

## DO EXPECTATIONS MEET ASPIRATIONS? THE RELATION OF PUBLIC MANAGERS' JOB CHOICE MOTIVES TO JOB SATISFACTION

XUHONG SU

University of Georgia, USA

&

BARRY BOZEMAN

University of Georgia, USA

We investigate how public managers' job choice motives shape their job satisfaction by using a representative sample of public managers from Georgia and Illinois in the United States. Factor analysis presents five main motives driving public managers to pursue a public position. By incorporating these primary job choice motives, the regression indicates that public managers' job satisfaction level is largely affected by their professed motivations and organizational context. Those managers with higher levels of motivation for the factors *Career Advancement or Public Value* demonstrate a higher level of satisfaction with their jobs; while other motives such as *Job Security, Salary and Smooth Working Environment* seem to have no impact on public managers' job satisfaction. Public managers working in Georgia are more satisfied with their job, regardless of the leading role Georgia played in dismantling traditional civil service reform. The study suggests that expectancy theory does not provide a strong explanation of public managers' job satisfaction and ends with the discussion of future research directions.

Key Words: public managers, job choice motives, job satisfaction

### INTRODUCTION

The field of management is rife with studies of job satisfaction, so much so that there is an abundance not only of empirical research but even of review and synthesis articles (e.g., Locke 1976; Petty et al. 1984; Judge et al. 2001). In public administration, job satisfaction has likewise been a popular topic of research. While many of the public administration studies differ little from general management research, often differing only in their respondent base, some studies focus on aspects of job satisfaction that seem distinctive to the public sector (e.g., DeSantis and Durst 1996). For example, some focus specifically on the public sector work environment (Wright and Davis 2003), some on the relation of job

satisfaction to public service motivation (Bright 2008), and still others on the impact of government reform on satisfaction (Brunetto and Farr-Wharton 2005; Korunka et al. 2003).

Continuing in the tradition of public administration job satisfaction studies focusing on distinctive aspects of the public sector environment; our study examines the relationship between public employees' job choice motivation and their job satisfaction. The question we ask is this: "Do public managers' stated reasons or objectives for taking a particular job affect the degree of satisfaction with the job?" To put it another way, does knowledge of job choice motives tell us anything useful about satisfaction with the job? Do certain aspiration patterns lead to disappointment whereas others lead to

satisfaction?

Our data for this study are from the National Administrative Studies Project, round three (NASP-III) questionnaire data derived from public managers in two state governments of the United States. We describe the data more fully below.

## **THEORY AND HYPOTHESES**

Given the focus on expectations, we employ a venerable body of theory quite familiar to students of employee motivation – and job satisfaction – expectancy theory (Vroom 1964; Mitchell 1974). Expectancy theory is one of several approaches to expected value. Its basic premise is that behavior and attitudes can be understood in terms of the expectations that behavior will lead to certain desired outcomes. In the case of our research, the focus is on the relationship of expectations (manifested as expressed job choice motives) to subsequent job satisfaction.

Our study examines the reasons public managers provide for taking their current job. A great many possibilities are included, some quite obvious and common in the literature (e.g., pay, advancement opportunity, benefits) and others not examined as frequently in the literature (e.g., the unavailability of any other job, ability to serve the public interest, “family friendly” policies). According to expectancy theory, satisfaction results when there is a close correspondence between the desired motivational object (in our case, the job choice motive) and the outcome. However, this is attenuated by the fact that some outcomes are more easily predicted than others. For example, if one takes a job for reasons of salary, then we expect that at least the starting salary is known when one takes the job and, thus, the outcome is predictable. By contrast, if one takes the job in order to have a more relaxed and friendly work environment, then the predictions are likely less valid because the work environment depends on personal interactions not known at the time one takes the job. Thus, we hypothesize:

H1.0 Public managers whose job choice motives focus on more predictable objectives will, all else being equal, have higher levels of job satisfaction.

Specifically,

H1.1 Public managers motivated by having a smooth, low conflict work environment will tend to have lower levels of job satisfaction

H1.2 Public managers motivated by job security will tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction.

H1.3 Public managers motivated by salary will tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction.

H1.4 Public managers motivated by less predictable secondary economic factors (e.g., family employment opportunities) will have lower levels of job satisfaction.

