expected by previous jobs has been demonstrated to result in "person-role mismatch" whereby individuals have negative attitudes towards their current job, independent of the motivation to switch jobs (Louis, 1980; West & Rushton, 1989). Indeed, the incidence of "mismatches" may be high

once the economy improves, given that the workers in the recent influx into the government workforce are perhaps different than those emphasized by Paul Light (1999); i.e., their selection into public service owed less to public motives and more to economic circumstances. Once government is no longer the employer of choice, it will be important to be able to anticipate in what instances such mismatches may occur.

DATA AND VARIABLES

Data for this study are from the most recent edition of the National Administrative Studies Project (NASP III). The data were derived from 787 responses to mailed questionnaires sent to a random sample of 1,849 state-level public managers, upper level professionals, and upper level technicians (e.g., professional engineers) in two US states: Georgia and Illinois. The survey was conducted in summer 2006. The response rate was 43%, with 431 responses from Georgia and 356 from Illinois.

In addition to demographic, attitudinal, and motivational questions, the survey asked respondents to provide information about their recent career history (last four jobs, including the current one). Gathering data on individuals' full employment history would have been ideal, but doing this in a survey format would have increased the respondent burden to an extent that would greatly reduce the response rate. Even with the limitation of data for the last four jobs only, for 39% of the respondents (303 respondents), the span of current job plus three prior jobs was broad enough to cover the entirety of their career histories. Questions about past jobs included start and end dates, number of employees supervised, type of job (managerial, professional, or technical), and type of organization (public sector, private sector, non-profit sector). The survey items used to collect career trajectory data are detailed in the appendix.

Of the 787 respondents, 28% (216) reported that one or more of their prior three jobs was in the private sector (see Table 1). Twelve percent (92) reported that the job they held immediately prior to their current public sector job was in the private sector. These descriptive numbers alone imply that individuals with private sector work experience are fairly common in the public sector workforce. After excluding from the data set 28 respondents whose current job was their first full time job (and therefore by definition they could not have had any prior work experience), the data set consists of 759 respondents.^{3,4}

The analyses below consider two measures of private sector work experience: whether any job in respondents' last four jobs was in the private sector and whether the job held immediately before the current public sector job was in the private sector. Additionally, the study explored whether sector perceptions associated with having had private sector work experience tended to intensify or dissolve with the number of private sector jobs held. It is proposed that respondents' sector perceptions are a function of numerous factors in addition to career history. These include length of tenure in current public sector job; whether the current job is managerial (versus technical or professional); and attitudinal and perceptual measures demonstrated in previous empirical study to be different across the sectors, including elements of public service motivation. Theoretically, the latter is perhaps the most important control measure for this study. Eighty-four percent of the sample indicated that "ability to serve the public and the public interest" was a motivation for accepting the current public sector position (see Table 1).

Respondents' perceptions of the government and business sectors fluctuated significantly, depending on the dimension for which they were asked to draw a comparison (worker innovativeness, worker talent, managerial autonomy, opportunity for women, and opportunity for minorities). Respondents were asked to indicate whether they perceived the government or business sector to be superior for each dimension (or if they felt that there is no difference). Therefore, for each dimension the respondent selected one of three mutually exclusive options; i.e., business sector is superior, government sector is superior, there are no perceived differences. (See appendix for a description of the survey items used to measure sector perceptions.)

The two dimensions on which respondents overwhelmingly agreed were that business sector work environments prove more conducive to the innovativeness of employees and to the work autonomy of managers, with 65% and 61% of all respondents, respectively, agreeing that these characteristics are more likely to be present in the business sector (see Table 2). This is perhaps indicative of fundamental normative differences between the public and private sectors. On one hand, centralized control and fragmented governance structures often are credited with deterring or at least inhibiting innovative and autonomous behaviors in public sector organizations (Rainey, 1997, p. 291). On



the other hand, private firms value these behaviors, sometimes to the point that they alter their internal structures and management systems (Peters & Watermans, 1982; Thompson, 1967). The distinction is strongly implied when researchers label public policy innovators as “policy entrepreneurs” and “entrepreneurial leaders” (Doig & Hargrove 1987; Lewis 1980). Further, previous study has noted sector-based differences along these lines (Roessner, 1983).⁵

Table 1*Description of Variables (n=759)**

Variable	Mean**	Std. Dev.	Range
Last job was in the private sector	12.1%	0.33	0 – 1
Any 1 or more of the last 3 jobs were in the private sector	28.5%	0.45	0 – 1
Primary responsibility on current job is managerial	65.2%	0.48	0 – 1
Perceived level of red tape on current job	7.08		0 – 10
Number of years on current job	7.1	6.01	1 – 39
Male	56.6%	0.50	0 – 1
Minority	18.9%	0.39	0 – 1
Age	49.1	8.41	25 – 72
Ability to serve the public and the public interest important consideration in accepting current job	84%	0.37	0 – 1
Agency type of current job: health and human services	40.1%	0.49	0 – 1
Agency type of current job: criminal justice	17.1%	0.38	0 – 1
Agency type of current job: natural resources and transportation	20.3%	0.40	0 – 1
Agency type of current job: economic development and regulation	13.7%	0.34	0 – 1
State of Georgia resident	54.5%	0.50	0 – 1
First job captured in the survey	36%	0.49	0 – 1
All in all, I am satisfied with my job	3.21	0.79	1 – 4
The most important things that happen to me involve my work	2.1	0.85	1 – 4
I do not have enough authority to determine how to get my job done	2.1	0.97	1 – 4
Innovation is one of the most important values in this organization	2.4	0.87	1 – 4

*Range 0-1 means a binary variable, coded 1 if the condition is present, 0 otherwise.

**The means for the binary variables are transformed into percentages indicating the proportion of cases meeting the condition.

