

PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION: A TEST OF THE JOB ATTRACTION–SELECTION–ATTRITION MODEL

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ABSTRACT: *Public service motivation (PSM) research suggests that PSM influences employee sector choice, yet relatively little research examines how time moderates this relationship. In this research we examine public service motivation among private and public sector lawyers. Using survey data that measure sector of employment at multiple time periods, we investigate the stability of the relationship between individual reward orientations and sector employment choice over time. Our findings suggest that while PSM may not clearly predict the employment sector of a respondent's first job, it does increase the likelihood that a respondent's subsequent job is in the public sector.*

The purpose of this study is to investigate one of the most commonly made propositions of public service motivation theory, that “the greater an individual’s public service motivation, the more likely the individual will seek membership in a public organization” (Perry and Wise 1990, 370). While recruiting and retaining employees have always been important issues for the public sector, the changing demographics of the national workforce have recently increased the relevance of this line of inquiry. As baby boomers retire from public sector employment, the “impending wave of hiring increases the need to investigate what kinds of people are attracted to government jobs and what characteristics make those jobs appealing” (Lewis and Frank 2002, 395).

Such an investigation also seems particularly relevant in light of the College Cost Reduction Act of 2007, which encourages graduating students to consider public service careers by forgiving some student debt. While these monetary-based incentives may be successful, such legislation does not necessarily take advantage of the key tenet of PSM, that certain individuals may be predisposed to “respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations” (Perry and Wise 1990, 368).

Notwithstanding the policy relevance and intuitive appeal of an inquiry into factors influencing the recruitment and retention of public employees, current empirical support of PSM's influence on employee sector choice is incomplete, as research has primarily focused on determining sector differences in PSM levels without investigating the relationship between PSM and sector employment choice at different points of time (Leisink and Steijn 2008; Wright 2001; 2008; Wright and Grant, forthcoming). As a result, it remains unclear to what degree sector differences are due to employee selection or adaptation mechanisms. Using panel and cross-sectional data on private and public sector lawyers, this study extends the field's understanding of PSM by investigating the extent to which PSM may influence the likelihood that individuals select and retain employment in the public sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public management research typically emphasizes that "public and private employees are different" (Houston 2000, 725), often in ways consistent with the function or values of each sector. For instance, consistent with the public sector's emphasis on social equity (Frederickson 1971), its employees are more likely to come from traditionally disadvantaged groups such as women and minorities (Blank 1985; Frank and Lewis 2004). Similarly, given the pro-social and service function of the public sector, it is also not surprising that the public sector may be more likely to employ individuals who value helping others and being useful to society (Crewson 1997; Frank and Lewis 2004; Houston 2006; Rainey 1982). These findings have a number of important managerial implications for the ability to attract and motivate public sector employees (Blank 1985; Perry and Wise 1990). In particular, PSM research suggests that private and public employees differ in their reward or value orientations and that "understanding the values and reward preferences of public managers is essential in structuring organizational environments and incentive systems to satisfy those preferences" (Wittmer 1991, 369).

Consistent with these assertions, a growing body of work demonstrates public service motivation to be higher among public than private sector employees, regardless of whether PSM was measured as an employee's interest in opportunities to benefit society or help others (Crewson 1997; Frank and Lewis 2004; Posner and Schmidt 1996; Rainey 1982) or their likelihood to perform unpaid overtime (Gregg et al. 2008) and undertake pro-social acts (Brewer 2003; Houston 2006). While these differences between private and public sector employees may be a result of self-selection (Pandey and Stazyk 2008) or even socialization processes (Moynihan and Pandey 2007), much of the PSM scholarship has emphasized the latter mechanism by assuming that employee values are antecedents (rather than consequences) of an individual's job choice decisions. In other words, PSM is an employee motive "brought to the work situation" (Perry and Porter 1982, 90) such that "the greater an individual's public service motivation, the more likely the individual will seek membership in a public organization" (Perry and Wise 1990, 370).

Given this assumption, the theory of PSM parallels industrial psychology theories of attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) and person–organization fit (Leisink and Steijn 2008) in many respects. The underlying assertion of all three streams of research is that individuals are attracted to organizations based on the fit between an organization’s characteristics and their own. Furthermore, consistent with the theory of PSM, the goals of the organization are considered the core of the ASA model because an individual’s preference for a particular organization is often based on their perception of the congruence between the organization’s goals (or values) and their own (Schneider, Goldstein, and Smith 1995). PSM does, however, differ slightly from these other theories in the degree of emphasis it puts on pro-social values and the sector of employment as a source of organizational characteristics that influence individual employment decisions.

Indirect support for this emphasis on sector self-selection (i.e., that individuals sort themselves into employment sectors) has been provided by studies indicating that employees tend to work for organizations that they feel will satisfy their most important needs (Georgellis, Iossa, and Tabvuma 2008; Graham and Renwick 1972; Lawler 1971). More recent research concerning person–organization fit also highlights the link between employee values and job choices (Cable and Judge 1996; Chatman 1991) in ways consistent with PSM’s emphasis on sector values. For example, studies have found that individuals whose primary value orientations are consistent with public service (e.g., fairness and concern for others) are more likely to accept a job in organizations that emphasize those specific values (Judge and Bretz 1992).