With respect to H1.2, we feel that job security in most instances of public sector work tends to be predictable and outcomes occur in expected ways. This is especially true at managerial levels. (Very different outcomes might well obtain for public or nonprofit organizations.) The public administration literature suggests that public employees cite job security as one of most important reasons for working in the public sector (Lewis and Frank 2002), and they value the opportunity to have an impact on broad public affairs (US Merit System Protection Board 1987), lessening the relative importance of monetary rewards and power status.

With respect to H1.3 and H1.4, we expect that salary will in most instances be well predicted but such factors as family employment opportunities or even regional cost of living are less easily predicted and, thus, less likely to result in high levels of job satisfaction.

One important assumption not related to expectancy theory is that the job choice motivations themselves tell us something about individuals and this, in turn, predicts the likelihood of their being satisfied with their jobs. For example, those who are ambitious risk takers may be expected to have a different likelihood of satisfaction as compared to those who are oriented to stability. Thus, we hypothesize:

H2.0 Public managers motivated by career advancement will, all else being equal, have higher levels of job satisfaction.

H3.0 Public managers motivated by public values and public interest will, all else being equal, have higher levels of job satisfaction.

In the case of H2.0, we expect that those who are motivated by career advancement will tend to be more resilient, at least in the short term (Tietjen and Myers 1998). Those who have been in their current job for an

extended period of time and are motivated by career advancement are likely to have lower levels of job satisfaction.

The importance of public value and public service motivations has been well documented in the public administration literature (Perry and Wise 1990; Crewson 1997; Jurkiewicz et al. 1998). The hypothesis about public values motivation relates closely to others' findings about public service motivation, namely that those with high levels of public service motivation tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction (Alonso and Lewis 2001).

## DATA AND METHODS

The data are from the NASP-III project, completed in 2006. The data are based on a questionnaire administered to a random sample of public managers in Georgia and Illinois from multiple organizational functions, soliciting information about their motives to take a public job and their perceptions of work environment, organizational culture, and job characteristics. The two states, when taken together, are quite representative of the United States at large, but in the meantime, retain differential characteristics on cultural, political and bureaucratic environments, both of which make them a useful case to unfold public managers' job satisfaction.

Among 1,849 surveyed public managers, 790 useful responses were generated with a response rate of 43%. Fifty-five percent of respondents were working in the state of Georgia. Descriptive statistics for the variables used in our model (developed in the next section) are presented in Tables 1 and 2. More detailed information about the research design and study approaches can be found in the Appendix to this paper (see also Bozeman and Ponomariov (2008).

The dependent variable *Job Satisfaction* is derived by asking public managers to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement "All in all, I am satisfied with my job" (1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=somewhat agree, 4=strongly agree). The frequency and percentage of each category are revealed in the top part of Table 2. While using a single item to measure psychological construct is typically discouraged due to the presumptuously low measurement reliability (Wanous et al. 1997), job satisfaction can be an exception. Some studies suggest that a single-item measure of overall job satisfaction has

face validity advantages over scales based on a sum of specific job facet satisfaction items (Scarpello and Campbell 1983; Wanous et al. 1997)

Job satisfaction, by nature, is a psychological process resulting from the interaction between the individual and the environment. Individual demographic characteristics proved to be important factors shaping job satisfaction. One consistent finding is that women tend to report a higher level of job satisfaction than male peers (Clark 1997). As to race differences, the findings are mixed, with different possible scenarios being covered (Bartel 1981). Education is indicative of individual ambition and capacity, and shows a potential to influence job satisfaction. Age is also incorporated as a control variable.

A dummy variable is added into the equation indicating whether public managers work in Georgia or Illinois. Other NASP-III studies (e.g., Bozeman and Ponomariov 2008) have shown that the very different public personnel systems in the two states sometimes result in significant differences in outcomes and behaviors.

## Measures of Job Choice Motives

Although it is difficult to fully capture job choice motives, we include a number of items exceeding what is found in most other job choice studies. In the questionnaire, public managers were requested to "indicate the extent to which the factors below were important in making your decision to take a job at your current organization" (1= very important, 2 =somewhat important, 3=somewhat unimportant, 4=not important). The items included the following:

- Opportunity for advancement within the organization's hierarchy
- Opportunity for training and career development
- Job security
- The organization's reputation for opportunities for women or minorities
- Overall quality and reputation of this organization
- The organization's pension or retirement plan
- Desire for less bureaucratic red tape
- Desire for a low conflict work environment
- Desire for increased responsibility
- Benefits (medical, insurance)
- "Family friendly" policies (e.g., flexible work hours, parental leave)

- Salary
- Ability to serve the public and the public interest
- Few, if any, alternative job offers
- Relatively low cost of living in the region
- Employment opportunities for spouse or partner

To construct job choice motives measurement models from the data, and to infer different kinds of motives from aggregation of individual variables, a factor analysis of these sixteen items was conducted. The analysis employed a principal component solution (with a varimax rotation, imposing an orthogonality constraint). Five dimensions were extracted, accounting for 61% of the total variance in the job choice motives construct. The results are provided in Table 1.