Table 2*Description of Sector Perceptions for All Respondents (n=759)*

<i>In this section we ask your perception of work in the public and business sectors. Please answer these questions even if you have stayed in the same sector for your entire career.</i>	Public sector	Business Sector	No Difference
Managers have more work autonomy	23.26 %	61.36 %	15.37 %
Persons doing similar jobs are more talented	55.02 %	35.88 %	9.1 %
Women have more opportunities	34.89 %	14.57 %	50.53 %
Minorities have more opportunities	28.74 %	7.89 %	63.37 %
Employees are more innovative	28.93 %	64.93 %	6.13 %

Two dimensions of comparison where a majority of respondents indicated that they felt there was no difference between the public and private sectors were those regarding opportunities for women and for minorities. At first, this

seems at odds with research on women and minorities working in the public sector versus the private sector. Lewis (1998), for example, demonstrates the gap between the salaries paid to white males and the salaries paid to women and minorities of comparable education and work experience to be smaller in the public sector than in the private sector. However, the sample employed for this study is comprised of higher level public managers (here a collective term for managers and upper level professionals and technical personnel), not of public servants more generally. Because managerial positions in the public sector have been demonstrated to be held predominantly by white males (Steinberg et al., 1990), these non-findings are unsurprising.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

This study is part of a growing body of work concerned with careers characterized by employment with numerous organizations (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001), oftentimes across the sectors (Light, 1999). This study is also part of the longer-standing scholarship on public workers' attitudes and perceptions, including but not limited to sector perceptions. Studies at this topical crossroads can benefit from explicit theory development regarding the variable effects of past experiences, including but not limited to career experiences, on contemporaneous attitudes and perceptions. Accordingly, the overarching premise of this paper is that past career experiences in addition to current workplace ones help to shape public managers' workaday perceptions and attitudes.

Our hypotheses regarding the effects of private sector work experience and perceptions of current work environment on public managers' sector perceptions are informed by empirically-supported theoretical propositions from applied and occupational psychology. Specifically, insights from theories of attitude formation and change and from theories of workplace socialization are drawn to inform the theoretical framework. While these areas of work are generally underutilized in public administration scholarship, they prove quite helpful in forming propositions about the expected effects of variable career experiences. In contrast, most explanation in prior work in public administration is focused on contemporaneous attitudes and structural features. One exception is found in Buchanan's (1974) ideas about workplace socialization, though the present research extends the logic of his ideas to consider the impact of variation in public managers' career trajectories (e.g., private sector experience, type of position held).⁶

First, there is direct evidence that prior job experiences can affect perceptions and attitudes towards current employment. For example, transitioning to a job that expects roles and behaviors that are inconsistent with prior work experiences has been demonstrated to create negative attitudes towards one's job (Louis, 1980). West and Rushton (1989) explain this as "person-role mismatch," whereby workers experience on the job few if any tasks or encounters that are similar to those they experienced in prior jobs – the result being negative attitudes towards one's current job regardless of the motivation to take that job. Other studies of workplace socialization emphasize the duration of prior work experiences, suggesting that work attitudes are in part a function of the length of tenure in past jobs (Reichers, Wanous, & Steele, 1994). Except in cases where professional norms and standards prevail (e.g., when a lawyer or medical doctor changes jobs), person-role mismatch seems more likely for sector switchers than for workers transitioning between same-sector jobs.

Second, more general explanations of attitude development and change emphasize both past and current experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and other explanatory factors. The simplified explanation of attitude formation in the applied psychology field describes an individual's evaluation of an object (e.g., one's current job, a past job) along multiple attribute dimensions (e.g., innovative-not innovative, satisfying-not satisfying) which, in turn, gives rise to beliefs about that object. An individual's consideration of these beliefs sees the development of an attitude towards the object (e.g., the business sector has more innovative workers than the public sector). The important point here is that some scholars consider the process of contemporaneous belief evaluation to explain the totality of attitude formation (Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1995).

However, alternate studies, also in applied psychology, have demonstrated that immediate context and beliefs constitute but one component of a larger set of predictors explaining attitudes (Haugtvedt 1997; Miniard & Barone, 1997; Priester & Fleming, 1997). Non-cognitive and non-contemporaneous processes also have been demonstrated to matter in attitude formation and differentiation (Azjen, 2000; Azjen & Fishbein, 2000). Past experiences, including past job experiences, can play a significant role in the formation of attitudes (Songer-Nocks, 1976; Petty & Krosnick, 1995). If so, past work experiences will be particularly influential in the process of forming attitudes regarding the business



and government sectors insofar that such experiences constitute varying experiential “reference points” from which to begin to form sector perceptions. These points about workplace socialization and attitude formation and change, along with prior empirical findings on sector perceptions, are used to formulate the hypotheses below.

Hypotheses for Private Sector Work Experience

The primary question of interest here is the impact of private sector work experience on public managers’ comparative perceptions of the public and private sectors. The NASP III survey asks respondents, even if they have spent their entire careers in the public sector, to indicate whether they view the public or private sector as more conducive to managerial autonomy, having a talented and innovative workforce, and to better career opportunities for women and minorities. The general expectation of this paper is that public managers who have had private sector work experience will hold more positive views of the private sector (in comparison with the public sector) relative to their peers with no such experience.⁷ This expectation is tested with the following operationalizations of private sector work experience:

“Immediacy hypothesis” (H1): Having one’s last job (i.e., the job immediately prior to the current public sector job) in the private sector, all else equal, is associated with perceiving the private sector as superior to the public sector on the dimensions of comparison.

“Extent of exposure hypothesis” (H2): The higher the number of jobs in the private sector, all else equal, the more likely will the private sector be perceived as superior to the public sector on the dimensions of comparison.