The potential influence of organizational goals may be particularly important when comparing private and public sector organizations because employee reward orientations may coincide with the general goals or function each sector serves. Consistent with this expectation, public sector employees have been found to place a lower value on financial rewards (Cacioppe and Mock 1984; Khojasteh 1993; Kilpatrick, Cummings, and Jennings 1964; Lawler 1971; Newstrom, Reif, and Monczka 1976; Rainey 1982; Rawls, Ullrich, and Nelson 1975; Wittmer 1991) and a higher value on helping others or serving the public (Buchanan 1975; Cacioppe and Mock 1984; Crewson 1997; Kilpatrick, Cummings, and Jennings 1964; Rainey 1982; Wittmer 1991) than their private sector counterparts.

While these results are consistent with the expectation that PSM influences sector employment choice, these studies have relied on cross-sectional designs that test this relationship only at a single point in time *after* individuals have selected a sector of employment (i.e., Crewson 1997; Brewer 2003; Houston 2006; Posner and Schmidt 1996; Rainey 1982; Wittmer 1991) or study (Karl and Peat 2004). These studies provide strong evidence that PSM and employment sector are related, but they do not isolate the source or direction of this relationship. While PSM values may influence employment decisions (attraction–selection), these results could also be as interpreted as evidence that the employment decisions influence their values (socialization). To provide stronger evidence for the influence of PSM on employment decisions, this study extends this previous research by testing the ability of these values to predict sector of employment at different time periods.

First, consistent with the expectations of PSM theory and existing empirical findings, we hypothesize as follows:

- H1a: Individuals who choose their profession because of their PSM are more likely to be employed in the public sector at the time in which PSM is measured.
- H1b: Individuals who choose their profession because of their interest in financial opportunities are less likely to be employed in the public sector at the time in which this interest is measured.

Second, going beyond the validation of previous findings, this study attempts to provide additional support for PSM theory by investigating the stability of the relationship between initial reward orientations and sector employment choice over time by testing the following hypotheses:

- H2a: Individuals who choose their profession because of their PSM are more likely to begin their careers in the public sector.
- H2b: Individuals who choose their profession because of their interest in financial opportunities are less likely to begin their careers in the public sector.
- H3a: Individuals who choose their profession because of their PSM are more likely to be employed in the public sector several years after their PSM was measured.
- H3b: Individuals who choose their profession because of their interest in financial opportunities are less likely to be employed in the public sector several years after their interest was measured.

The relationship between individual and organizational or sector values may be more complicated, however, when looking at employee retention as opposed to just employee attraction–selection. While several studies have found that employee–organization value or goal congruence is associated with lower turnover intent (Cable and Judge 1996; Chatman 1991), the results of several recent economic panel studies investigating PSM’s ability to predict when employees switch sectors have been less conclusive. Operationalizing PSM in terms of an individual’s predicted satisfaction with the work itself (a general measure of intrinsic motivation), Georgellis and colleagues (2008) found that PSM increased the likelihood that employees will transition from private sector to public sector employment. A second study operationalizing PSM and the willingness to perform unpaid overtime, however, found that PSM could not predict when employees move from the private to the public sector (Gregg et al. 2008).¹ These mixed findings may be a reflection of the added complexity of decisions to change jobs, organizations, or sectors. In fact, several recent studies suggest that employee turnover intentions may be less related to the match between organizational and individual values than to other aspects of job satisfaction such as how well the organization meets expectations regarding the quality or type of work, career opportunities, supervisors, coworkers, and physical working conditions (Moynihan and Pandey 2008; Vigoda and Cohen 2003).

Thus, in addition to testing the relationship between reward orientation and sector employment choice over time, it is also important to understand better the mechanisms by which PSM predicts public employment. In particular, to the extent that PSM is found to predict sector employment over time, these findings could be a

result of varying degrees of attraction/selection or attrition/retention processes. Each sorting mechanism can have important implications for the efficacy of PSM. While it may be beneficial that PSM attracts employees into the public sector, its value is limited if PSM does not also help retain public employees. The use of PSM to retain employees assumes “that public employees experience a person–job fit and can fulfill their needs in their job” (Leisink and Steijn 2008, 126). However, there is evidence to suggest that public sector employment may not always live up to its promise of providing opportunities to help others or benefit society. In several studies, public employees report being less committed to or less satisfied with their jobs when they did not feel that they were able to make public service contributions at work (Buchanan 1974; 1975; Vinzant 1998). Surveys of federal employees suggest that public servants are becoming less satisfied with their opportunities to accomplish something worthwhile (Light 2002).

Under such conditions, it may not be surprising that one recent study found that PSM is inversely related to job tenure (Moynihan and Pandey 2007). This particular finding only highlights further the need to understand PSM’s relationship with employee attraction and retention. If PSM is a force for attraction but not retention, then PSM may only provide a short-term benefit to public organizations at best. It is also possible, however, that PSM may ultimately have negative consequences as public organizations may attract the very employees that are more likely to leave. Thus while H1–H3 focus on whether individuals are attracted to and/or selected for public employment because of their PSM, we also want to test the degree to which PSM increases employee retention in public sector organizations. Thus we hypothesize:

- H4: Individuals selecting their first job in the public sector are more likely to stay in the public sector if they chose their profession because of their PSM.
- H5: Individuals selecting their first job in the public sector are less likely to stay in the public sector if they chose their profession because of their interest in financial opportunities.