In regard to the immediacy hypothesis, it is possible that public managers with private sector work experience are not automatically “dissocialized” from the private sector upon taking a public sector position, but rather that these employees have “residual socialization” of private sector norms and expectations. Therefore, consistent with theories of attitude formation and workplace socialization, the expectation here is that individuals who transition to employment in the public sector after employment in the private sector do not transform overnight their attitudes and perceptions about the nature of work in general and their personal work experiences in both sectors. Instead, their conditioning in private sector norms and expectations will affect, at least initially, their perceptions of work in the two sectors.

The hypothesized differences in perceptions of the two sectors, if empirically verified, may indicate that individuals who have switched sectors may still be under the influence of attitudes formed during their private sector careers, while the relative recentness of their public sector experience has not yet affected their attitudes. Given that an attitude is a “spontaneous evaluation of an object” based on previous as well as current experiences (Azjen, 2000; Azjen & Fishbein, 2000), for respondents whose last job was in the private sector this evaluation may be more favorable regarding the private sector insofar as the new experiences in the public sector may not be completely consistent with the existing attitudes. This inconsistency, arguably, will result in a more favorable evaluation of the private sector. This will occur not necessarily because the private sector is inherently superior, but because new experiences are evaluated against prior experiences and resulting beliefs. That changes in workaday perceptions and attitudes take time to transpire is a fundamental assumption of studies of workplace socialization.

It is easy to conceive of the reverse occurring – past work experience in the private sector resulting in more favorable opinions of the public sector – due to a strong motivation to change jobs. For example, those who have made the private to public sector transition perhaps were highly motivated to do so, perhaps because of dissatisfaction or disillusionment with their private sector jobs. A move from private to public sector work could be for reasons such as promotion (Bozeman & Ponomariov 2008) or perhaps for reasons that are more related to intrinsic motivations. Indeed, 84% of the sample indicated that “ability to serve the public and the public interest” was a motivation for accepting one’s current public sector position. In either of these cases, it is reasonable to expect a more positive assessment of the public sector vis-à-vis the private sector. Accordingly, the empirical models control for elements of public service motivation. However, the “workplace socialization” explanation is emphasized here over the “motivation to switch to the public sector” explanation insofar that transitioning to a job that expects different roles and behaviors than those expected by previous jobs has been demonstrated to result in “person-role mismatch” whereby individuals experi-

ence negative emotional effects related to their current job, independent of the motivation to switch jobs (Louis, 1980; West & Rushton, 1989). Further, the theoretical propositions of attitude formation and change and workplace socialization do not require assumptions about the motivation to change jobs (e.g., dissatisfaction with one's current job).

The "last job" (H1) and "number of jobs" (H2) predictors, as respective indicators of immediacy and degree of private sector work experiences, have limitations. While one's last job may have been in the private sector, this job could have ended many years ago. Second, an individual can have numerous jobs over a relatively short time span, which could signify a lack of satisfaction with private sector jobs (i.e., they may move around a lot due to job dissatisfaction). One way to account for these limits is with a control variable measuring in years the length of tenure respondents have in their current public sector jobs. More directly, an additional indicator is introduced to determine if the respondent's private sector work experience was two or more jobs ago. Unlike in the "immediacy" hypothesis, for the latter indicator the expectation is of no impact on sector perceptions. Consistent with the proposed theory, having had one or more jobs in the public sector following any private sector job experience implies that the individual may have experienced socialization into public sector norms and expectations and thus will not necessarily any longer experience inconsistencies between current expectations and past experiences.

Specifically, since the approach followed so far implies that work attitudes and attendant sector perceptions are at least in part a product of ongoing professional experiences and socialization, it should also follow that the effect of private sector job experience on such attitudes and perceptions is not static, but that it may diminish over time as public sector experiences accrue. This expectation is consistent with early findings regarding the socialization of managers, with relatively new managers (in their first few years on the job) experiencing anxiety regarding their fit within and commitment to their work organizations when compared to their longer-tenured counterparts (Buchanan, 1974). Therefore, as individuals are socialized into the norms and expectations of the public sector, they increase the normative "distance" between their private sector job experiences and their current public sector careers. Such individuals may begin to exhibit beliefs and perceptions about the public and private sectors that are more congruent with public servants with no private sector job experience (i.e., perceiving the public sector more positively than the private sector) than with the perceptions of "sector switchers" with more recent or immediate experiences in private sector jobs.

Controlling for Perceived Characteristics of Current Public Sector Work Environment

Consistent with the theoretical arguments laid out above regarding attitude formation and workplace socialization, public managers' perceptions of their current jobs and work environments are likely to affect their sector perceptions. The red tape measure used here originates from prior study to differentiate public from private sector managers.

"Red tape hypothesis" (H3): The higher the perceived level of red tape in one's current public sector job, the more likely will the private sector be perceived as superior to the public sector on the four dimensions of comparison.

The perception of organizational rules and procedures as burdensome and/or dated is one of the classic distinctions with which public and private sector managers have been compared (Bozeman, 2000; Buchanan, 1974). Such perceptions may result in a general "grass is greener" propensity to devalue one's current public sector workplace in favor of the private sector. The underlying rationale is general, not pertaining just to red tape. The more negatively one perceives his current workplace, the more likely it is that an alternative could be evaluated higher. Since the presence of red tape in public organizations – defined as rules and regulations that entail compliance burden without contributing to organizational goals (Bozeman, 2000) – is one of the important dimensions according to which public and private sectors differ, it is likely that inter-organizational variations in perceived red tape by public managers will also affect their perceptions of the public versus the private sector.

Per the same rationale, measures of additional perceptions of various characteristics of the current workplace that map closely to some of the dimensions of sector perceptions are used as dependent variables. Specifically, individuals are likely to generalize and build their sector perceptions by at least partially extrapolating from their experiences on their current jobs. The survey allowed for matching perceptual measures (for the current job) to two dimensions of sector comparisons - the extent to which their current public sector workaday environs are conducive to managerial



autonomy and employee creativity.

For the dependent variable comparing perceived worker innovativeness in the public and private sectors:

“Worker innovativeness hypothesis” (H4): The higher the perceived level of innovativeness of the current public sector organization, all else equal, the less likely will private sector employees be perceived as “more innovative” when compared to public sector employees.

To test this hypothesis a survey item asking respondents to evaluate, on a 4-point Likert scale, the statement “Innovation is one of the most important values in this organization.” is used.

For the dependent variable comparing perceived managerial autonomy in the public and private sectors:

“Managerial autonomy hypothesis” (H5): The greater the perceived authority in one’s current public sector job, the less likely will private sector managers be perceived as having greater work autonomy than public sector managers.

To capture this perception of current workplace context, a survey item asking respondents to evaluate the statement “I do not have enough authority to determine how to get my job done” on a 4-point Likert scale is used.

Controlling for Gender and Ethnicity

And for the variables measuring perceived opportunity for women and minorities:

“Gender hypothesis” (H6): Being female, all else equal, is associated with less favorable perceptions of the private sector when compared to the public sector.

“Ethnicity hypothesis” (H7): Being non-white, all else equal, is associated with less favorable perceptions of the private sector when compared to the public sector.

There is a general perception that affirmative action has ensured women and minorities greater opportunities for hiring and promotion in the public sector when compared to the private sector, though this does not mean that barriers in the public sector have ceased to exist (Reid et al., 2003). Studies of the salary gap between white male workers and women and/or minority workers partially confirm this perception, with the gap being smaller in the public sector than the private sector (Asher & Popkin, 1984; Lewis, 1998; Perloff & Wachter, 1984; Smith 1977). If so, the perceptions of women and minorities should reflect these advantages in their assessment of the public sector as having more opportunities for women and minorities.

But this reasoning may not necessarily hold in all circumstances. For example, this study’s sample, which is comprised of public servants in pay grades that imply managerial, professional, and/or technical responsibilities, excludes public servants in lower grades who represent the majority of the public sector workforce.⁸ Managerial positions in the public sector have been demonstrated to be held predominantly by white males (Steinberg et al. 1990). Therefore, there may be no perceived differences regarding the opportunities afforded women and minorities in the public versus the private sectors amongst women and/or minority respondents and white male respondents.

The analyses below account for additional control variables. Mentioned above, the models control for time effects, specifically public managers’ length of tenure in their current jobs. We also control for respondent age, the type of agency the respondent is currently working in, whether the respondent works for the state of Georgia or for Illinois, and for public service motivation. The latter is operationalized by respondent indication of degree of importance (on a Likert-type scale) of “ability to serve the public interest” in the decision to take one’s current, public sector job.

RESULTS

Since the dependent variables are categorical, the appropriate estimation technique is multinomial logit. The base outcome is that the public sector is perceived as superior to the private sector on the dimension measured. Therefore, in the regression outputs, positive (and statistically significant) estimates represent an increase in the likelihood of perceiving the private sector as “more conducive” to managerial autonomy, worker talent, worker innovativeness, opportunities for women, or opportunities for minorities – relative to the public sector.⁹

Effect of Last Job Being in the Private Sector

Regarding respondents' "immediate" work experience in the private sector, H1 is supported for three dimensions of sector perceptions (see Table 3). If the respondent's last job was in the private sector, she is more likely to perceive the private sector as having more talented and innovative workers than the public sector. Positive effects were also found for perceptions of managerial autonomy, indicating perceived private sector superiority for this dimension of public-private sector differences. Having had one's last job in the private sector does not affect the perceived opportunities for women and minorities across the sectors.

Effect of Private Sector Job Experience that was Two or More Jobs Ago

The positive effect of private sector work experience on public managers' perceptions of the private sector (i.e., as "more conducive" than the public sector) wanes with public sector experience. In the second set of regression models (see Table 4), a binary variable indicates that respondents' private sector work experience, if any, was not in their last job but rather earlier in their careers, at least two or more jobs preceding their current public sector jobs.¹⁰ Also, respondents whose last job was in the private sector are excluded from the analysis to ensure the comparison of individuals with no private sector job experience to individuals with less immediate (in terms of quantity of jobs, not time) private sector experience. Accordingly, these models include respondents who have no private sector work experience or who have had at least one public sector job between their private sector job and their current public sector job. Private sector work experience that was two or more jobs ago has no statistically discernible effect on any of the sector perception dimensions.

Effect of Number of Private Sector Jobs

The above regression models establish a generally positive effect of private sector work experience on holding sector perceptions that favor the private sector, when that experience is relatively "immediate," just a single job ago. To reinforce the plausibility of the ideas about career history, workplace socialization, and sector perceptions, in addition to the above regression models, the scenario in which private sector work experience was not a one-shot experience, but rather one that spans multiple positions in private companies is considered.

Next, the ideas about the impact of private sector work experience and workplace socialization on sector perceptions are tested by accounting for the number of positions a public manager has occupied in the private sector. Per H2, the expectation is that perceptions favoring the private sector over the public sector to be more likely as the number of private sector positions held increases. To tease out any such additional detail regarding the effects of private sector work experience, cross-tabulations and Chi-square tests are used to present a descriptive depiction of variation of sector perceptions relative to the number of private sector jobs held by respondents, for the dimensions of sector comparisons for which the models in Table 3 where private sector experience had statistically significant effect.

The results provide mixed support regarding the effects of "degree" or "extent" of exposure to the private sector (at least in terms of number of positions held) on sector perceptions, with some of the positive private sector perceptions amplified with increasing exposure to private sector, and some weakened. Table 5 presents the results for the dimensions of sector perceptions for which private sector work experience had a statistically discernible impact.