METHODS

Study Population

To test our hypotheses, we use survey data collected by the American Bar Association (ABA) to analyze the employment trends of lawyers. As past research suggests that PSM may be a more powerful force for some professions than others (Crewson 1997; Lewis and Frank 2002), any findings based on a single profession may have limited application to other professions. Nonetheless, there is empirical support for the relevancy of PSM in the legal profession (Nalbandian and Edwards 1983), and the choice a lawyer makes between public and private sector employment can provide a useful test of PSM’s ASA hypotheses. Studying members of a single profession commonly employed in both sectors, for example, helps control for important professional differences (Langbein and Lewis 1998), including the

socialization—whether favorable or unfavorable towards public sector selection—that might be introduced in the education process. Previous research has also suggested the potential relevancy of both the attraction–selection–attrition and the reward orientation issues for this particular population.²

Another advantage of studying lawyers is that the profession and its members play prominent roles in both sectors.³ Further, because many would-be lawyers view the legal profession as socially beneficial, irrespective of sector, the ostensible service orientation of the legal profession may actually mitigate against finding differences when examining ASA across private and public sector. Thus, any positive findings that PSM plays a role in ASA would be all the more noteworthy.

Survey Design and Participants

Our data consist of responses to the National Survey of Career Satisfaction of the American Bar Association (ABA).⁴ The survey collected data on the personal characteristics and job satisfaction of several populations of attorneys, from which respondents were randomly selected. The survey was administered twice, resulting in both panel data (consisting of lawyers surveyed 1984 and then again in 1990) and cross-sectional data (a second sample of lawyers surveyed only in 1990).

The panel data were collected from an initial sample surveyed in both 1984 and 1990. The panel recipients were a random probability sample of 2,967 lawyers of all ages selected from ABA member and nonmember lists of 569,706 lawyers in the United States purposely oversampling young lawyers (those under 36 years of age or admitted to the bar after 1980). The initial 1984 survey received 2,236 responses for a response rate of 75.4%. Of these, our study focused on only 1,469 respondents who responded by mail and provided information regarding their reward orientations.⁵ In 1990, respondents to the 1984 survey were again contacted. Of the 1,469 respondents providing initial reward orientation information in 1984, 840 (57.2%) completed the 1990 survey in sufficient detail to be included in this study.⁶ General demographic information for the panel respondents used in our study is provided in Table 1A by sector of employment. Non-response analyses found that the resulting samples produced by both the initial 1984 survey and the 1990 follow-up survey were generally representative of the legal profession with the exception that it slightly overrepresented young lawyers and those working for the public sector (Hirsch 1992).

A second, cross-sectional data set created by the same survey was comprised of a second sample of lawyers contacted only in 1990. This sample focused on attorneys admitted to the bar after 1984 (thus not included in the panel sample), asking about the respondent's first job and job at the time of the survey. While the second sample of lawyers surveyed in 1990 only yielded a 50% response rate from the 1,002 surveys distributed, only 347 respondents responded by mail and provided information regarding their reward orientations.⁷ General demographic information for this 1990-only sample is provided in Table 1B by sector of employment. Similar to the panel respondents, a non-response analysis found that the resulting sample was generally representative of the legal profession except that public sector, active

TABLE 1A
Panel Respondent Demographics by Sector of Employment

	<i>Employment Sector of First Legal Job</i>		<i>Employment Sector in 1984</i>		<i>Employment Sector in 1990</i>	
	<i>Private (n = 1,018)</i>	<i>Public (n = 274)</i>	<i>Private (n = 1,162)</i>	<i>Public (n = 177)</i>	<i>Private (n = 744)</i>	<i>Public (n = 76)</i>
Caucasian	98.2%	97.0%	98.3%	96.0%	98.0%	97.4%
Male	83.6%	80.2%	85.0%	71.8%		
Married	72.4%	69.4%	84.8%	71.8%	74.4%	73.3%
Age (in years)						
Average			38.3	36.0	43.0	44.0
Standard deviation			11.1	10.2	9.7	9.5
Prestige of law school						
Very prestigious	25.5%	14.6%	23.3%	18.6%	23.5%	19.7%
Somewhat prestigious	43.5%	48.9%	46.1%	44.1%	45.8%	48.7%
Not very prestigious	26.2%	31.4%	26.2%	31.6%	27.2%	28.9%
Not at all prestigious	4.7%	5.1%	4.5%	5.6%	3.5%	2.6%
Class rank in law school						
Top quartile	47.8%	43.4%	49.7%	31.4%	50.9%	29.3%
Second quartile	32.9%	33.6%	32.3%	40.6%	30.6%	41.3%
Third quartile	15.3%	16.8%	14.0%	21.7%	14.2%	22.7%
Fourth quartile	4.0%	6.2%	4.0%	6.3%	4.3%	6.7%
1983 annual salary						
<\$15,000					7.5%	5.7%
\$15,000–24,999					12.4%	22.7%
\$25,000–39,999					26.6%	36.4%
\$40,000–54,999					18.4%	18.8%
\$55,000–74,999					13.1%	13.1%
\$75,000–99,999					8.9%	2.8%
\$100,000–199,999					10.4%	0.0%
\$200,000 or more					2.6%	0.6%

(as opposed to retired) and ABA member lawyers were overrepresented (Hirsch 1992). We refer readers to Hirsch (1992) for additional detail regarding the instrument and survey procedures.

Measures

To test our hypotheses, the sector of employment was measured in three ways. Two measures were captured in the initial surveys received by both the panel sample (1984) and the cross-sectional sample (1990). These questions asked each participant to identify the job setting of their current position as well as their first legal position. Those that noted that their job setting was in the federal, state, or local government (or judiciary) were coded as being employed in the public sector while those noting

TABLE 1B
1990 Only Respondent Demographics by Sector of Employment

	<i>Employment Sector of First Legal Job</i>		<i>Employment Sector in 1990</i>	
	<i>Private (n = 235)</i>	<i>Public (n = 83)</i>	<i>Private (n = 239)</i>	<i>Public (n = 64)</i>
Caucasian	94.5%	89.7%	95.3%	87.5%
Male	69.1%	56.4%	68.2%	53.1%
Married	61.3%	51.3%	60.5%	50.0%
Age (in years)				
Average			32.90	34.80
Standard deviation			5.73	6.62
Prestige of law school				
Very prestigious	24.0%	16.0%	22.7%	16.4%
Somewhat prestigious	43.8%	45.7%	43.7%	44.3%
Not very prestigious	27.0%	33.3%	28.6%	34.4%
Not at all prestigious	5.2%	4.9%	5.0%	4.9%
Class rank in law school				
Top quartile	44.6%	46.9%	50.6%	32.3%
Second quartile	31.8%	33.3%	29.1%	40.3%
Third quartile	14.6%	14.8%	12.2%	22.6%
Fourth quartile	9.0%	4.9%	6.0%	4.8%
1989 annual salary				
<\$15,000			5.9%	9.4%
\$15,000–24,999			7.1%	7.8%
\$25,000–39,999			18.5%	57.8%
\$40,000–54,999			26.9%	21.9%
\$55,000–74,999			24.4%	3.1%
\$75,000–99,999			9.7%	0.0%
\$100,000–199,999			5.5%	0.0%
\$200,000 or more			2.1%	0.0%

that they were in private practice or corporate counsel were coded as being employed in the private sector.⁸ To measure the respondents' future sector of employment, 1984 panel respondents were asked to describe their current job setting in a similar fashion in the 1990 follow-up survey. Taken together, both data sets allow us to analyze the relationship between PSM and employment sector at multiple time periods. For panel participants, we test whether PSM predicts the respondent's first legal job, the respondent's job in 1984, and the respondent's job at the time of the follow-up survey in 1990. For survey participants contacted for the first time in the 1990 survey, we test whether PSM predicts the respondent's first legal job as well as the respondent's job at the time they completed the survey. Of these five tests, the strongest test is provided by comparing panel respondent's PSM as reported in the 1984 survey to the same respondent's sector of employment measured six years later in the

1990 survey. We also examine the influence of PSM on retention by testing whether PSM predicts whether employees who begin their legal careers in the public sector stay in the public sector. Unfortunately, given the limited sample size of the 1990 survey and the small number of employees beginning their legal careers in the public sector, this latter relationship can only be tested using the 1984 data.

To measure a respondent’s reward or value orientation, the initial surveys received by respondents asked each participant to identify the most important factor that led them to choose a legal career. Responses by category are provided for panel respondents in Table 2A and the respondents sampled only in 1990 are provided in Table 2B. Respondents who noted that the most important reason for choosing a legal career was their “interest in social service/helping others” were coded as exhibiting PSM. Conversely, those noting the most important reason as financial opportunity were used to test the corollary hypotheses concerning economic motivation.

One weakness of this measure of PSM is that it does not fully capture the potential range or dimensions suggested by more sophisticated measures (i.e., Perry 1996). Notwithstanding this limitation, a recent review of PSM research helps put this weakness into perspective. Wright (2008) noted considerable diversity in the measures of PSM used in published studies with nearly half of the studies using a single item measure asking about the individual’s interest in social service or helping others. Although the more comprehensive conceptualization of PSM suggested by Perry and Wise (1990) is widely referred to, only approximately 60% of the studies published in the last ten years use a multiple item measure based on Perry’s (1996) four dimensional operationalization of PSM. Even of these studies, however, the vast majority failed to measure (or distinguish between) Perry’s (1996) four conceptualized

TABLE 2A
Reasons Panel Respondents Chose Career in Law by Sector of Employment

	<i>Employment Sector of First Legal Job</i>		<i>Employment Sector in 1984</i>		<i>Employment Sector in 1990</i>	
	<i>Private (n = 1,018)</i>	<i>Public (n = 274)</i>	<i>Private (n = 1,162)</i>	<i>Public (n = 177)</i>	<i>Private (n = 744)</i>	<i>Public (n = 76)</i>
Most important reason						
Intellectual challenge	39.7%	36.5%	40.1%	41.8%	41.5%	35.5%
Financial opportunity	15.5%	15.3%	15.7%	13.0%	15.6%	14.5%
Interest in social service/ helping others	11.4%	13.5%	10.6%	18.1%	9.9%	21.1%
Family wishes	6.1%	6.2%	6.1%	5.6%	4.8%	7.9%
Influence of a role model	0.3%	0.7%	0.5%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%
Other	27.0%	27.8%	27.0%	21.5%	27.5%	21.0%
Mentioned in top 2 reasons						
Financial opportunity	46.5%	45.3%	47.4%	41.4%	45.5%	43.8%
Interest in social service/ helping others	23.9%	28.3%	23.5%	34.3%	23.2%	31.5%

TABLE 2B
Reasons 1990 Only Respondents Chose Career in Law by Sector of Employment