Specifically, the more private sector jobs an individual has had, the more likely is he to agree that in the private sector "persons doing similar jobs are more talented." However, as number of private sector jobs increases, the less likely are public managers to perceive the private sector as being conducive to more managerial autonomy when compared to the public sector. Individuals with three private sector jobs were, on average, less likely to assess the private sector as having more managerial autonomy than the public sector when compared to the perceptions of respondents with no private sector experience at all. Perhaps with increased work experience across the sectors, stereotypes about sectoral differences are invalidated (Rainey & Bozeman, 2000).

Effects of Perceptions of and Attitudes toward Current Job

Overall, the evidence suggests that perceived characteristics of one's current job shape sector perceptions as well. Consistent with the theory used for this analysis, this implies that individuals tend to build their attitudes and opinions in the context of their own experiences in a particular work environment, present as well as past, from which



Table 3

Last job in the Private Sector. Multinomial logit regression results (n=759). Base outcome: public sector. Results for “no difference” not presented.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Managers have more work autonomy	Persons doing similar jobs are more talented	Employees are more innovative	Women have more opportunities	Minorities have more opportunities
Last job was in the private sector	0.558* (0.338)	0.761*** (0.270)	0.620* (0.333)	0.168 (0.355)	0.085 (0.469)
The primary responsibility of the current job is managerial	0.207 (0.204)	-0.403** (0.185)	-0.396** (0.199)	-0.149 (0.253)	-0.035 (0.332)
Perceived level of organizational red tape	0.097** (0.048)	0.178*** (0.046)	0.101** (0.045)	0.198*** (0.067)	0.286*** (0.095)
Number of years on current job	-0.030* (0.018)	-0.034** (0.016)	-0.009 (0.017)	0.028 (0.023)	0.014 (0.031)
Male	0.320 (0.203)	0.622*** (0.184)	0.605*** (0.190)	-0.244 (0.259)	0.118 (0.338)
Minority	-0.202 (0.249)	0.418* (0.225)	0.228 (0.235)	0.471 (0.307)	0.964*** (0.370)
Age	-0.016 (0.013)	0.007 (0.012)	-0.009 (0.012)	0.003 (0.016)	0.023 (0.021)
Ability to serve the public interest important motivation in accepting current job	0.135 (0.276)	-0.643*** (0.226)	-0.581** (0.281)	0.572 (0.360)	0.253 (0.464)
Agency type of current job: health and social services	0.089 (0.375)	0.260 (0.326)	0.346 (0.338)	0.109 (0.506)	0.189 (0.640)
Agency type of current job: criminal justice	-0.012 (0.416)	0.491 (0.364)	0.399 (0.371)	0.783 (0.542)	0.565 (0.684)
Agency type of current job: natural resources and transportation	-0.759* (0.392)	0.158 (0.351)	0.066 (0.360)	0.060 (0.530)	0.108 (0.670)
Agency type of current job: economic development and regulation	0.150 (0.424)	0.682* (0.363)	0.359 (0.381)	-0.005 (0.558)	-0.779 (0.840)
First job captured in the survey	0.001 (0.208)	0.123 (0.188)	0.087 (0.196)	-0.099 (0.267)	0.275 (0.345)
State of Georgia resident	0.183 (0.214)	-0.198 (0.193)	0.134 (0.203)	0.132 (0.270)	0.376 (0.357)
All in all, I am satisfied with my job	-0.175 (0.141)	-0.054 (0.115)	-0.050 (0.135)	0.035 (0.159)	0.003 (0.203)
I do not have enough authority to determine how to get my job done	0.142 (0.109)				
Innovation is one of the most important values in this organization			-0.449*** (0.121)		
Constant	1.127 (0.970)	-1.642** (0.827)	1.835** (0.895)	-3.344*** (1.190)	-5.583*** (1.590)
Observations	700	700	699	700	700

Note. Standard errors in parentheses; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 4

Private Sector Work Experience Two or More Jobs Ago. Multinomial logit regression results (n=759). Base outcome: public sector. Results for "no difference" not presented.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Managers have more work autonomy	Persons doing similar jobs are more talented	Employees are more innovative	Women have more opportunities	Minorities have more opportunities
Any one or more of the prior 3 jobs in the private sector	0.219 (0.262)	-0.058 (0.241)	0.187 (0.245)	-0.192 (0.356)	0.598 (0.426)
The primary responsibility of the current job is managerial	0.203 (0.217)	-0.459** (0.202)	-0.323 (0.211)	-0.169 (0.278)	-0.096 (0.361)
Perceived level of organizational red tape	0.107** (0.051)	0.205*** (0.051)	0.129*** (0.048)	0.224*** (0.075)	0.265*** (0.102)
Number of years on current job	-0.034* (0.019)	-0.035* (0.018)	-0.011 (0.018)	0.038 (0.026)	0.044 (0.034)
Male	0.265 (0.213)	0.630*** (0.198)	0.497** (0.197)	-0.413 (0.285)	0.020 (0.370)
Minority	-0.217 (0.257)	0.295 (0.241)	0.209 (0.243)	0.336 (0.336)	1.016*** (0.394)
Age	-0.010 (0.014)	0.011 (0.013)	-0.005 (0.013)	0.007 (0.018)	0.025 (0.024)
Ability to serve the public interest important motivation in accepting current job	0.187 (0.302)	-0.862*** (0.251)	-0.659** (0.306)	0.351 (0.405)	-0.126 (0.525)
Agency type of current job: health and social services	0.281 (0.399)	0.298 (0.364)	0.554 (0.357)	0.440 (0.619)	0.618 (0.830)
Agency type of current job: criminal justice	0.137 (0.441)	0.530 (0.400)	0.632 (0.390)	1.279** (0.649)	1.195 (0.858)
Agency type of current job: natural resources and transportation	-0.569 (0.417)	0.303 (0.387)	0.390 (0.380)	0.610 (0.637)	0.814 (0.847)
Agency type of current job: economic development and regulation	0.202 (0.451)	0.689* (0.408)	0.524 (0.404)	0.385 (0.674)	-0.741 (1.071)
State of Georgia resident	0.307 (0.228)	-0.199 (0.210)	0.179 (0.214)	0.172 (0.296)	0.420 (0.394)
First job captured in the survey	0.119 (0.222)	0.122 (0.203)	0.087 (0.204)	-0.097 (0.291)	0.217 (0.376)
All in all, I am satisfied with my job	-0.132 (0.148)	0.035 (0.126)	-0.035 (0.141)	0.028 (0.178)	0.010 (0.230)
I do not have enough authority to determine how to get my job done	0.172 (0.116)				
Innovation is one of the most important values in this organization			-0.406*** (0.127)		
Constant	0.275 (1.031)	-2.095** (0.917)	1.125 (0.947)	-3.884*** (1.365)	-5.961*** (1.835)
Observations	618	619	617	618	618