	<i>Employment Sector of First Legal Job</i>		<i>Employment Sector in 1990</i>	
	<i>Private (n = 235)</i>	<i>Public (n = 83)</i>	<i>Private (n = 239)</i>	<i>Public (n = 64)</i>
Most important reason				
Intellectual challenge	39.6%	39.8%	41.8%	34.4%
Financial opportunity	11.5%	12.0%	10.9%	10.9%
Interest in social service/ helping others	14.9%	22.9%	13.0%	26.6%
Family wishes	4.3%	3.6%	3.8%	4.7%
Influence of a role model	7.7%	1.2%	6.3%	6.3%
Other	22.0%	20.5%	24.2%	17.1%
Mentioned in top 2 reasons				
Financial opportunity	48.1%	30.1%	47.7%	28.1%
Interest in social service/ helping others	26.4%	43.4%	29.8%	42.2%

dimensions. Thus, while the measure of PSM used here fails to fully capture the potential range or dimensions suggested by more sophisticated measures (i.e., Perry 1996), it is consistent with both the general conceptualization of PSM and one of its most commonly used operationalizations (see Alonso and Lewis 2001; Frank and Lewis 2004; Lewis and Frank 2002; Houston 2000; Steijn 2008; Tschirhart et al. 2008). We also note that recent empirical evidence provides additional support for the use of this single-item measure. In a recent study of law students (Christensen and Wright 2009a), the single item measure used in this current study was found to correlate strongly with the three most commonly used dimensions of Perry's (1996) previously validated multiple-item and multiple-dimension measure of PSM (correlations ranged from 0.58 to 0.61) and was even moderately correlated ($r = 0.31$) with the fourth dimension (attraction to policymaking).

An additional measurement issue raised by recent reviews (Wright 2008; Wright and Grant, forthcoming) has been the reliance on measuring PSM and its purported antecedents or consequences at a single, simultaneous point in time. Unfortunately, the measure of PSM used in this study shares a common weakness with previous PSM studies by measuring participants' PSM only after they have made their initial employment decisions. It does, however, offer some improvement in that it measures the hypothesized consequences of PSM (sector of employment) at several points in time and the measure's wording may help reduce the potential bias due to socialization by asking the respondent to recall why they originally chose a career in law rather than why they choose a particular (or current) job, organization, or sector. In conclusion, the measure of PSM used in this study reflects a series of tradeoffs. While it may fail to capture the full range or dimensions of PSM, it is consistent with

one of the more dominant approaches to measuring PSM and in some ways even improves on existing studies by measuring PSM's effect over multiple time periods.

Recognizing previous findings regarding the proclivity of women, minorities, and older individuals to be overrepresented in public employment (Lewis and Frank 2002) as well as the potential influence these characteristics may have on PSM (Pandey and Stazyk 2008), we used demographic information provided by the surveys to control for these factors. Similarly, we controlled for other variables that might influence a respondent's job selection. These included academic achievement in law school (measured by self-reported graduation quartile), prestige of respondent's law school (measured on a self-reported four-point⁹ ordinal scale), and respondent's potential need for a greater balance of family–work (measured by marital status with married scored as 1 and unmarried as 0).

RESULTS

When looking at the reasons respondents employed in each sector gave for choosing a legal career, a few interesting patterns emerge relevant to our hypothesized relationship between sector employment and reward or value orientation. First, it should be noted that PSM is not just a public sector phenomenon. While a higher ratio of government lawyers have PSM (Tables 2A and 2B), the vast majority of lawyers with PSM work in the private sector. Of the panel respondents who chose a career in law because of their interest in social service/helping others, 76% worked their first legal job in the private sector (79% by 1984, 82% by 1990).¹⁰ A second, related pattern exists regarding economic incentives. Regardless of the sample or time period of employment, the percentage of private sector lawyers noting the importance of financial opportunities is similar to the percentage of public sector lawyers noting its importance. This held true even though the data suggest that lawyers are generally paid more in the private than in the public sector (Tables 1A and 1B).¹¹

To provide stronger tests for our hypotheses, we conducted a series of logistic regression analyses (Tables 3A, 3B and 4) using measures of financial importance and service/helping others to predict sector employment at three points of time while controlling for race, gender, age, marital status, academic achievement, and law school prestige.¹²

Our results provide mixed support for our hypotheses. Consistent with H1a, respondents who report that their interest in social service/helping others was the most important reason they chose a legal career were more likely to be currently employed in the public sector ($p < 0.05$). Contrary to H2a, however, those same respondents were no more likely to report having started their legal career (first job) in the public sector ($p > 0.05$). Similarly, our hypotheses regarding the relationship between sector of employment and financial interest were also not supported. Contrary to H1b and H2b, respondents who report that their interest in financial opportunities was the most important reason they choose a legal career were no less likely to have either their current or first professional legal job in government ($p > 0.05$). These findings were robust across both the panel (Table 3A) and cross-sectional only (Table 3B) data sets as well as across alternative iterations of the models where interest in social

TABLE 3A

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Public Sector Employment of Panel Respondents for First Legal Job ($n=1,249$), 1984 Job ($n=1,290$), and 1990 Job ($n=799$)

Predictor	First Job ^a			1984 Job ^a			1990 Job ^b		
	B	SE B	e ^B	B	SE B	e ^B	B	SE B	e ^B
Most important factor in choosing legal career									
Social service/Helping others ^a	0.25	0.21	1.28	0.60*	0.23	1.81	0.92*	0.33	2.51
Financial opportunities ^a	0.06	0.20	1.06	-0.10	0.25	0.90	0.02	0.36	1.02
Controls									
Caucasian	-0.43	0.44	0.65	-0.36	0.49	0.70	-0.14	0.79	0.87
Married	-0.07	0.16	0.93	-0.21	0.18	0.81	0.00	0.30	1.00
Age	0.00	0.01	1.00	0.00	0.01	1.00	0.02	0.01	1.02
Female	0.15	0.18	1.16	0.67*	0.20	1.96	0.14	0.36	1.15
Graduation quartile	0.15	0.08	1.16	0.39*	0.09	1.48	0.41*	0.13	1.50
Prestige of law school	0.25*	0.09	1.28	0.19	0.10	1.21	0.15	0.16	1.16
Constant	-9.02	13.54		0.64	16.34		32.60	24.03	
χ^2		17.71			45.42			18.95	
df		8			8			8	
Percent employed in public sector		21.4			13.4			9.3	

* $p < 0.05$.

^aAs reported in 1984.

^bAs reported in 1990.

service/helping others or financial opportunities were measured more liberally as one of the top two reasons for choosing a career in law.¹³

To test H3a and H3b, responses from the panel participants regarding the most important reason they choose a legal career as reported in 1984 were then used to predict the sector in which they were employed six years later during the 1990 follow-up survey. The results (Table 3A) here were similar to the results found when predicting their sector of employment in 1984 (H1a and H1b). Consistent with H3a, respondents who reported in 1984 that their interest in social service/helping others was the most important reason they originally chose a legal career were more likely to be employed in the public sector in 1990 ($p < 0.05$). H3b was not supported. Respondents who reported in 1984 that their interest in financial opportunities was the most important reason they choose a legal career were no less likely to be employed in government in 1990 ($p > 0.05$).

To investigate the potential effects of PSM on attrition/retention (H4 and 5), an additional logistic regression analysis was conducted separating the 1984 respondents by the employment sector of their first legal job.¹⁴ When only including in the analysis respondents whose first job was in the public sector, interest in social service/helping others and financial opportunity were used to predict whether

TABLE 3B

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Public Sector Employment of 1990 Only Respondents for First Legal Job (*n* = 290) and 1990 Job (*n* = 292)

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>First Job^a</i>			<i>1990 Job^a</i>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>
Most important factor in choosing legal career						
Social service/Helping others ^a	0.47	0.35	1.59	0.86*	0.37	2.36
Financial opportunities ^a	0.08	0.45	1.08	0.39	0.48	1.47
Controls						
Caucasian	-0.72	0.52	0.49	-0.82	0.55	0.44
Married	-0.26	0.28	0.77	-0.21	0.31	0.81
Age	0.00	0.02	1.00	0.03	0.02	1.03
Female	0.38	0.29	1.47	0.59	0.31	1.80
Graduation quartile	-0.16	0.16	0.85	0.23	0.16	1.26
Prestige of law school	-0.26	0.28	0.77	0.27	0.19	1.30
Constant	7.42	45.62		49.78	47.82	
χ^2			11.13			20.04
<i>df</i>			8			8
Percent employed in public sector			25.9			20.5

**p* < 0.05.

^aAs reported in 1990.

they were still employed in the public sector at the time of the survey (1984).¹⁵ The findings are reported in Table 4. Contrary to our expectations in H4, individuals selecting their first job in the public sector were no more likely to stay (retention) in the public sector if they chose their profession because of their interest in social service/helping others (*p* > 0.05). Similarly, H5 was also not supported. Individuals selecting their first job in the public sector were no more likely to leave (attrition) public sector employment than if they chose their profession because of their interest in financial opportunities (*p* > 0.05). In fact, a substantial percentage of the lawyers whose first legal job were in government and chose their careers because of their interest in social service/helping others eventually left government to take jobs in the private sector (51% and 44%, 1984 and 1990, respectively).

When looking at the effects of our control variables, some interesting patterns emerge. For example, we found some evidence that older employees were more likely to switch sectors after their initial jobs (Table 4) while women were more likely to be currently employed (Table 3A) and retained (Table 4) in the public sector. Additionally, there is some evidence that the public sector may have a hard time recruiting the best-trained lawyers. Those employed by the government were more likely to graduate from less-prestigious law schools or in the lower quartiles of their class (Table 3A). Support for these relationships, however, was only found in the panel sample, perhaps as a result of either shifting in employment patterns over time or the weaker statistical power provided by the smaller sample of lawyers contacted for the first time in the 1990 survey.

TABLE 4
 Logistic Regression Predicting 1984 Public Sector Employment (Retention) of 1984
 Respondents with First Legal Job in Government ($N=235$)

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>1984 Job^a</i>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>
Most important factor in choosing legal career			
Social service/Helping others ^a	0.16	0.43	1.18
Financial opportunities ^a	-0.17	0.42	0.84
Controls			
Caucasian	-0.43	0.82	0.65
Married	-0.37	0.32	0.69
Age	-0.06*	0.02	0.94
Female	0.89*	0.38	2.44
Graduation quartile	0.27	0.16	1.31
Prestige of law school	0.25	0.20	1.28
Constant	-114.00	40.40	
χ^2		28.44	
<i>df</i>		8	
Percent employed in public sector		37.4	

* $p < 0.05$.

^aAs reported in 1984.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that the relationship between PSM and sector employment choice is not entirely straightforward. Although the data used in this study do not rule out the possibility that these findings are due to adaptation (post-employment rationalization or socialization) rather than attraction–selection processes, these findings do not fully support either mechanism’s expectations that employee reward preferences will coincide with the function each sector serves.