Note. Standard errors in parentheses; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%



Table 5
Sector Perceptions by Number of Private Sector Jobs

Managers have more work autonomy	Number of Private Sector Jobs			
	0	1	2	3
Public sector	24.53%	17.24%	27.54%	13.79%
Private sector	60.3%	66.38%	63.77%	55.17%
No difference	15.17%	16.38%	8.7%	31.03%

Chi-squared=11.38, p=0.077

Persons doing similar jobs are more talented	Number of Private Sector Jobs			
	0	1	2	3
Public sector	57.41%	52.99%	50%	31.03%
Private sector	32.83%	39.32%	45.59%	55.17%
No difference	9.76%	7.69%	4.41%	13.79%

Chi-squared=13.39, p=0.037

Employees are more innovative	Number of Private Sector Jobs			
	0	1	2	3
Public sector	31.21%	24.79%	23.19%	17.24%
Private sector	62.06%	70.94%	75.36%	68.97%
No difference	6.73%	4.27%	1.45%	13.79%

Chi-squared=12.59, p=0.05

they extrapolate to rationalize general sector differences no matter if they have worked in both the public and private sectors. Most notable, when respondents perceived higher levels of organizational red tape in their current job, they were more likely to perceive the private sector as superior to the public sector on all of the sector comparison dimensions (thereby confirming H3).

Regarding the current job perceptions that “match” the sector perception dependent variables (H4-H7), support is mixed. The only statistically significant finding was for respondents’ perceived innovativeness of their current workplaces. If the respondent perceives her current public sector employer as valuing and emphasizing worker innovation, she is less likely to perceive the private sector as superior to the public in terms of employee innovativeness (H4).

Effects of Public Service Motivation and Other Controls

For the control variables, public service motivation (approximated here by an item indicating that “ability to serve the public interest” was important to respondents’ decisions to accept offers for their current jobs) affects sector perceptions. Public managers who considered the public interest in accepting their current job were less likely to agree that the private sector is superior to the public sector in terms of worker talent. Though this relationship is not surprising, it does not explain directly why public service motivation would be associated with devaluing the talent of private sector employees. Last, respondents in managerial occupations were more reluc-

tant (relative to their peers in technical or professional occupations) to assess private sector employees as superior to the public sector employees in terms of innovativeness as well as talent.

DISCUSSION

The results above generally support the theory and hypotheses advanced. Specifically, having a private sector job immediately before the current public sector job was associated with perceiving the private sector more favorably, while private sector work experience that was 2 or more jobs ago had no statistically discernible effect on any of the sector perception dimensions. Consistent with the theories of attitude change and workplace socialization, this suggests that as the normative and temporal “distance” between private sector job experience and one’s current public sector career increases, the residual internalized norms and expectations accrued from private sector work experience fade, and are perhaps supplanted by public sector norms and expectations. This is consistent with studies emphasizing the length of time spent in past jobs. Reichers and colleagues (1994) demonstrate the immediacy and duration of previous work experiences to correlate with the favorableness of worker attitudes towards one’s current job. While “converts” who have had recent job experiences quite different than those in their current jobs have negative attitudes about contemporaneous work, “initiates” with some but not extensive career experiences similar to their current occupation and “veterans” who have worked for an extended period in their current position or in positions quite similar to their current ones do not demonstrate such negativity. In contrast to workers whose last job was in the private sector, workers with relatively prolonged public sector work experience do not perceive differences between the sectors in terms of talent, innovativeness, or autonomy. This finding is in indirect support of the workplace socialization and attitude formation rationales articulated above, as it suggests that favorable perception of the private sector by employees with recent private sector experience is due not necessarily to inherent differences between sectors, but rather to inconsistencies between relatively new experiences in the public sector as evaluated against pre-existing and not-yet-adjusted expectations and attitudes.

These results are consistent with the framing public managers’ sector perceptions as a function of workplace socialization, which is likely a dynamic process that results in changing perceptions and attitudes over time. The regression results imply that an “imprint” indeed is made by past work environments, but that this impression, while it may be evident early on after a job change, does not last as current career experiences accrue, perhaps due to socialization into the current work environment. For sector perceptions, this means that public managers with private sector work experience perceive more favorably the private sector early on in their careers as public servants, but that sector switchers eventually come to perceive the public and private sectors in the same way as career bureaucrats who have never worked in the private sector.

These results are also consistent with early findings regarding the socialization of public managers, with relatively new managers (in their first few years on the job) experiencing anxiety regarding their fit within and commitment to their work organizations when compared to their longer-tenured counterparts (Buchanan, 1974). However, the emphasis here on the impact of variation across past career trajectories does not agree with the notion that relatively new managers constitute “tabula rasa” (Brim, 1968; Buchanan, 1974; Parsons, 1951). That relatively “immediate” private sector work experience affects sector perceptions (revisit Table 3) suggests that individuals bring to their public sector careers different notions about their careers and about the sectors. In this way, the findings align more closely with more recent empirical studies of workplace socialization acknowledging variation in the experiences and expectations of new workers (Reichers et al., 1994).

It is important to note that this process is not necessarily reflective of any actual differences (e.g., structural, environmental) between the public and private sectors because, by design, the reported differences originate primarily through transitions and adjustments between different career contexts, rather than in any actual measurement of such differences. However, the process implies the existence of particular differences and reinforces extant study focused on structural and environmental comparisons of public and private organizations. For instance, centralized control and fragmented governance structures often are credited with deterring or at least inhibiting innovative and autonomous behaviors in public sector organizations (Rainey 1997, p. 291), while private firms have been demonstrated to value these behaviors (Peters & Watermans, 1982; Thompson 1967). The results for having worked in the private sector immediately prior to one’s current public sector employment (Table 3) supports this characterization,



though – consistent with the process of workplace socialization – the effect does not exist when using the more general indicator of private sector work experience (Table 4). That public managers with private sector work experiences perceive the public and private sectors consistently and differently from managers without such experiences implies an actual distinction between the general structures and contexts of each sector.

CONCLUSIONS

The results in this paper suggest public vs. private sector perceptions to be moderated by past and present work experiences. We explain the effects of past work experiences in the private sector and of current public sector workday attitudes and perceptions on public managers' sector perceptions in terms of the related processes of workplace socialization and attitude formation and change. These processes see occupational norms and expectations and experiences, both past and present, amalgamating in each individual worker to render a unique set of values conducive to favoring one sector over another. These processes are "sector neutral," emphasizing the extent to which past and present work experiences "match," with "mismatches," leading individuals to perceive their prior sector of occupation more favorably – though this effect wanes with prolonged exposure to one's current (in this case – the public) sector. This consideration of past work experiences in addition to contemporaneous factors in a discussion of antecedents to public managers' workday attitudes provides an important, and overdue, linkage between public administration research and formal theories of attitude formation and change.

We have been able to test this theory for workers who have switched from the private sector to public service. Generally, when public managers have had private sector work experience, they tend to perceive the private sector more favorably than the public sector, across multiple comparative dimensions, while controlling for important personal characteristics and attitudes towards contemporaneous work environment, including public service motivation.

Throughout the analysis, it was maintained that sector perceptions are not necessarily reflective of any structural or environmental differences between the public and private sectors. Though sector perceptions are subjective phenomena, consistency in these perceptions when controlling individual-level variation in career trajectory, attitudes towards and perceptions of contemporaneous work environments, work motivation, and personal characteristics may indeed be implicative of actual differences across the sectors. That public managers with private sector work experiences perceive the opportunities and constraints of the public and private sectors consistently and differently from managers without such experiences implies a distinction between the general structures and contexts of each sector. This suggests that sectoral contexts represent different "stimuli and phenomena that surround and thus exist in the environment external to the individuals, most often at a different level of analysis" (Mowday & Sutton, 1993, p. 198). Accordingly, the public and private sectors may pose for individual workers unique sets of "opportunities and constraints" that affect sector perceptions in ways dependent on contextual attributes. However, that the results in this study demonstrate a waning of relatively favorable perceptions of the private sector as private to public switchers become further removed from their private sector work experiences suggests, alternatively, that some of the usual stereotypes differentiating the sectors may be precisely that – widely held assumptions not necessarily corresponding to actual differences. Else, sector perceptions may not change so readily.

This analysis of sector perceptions is important for reasons other than speculation about distinctions between the public and private sectors. The recent job market has been characterized (both empirically and rhetorically) as a "talent war" between the public and private sectors – and one which the public sector is losing (Light, 2002), at least until the recent recession. Accordingly, how the sectors are perceived by their respective workforces and by new entries into the job market (e.g., recent college graduates) becomes, by definition, an important human resources management concern. Moreover, previous study suggests that sector perceptions, accurate or not, correlate with negative work attitudes and also with negative behaviors such as turnover (West & Rushton, 1989).

Our explanation of how sector perceptions develop suggests that workplace experiences can be structured to influence these perceptions. We are not suggesting that public organizations engage in sector-touting propaganda to increase worker commitment and decrease turnover, though perceived organizational efficacy has been demonstrated to have desirable effects on worker attitudes (Sundquist & Boardman, 2008). Rather, public organizations may wish to consider engaging in "socialization tactics" (Ashforth et al., 1998) to ensure that public servants with divergent backgrounds and experiences engage in a common set of experiences that contribute to a common understanding of the

rules and procedures and cultures of a particular organization, no matter the sector. Such tactics may even be as important as the acknowledgement of the diverse motivations and incentives that operate within organizations (Barnard, 1938) in that they stand to lessen the possibility that sector switchers experiencing substantial inconsistencies between their previous and contemporaneous work experiences will re-evaluate their motivation to pursue careers in public service. In this sense, sector perceptions may be really no different than other heuristics individuals use to adopt behavioral and decision making strategies. The findings in this paper suggest that such heuristics may come into play before socialization occurs for sector switchers. If human resources managers proactively socialize new workers (especially “converts” [Ashforth et al. 1998]) with appropriate information and clear articulation of expectations, it is plausible that public agencies will enhance their ability to retain private sector employees in their ranks.