While a strong interest in social service/helping others does not predict the employment sector of a lawyers’ first legal job (H2a) it does increase the likelihood that their current (H1a) or future (H3a) job is in the public sector. Together, these findings suggest that PSM may be more or less important in employment decisions at different stages of an employee’s career. For example, students right out of law school may find public sector legal positions harder to obtain or initially place more value on private sector opportunities for doing socially important work. Although unexpected, the findings presented here are not entirely inconsistent with those of previous studies that use more diverse samples. In one of the studies most commonly cited in support of PSM, Crewson’s (1997) analysis of the General Social Survey found that public employees had significantly higher PSM than private employees for only about half of the years analyzed.¹⁶ Several previous studies have also found

that PSM predicts the desire to work for government, but not whether individuals actually do work for government (Lewis and Frank 2002; Tschirhart et al. 2008).¹⁷

While these findings are not inconsistent with previous studies with more diverse samples, sample or profession-specific explanations may help explain the somewhat weak relationship between PSM and sector employment found by this study. Individuals interested in a legal career may initially perceive that practicing law is socially important work, regardless of the specific type of practice. In addition to selecting socially important cases, pro bono work provides a specific outlet for attorneys with PSM—primarily from the private sector—to benefit society. Thus, any sector differences regarding PSM are likely weakened. While this limits the generalizability of the results, it may also help strengthen our confidence in the importance of PSM. In other words, that PSM displays any sector-based effects in this population may be particularly notable because the legal profession's service orientation potentially mitigates against finding sector differences.

Our findings also suggest that an interest in financial opportunities has no influence on a lawyer's initial (H2b), current (H1b), or subsequent (H3b) sector of employment. Such financial interests also did not increase the likelihood that an employee leaves public employment (H5). While again unexpected, this finding is not without precedent. Several previous studies have failed to find differences in preference for monetary rewards (Crewson 1997; Gabris and Simo 1995; Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins 2006; Maidani 1991; Schuster 1974). Consistent with these findings, other studies have found that the importance individuals place on income fails to predict not only whether respondents work for government but also their desire to work for government (Lewis and Frank 2002; Tschirhart et al. 2008).

There may be a number of potential explanations for these findings. For example, our analyses use a narrow definition of compensation and fail to consider other forms of compensation (i.e., retirement and health care benefits). While private sector lawyers reported higher incomes than public sector lawyers in both of our samples ($p < 0.05$), these differences might be smaller if we were able to take into consideration the value of the total compensation package. These results may also be dependent on the types of occupations studied. Lewis and Frank (2002) found that the importance of high income fails to predict whether individuals work for government when using the standard industrial classification code for public administration, but they also found that individuals interested in high income were less likely to work for government when the definition of public administration is broadened to include other fields dominated by government employment such as education, bus service, and sanitation. It could be that studies using samples of highly educated people with JD, MPA, and MBA degrees focus on individuals and occupations where financial considerations are less important. In this study, lawyers reported being many times more likely to choose their profession for intellectual than financial reasons (Tables 2A and 2B).

Together these findings suggest that instead of asking whether PSM affects employee attraction and retention, perhaps it is more appropriate to ask when and under what conditions PSM affects employee attraction and retention. Fortunately, this search for moderating variables has already begun. In one recent analysis

of PSM and sector of employment, Lewis and Frank (2002) observed that the PSM/sector relationship might be stronger for college graduates, employees under 30 years old, and for some of the more specific employment classifications (i.e., education, postal, and sanitary). Similarly, after reviewing the person–organization fit literature, Leisink and Steijn (2008) have recently noted that more research is needed to investigate the relative importance of PSM when compared to other factors influencing job or sector choice, such as the quality or type of work, career opportunities, supervisors, coworkers, and physical working conditions (Christensen and Wright 2009b; Moynihan and Pandey 2008; Vigoda and Cohen 2003).

Our study adds to this discussion by suggesting that PSM might not always influence an employee's first professional job (H1a) or even employee retention (H4), but may still be an important factor when recruiting employees with some prior professional experience (H2a and H3a).¹⁸ There are several potential explanations for this possibility. PSM may, for example, become more salient after respondents take their first position and find certain organizational or job characteristics to be less gratifying than they had expected. Alternatively, graduates selecting their first job may have less opportunity to incorporate PSM into their decision. Lack of job experience, school debt, and stiff competition for entry-level jobs may have caused respondents with PSM temporarily to delay selecting jobs based on internal motivation. Such individuals may gain more flexibility in acting upon more-valued preferences in future job decisions after acquiring some professional experience. Either way, our findings suggest that PSM may help us understand the attraction–selection process after a respondent enters the work force, but little about the initial job selection.

Our findings regarding retention raise similar questions. The failure to find a relationship between PSM and employee retention (H4 and H5) may also be the result of phenomena external to individual PSM. For example, as suggested in some previous research, public employees with PSM may find that their public sector jobs do not satisfy individual motivations as much as expected (Buchanan 1974; 1975; Vinzant 1998), which may precipitate that employee exiting the sector (Wright and Pandey, forthcoming). Such an interpretation is consistent with research suggesting that PSM's relationship to employee satisfaction and commitment is mediated by factors such as value congruence or person–organization fit (Paarlberg and Perry 2007; Pandey, Wright, and Moynihan 2008; Taylor 2008; Steijn 2008; Wright and Pandey 2008, forthcoming). Our findings also help shed light on a recently identified inverse relationship between job tenure and public service motivation (Moynihan and Pandey 2007). While this relationship could occur as employee PSM declines over time, our results suggest that many public employees with PSM may leave public employment.

In conclusion, this study raises a number of important questions that need to be pursued in future, and more specifically, longitudinal research. Future studies, for example, should conduct stronger tests of these hypotheses by addressing some of the weaknesses of this current study. In particular, we encourage research that examines a broader range of professions, uses more comprehensive measures of PSM, and assesses these measurements before individuals make their initial employment decisions. In order to better understand the extent to which PSM is inherent and to what

extent PSM is socialized, some effort should also be made to expand our assessment of external influences that potentially bear on PSM over time. These influences might include factors that affect job selection, such as school debt, initial salary, job market conditions (such as competition for available jobs within and across sectors), as well as factors that affect job attrition such as job satisfaction and, ultimately, person–organization fit.

Nonetheless, this present study begins to demonstrate the importance of longitudinal analysis as a tool to more fully understand the implications of PSM. Extant investigations concerning the role of PSM are useful in identifying moderating factors, but are empirically incomplete in their ability to enlighten the interplay between PSM and the attraction–selection–attrition processes over time. We have demonstrated that PSM can play different roles in the attraction–selection–attrition process at different stages in an individual’s career. Better understanding this process holds, in turn, the promise of improving policy initiatives, like the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, and addressing managerial challenges such as the need to attract and retain skilled and motivated individuals in public positions.

NOTES

1. Gregg et al.’s (2008) study used the same measure (in this case a lower willingness to work unpaid overtime) to predict which employees moved from the public sector to the private sector.

2. Recent work has suggested that public interest organizations are struggling to recruit talented law graduates into the legal services arena. Studies show that this recruitment challenge is compounded by problems in retaining lawyers, as attorney attrition siphons off already scarce resources from these organizations providing legal access (Equal Justice Works et al. 2002). In fact, Boylan’s (2004) study of public sector lawyers found that comparatively lower government salaries led to increased turnover.

3. In 2007, the American Bar Foundation reported that there were 1,143,358 lawyers actively practicing and residing in the United States (American Bar Association 2007) with approximately 1/8 of the profession employed in the public sector (American Bar Association 2006).

4. We recognize Joanne Martin from the American Bar Foundation for her assistance in using and understanding the data.

5. Phone respondents only completed an abbreviated set of survey questions that did not include information regarding their PSM.

6. Panel respondents were only asked for the information regarding their reward orientation used to measure PSM in the initial 1984 survey. The follow-up survey in 1990 did, however, provide updated information about the recipient’s current job including sector of employment.

7. As with the initial 1984 sample, those responding to 1990 survey by phone only completed an abbreviated set of survey questions that did not include information regarding their PSM.

8. Respondents describing their job setting as professors were excluded from this analysis.

9. Ranging from 1 (*very prestigious*) to 4 (*not at all prestigious*).

10. Perhaps this is because individuals initially perceive that practicing law is socially important work, regardless of the specific type of practice. Beyond the general role of law in society, pro bono work provides a specific outlet for attorneys—primarily from the private sector—to benefit society.

11. Our analysis of these data found that 64.8% of government lawyers report making less than \$39,999 in 1983 compared to only 46.5% of private sector lawyers. A difference can also be seen at the higher income levels as 21.9% of private sector lawyers report salaries over \$75,000 compared to only 3.4% of public sector lawyers. This is consistent with more complete and recent information that indicate that private sector lawyers are not only higher paid but also have higher starting salaries (see Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006 and 2010).

12. To test the possible influence of graduate school socialization, supplemental analyses were conducted controlling for the year the respondent graduated from law school instead of age. This substitution did not change the results (Tables 3 and 4). Both age and year of graduation could not be used in the models simultaneously as they were highly correlated ($r = 0.93$).

13. Some notable differences between the two samples became clear when looking at gender and the secondary reasons for choosing a legal career. First, compared to those surveyed as part of the 1984 panel, respondents surveyed for the first time in 1990 included a higher percentage of women. Second, women were much more likely than men to choose social service/helping others as their second reason.

14. To provide sufficient time after accepting their first legal job to allow for turnover opportunity, we only included individuals in the analysis that had graduated at least two years before the survey was conducted.

15. Due to low sample sizes, similar analyses could not be conducted with either the 1990 cross-sectional data or the panel data comparing employment sector changes between 1984 and 1990.

16. While a statistically significant difference was found in only 8 of the 14 years analyzed, it was only found in 5 of the 11 years in which the General Social Survey was conducted using a full probability sample.

17. In their study of MPA and MBA graduates, Tschirhart and colleagues (2008) found that the importance individuals place on work that helps others not only predicts their preference to work for government but whether they actually do work for government. Similarly, after controlling for other variables, Lewis and Frank (2002) found PSM predicts the preference to work for government among General Social Survey respondents but only predicts whether they work in government for one of their three different classifications of public administrators.

18. In fact, in a supplemental analysis including only 1984 respondents whose first job was in the private sector, we found that PSM increased the likelihood that they would later leave to accept jobs in the public sector (logistic regression results are not reported here but are available from the authors). Unfortunately, given that PSM was measured concurrently with the latter job, this relationship may well be due to socialization rather than attraction-selection processes.

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