NOTES

1. Unfortunately, the data used for this paper do not include observations of individuals switching from public sector careers to private sector jobs. Even if the data did include these “inverse” observations, the theoretical argument that workers must be socialized into their current workplaces and that the socialization process takes time would remain unchanged. Therefore, for the “inverse” observations that the data do not include, one would expect that private sector workers with past experience in public sector jobs to perceive the public sector as more conducive than the private sector to gratification, worker talent, worker innovativeness, managerial autonomy, and opportunities for women and ethnic minorities – at least until they have spent a sufficient amount of time in the private sector to erode and eventually reverse these perceptions.
2. Feeney (2009) was important to the ideas developed in this study. The paper is discussed in a subsequent section of this paper.
3. Indication of self-employment (31 jobs for the entire data set) was removed from the data to facilitate comparison of respondents with private sector work experience to those with none. That is, the data and analysis only consider private sector job experiences that were full time and have taken place in a private sector organization (e.g. a company).
4. That only two states are examined is of course a limitation of the paper, as is the fact that only state-level employees are examined. For instance, one would expect federal employees to be working under somewhat different system constraints and to have different structural factors influencing career choice and perceptions of past and present work environments. Moreover, needed is longitudinal data rich enough to control for cohort effects, including data for sector switchers who have moved from the public to the private sector in addition to data for the switchers examined in this paper, who have moved from the private sector to the public. However, even with these limitations, the findings speak at least provisionally to the importance of considering past experiences when explaining current perceptions and attitudes. Such consideration is especially important when assessing sector perceptions and ramifications for workforce retention.
5. However, sector distinctions among organizations based on relative levels of exposure to political authority versus economic authority (i.e., “publicness,” Bozeman 1987) instead of legal status could confound these findings. For instance, private companies dependent solely on government contracts may be more similar to government agencies in their valuation of workplace innovativeness and autonomy when compared to private companies without a heavy reliance on government.
6. Discussion of prior empirical study of sector differences and of sector perceptions is reserved for the hypotheses.
7. If the NASP III data set included respondents currently working in the private sector with prior work experience as public servants, the logic would be the same – with past public sector experience correlating with perceiving the public sector as more favorable along these dimensions. Accordingly, the theories employed in this paper have borrowed from studies of applied and occupational psychology, is “sector neutral.”



8. The study sample is representative for the public managers in Georgia and Illinois from agencies from all service areas and state agency types (not including employees at technical colleges, commissions, authorities, the office of the governor, and institutions from the judicial or legislative branch, and any institutions with less than 20 employees). The population of managers in Georgia was drawn from the Georgia Department of Audits comprehensive list of state employees who were on state agency payrolls during the 2003/2004 fiscal year. The population included any job titles coded as "director" "coordinator" "officials or manager" and "professionals" under the pay grade of 017 and all individuals with a pay grade of 017 or higher. The resulting population included 6,164 Georgia managers. The population of managers in Illinois was developed through a Freedom of Information Act request for a list of all state employees designated as either "senior public service administrators" or "public service administrators." This list included information on 5,461 state employees, including name, agency, and county. From these populations, a random sample of 1,849 managers was drawn (The study began with a sample of 2000 but was eventually reduced to 1849 (912 Georgia, 937 Illinois) because of respondents who had retired (16 cases) or were no longer working for the state (135 cases).
9. Estimates for the "no difference" outcomes (i.e. the estimates of how more or less likely it is that respondents to give the "no difference" response versus "public sector is better"), although computed along with the estimates for the "private sector is better outcome", are omitted from the output table for parsimony, and more importantly - because this does not provide meaningful information in the context of the hypotheses outlined above. Specifically, the research questions asked pertain to variables that could explain under what circumstances the private sector could be perceived as superior to the public sector on a number of dimensions. Factors explaining the likelihood that the "no difference" alternative is chosen versus the "public sector is better alternative" have no apparent connection with the hypotheses.
10. The authors also estimated a model featuring the variables "last job was in the private sector" and "any one or more of the jobs preceding the last job was in the private sector" into a single model. In this model (not presented here), the parameter estimates on all independent variables were practically the same. Specifically, last job being in the private sector has a positive influence on the various sector perceptions, while private sector jobs preceding the last job of the respondent had no statistically discernible effect. Although the parameter estimates are practically the same, the results are presented in two sets of models for better consistency with the proposed reasoning and also because of ease of interpretation and possible multicollinearity concerns.

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APPENDIX

NASP III survey items

The NASP III survey was designed using Dillman’s (2000) “tailor design method,” and the survey went through multiple iterations by a panel of senior public administration scholars experienced in employing the Dillman method for survey design. (See <http://www.uga.edu/padp/nasphome.htm> for a copy of the survey and other information about the project.) For the independent variables indicating career trajectory, the NASP III survey asked respondents to fill out the “boxes” for their current job and previous three jobs (totaling four jobs).

Figure 1. Career Trajectory Survey Questions

Box 2: The job you held immediately before your current job		
Organization type <input type="checkbox"/> Public (government) <input type="checkbox"/> Private company <input type="checkbox"/> Non-profit organization <input type="checkbox"/> Different job but same organization as current one	Main responsibility <input type="checkbox"/> Managerial <input type="checkbox"/> Professional (e.g. legal, accounting) <input type="checkbox"/> Technical <input type="checkbox"/> Other	This job was: <input type="checkbox"/> A promotion to a higher position from within the same organization <input type="checkbox"/> A lateral move within the same organization <input type="checkbox"/> A lateral move from a different organization <input type="checkbox"/> An upwards-move from a different organization <input type="checkbox"/> Your first job
Agency or Company:	# of employees supervised, if any:	Formal job title:
		Year started: Year ended:

Each box on the survey represents a single job. Respondents “worked backwards,” filling out the first box for their current public sector job, the second box (shown) for the job held immediately prior, and so on. If respondents changed jobs within the same organization, they were instructed to use separate boxes for each job. If respondents had not held four positions, they were instructed to leave the extra boxes blank and continue to the next section. Important, the survey item also solicited the name of the employing organization with which to verify the sector classification.

For the dependent variables indicating sector perceptions, the following item was employed.

Figure 2. Sector Perceptions Survey Questions

9. In this section we ask your perception of work in the public and business sectors. Please answer these questions even if you have stayed in the same sector for your entire career. [Please check only ONE box in each row]

	Public Sector	Business Sector	No Difference
Work is more personally gratifying.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managers have more work autonomy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Persons doing similar jobs are more talented	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women have more opportunity.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minorities have more opportunity.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employees are more creative and innovative.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>