As is conventional, the factor dimensions were

named according to the highest loading variables. The first factor, *Career Advancement*, accounts for roughly 15% of the total variance (after rotation). The items with the greatest loadings on this factor refer to the opportunities for advancement, training and career development, and more responsibilities. The factor *Smooth Working Environment* constitutes the second job choice motive. It explains roughly the same magnitude of the total variance as the first factor. The statements with the greatest loadings on *Smooth Working Environment* focus on flexible working hours, less conflict and less red tape.

The third factor, *Job Security*, explains 14% of the total variance. This factor includes the motive items job security, benefits (medical, insurance), and pension or retirement plan. The *Economic Concerns* factor forms

**Table 1.** Principal components analysis of job choice motive

Public Managers' Job Choice Motives	Mean	St. Dev.	Factor Loadings (+/- .50 or greater) <sup>1</sup>					
			FI	FII	FIII	FIV	FV	
Opportunity for advancement within the organization's hierarchy	3.05	.91	.82					
Opportunity for training and career development	3.19	.81	.78					
Desire for increased responsibility	3.06	.85	.64					
Overall quality and reputation of this organization	3.01	.88						
Salary	3.26	.72						
Desire for less bureaucratic red tape	2.23	1.03		.77				
Desire for a low conflict work environment	2.47	1.05		.82				
"Family friendly" policies (e.g., flexible work hours, parental leave)	2.78	1.06		.57				
The organization's reputation for opportunities for women or minorities	2.09	1.07		.52				
Job security	3.49	.77			.71			
The organization's pension or retirement plan	3.31	.85			.83			
Benefits (medical, insurance)	3.41	.82			.83			
Few, if any, alternative job offers	2.12	1.05					.50	
Relatively low cost of living in the region	2.02	.99					.77	
Employment opportunities for spouse or partner	1.61	.95					.84	
Ability to serve the public and the public interest	3.27	.83						.77

Factor I= Career Advancement

Factor II=Smooth Working Environment

Factor III=Job Security

Factor IV=Economic Constraints

Factor V= Public Value

<sup>1</sup> Principal Components Analysis; Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of study variables.

Dependent Variable	Frequency	Percent
Job satisfaction		
Strongly disagree	31	3.94
Somewhat disagree	85	10.81
Somewhat agree	358	45.55
Strongly agree	312	39.69
Study Variables	Mean	Std dev.
Job satisfaction	3.02	.80
Male	.57	.50
Minorities	.30	.84
Married	.78	.41
Education	4.76	1.21
Georgia	.55	.50

the fourth motive, and refers to living cost, employment opportunities for spouse and limited choices of job offers and accounts for 10% of the total variance. Finally, the factor *Public Value* includes items related to public managers' desire to serve the public and the public interest. The factor accounts for 8% of the variance in the original matrix.

The public administration literature puts a great deal of emphasis on factors such as job security and serving the public interest and tends to focus less on career advancement issues and internal characteristics of the working environment. However, this study seems to suggest that public managers are more motivated by the work per se than by the meaning attached to the work.

### Regression Results

The ordinal logit model is deployed for this study. After completing the factor analysis, factor scores were calculated and serve as independent variables into the regression equation. The findings are presented in Table 3. The interpretation of the model focuses mainly on the overall relationships (sign and significance) and estimated odds ratios (exponentiated B).

Both individual- and contextual-level control variables turn out to be determinants of individual job

satisfaction. Highly educated people tend to be less satisfied. One standard deviation increase in the education level amounts to 13% less satisfaction with the job. Women did not report a higher level of job satisfaction in the study, so did minorities and married people. Younger managers are more likely to be satisfied with the job than older managers. One standard deviation increase in age leads to a 35% higher likelihood of being satisfied with the job; however, the age differences seem not to be attributable to different job choice motives (the interaction terms prove not significant)

Noticeable are the influences exercised by context. Public managers working in the state of Georgia report a significantly higher level of job satisfaction than those in Illinois. The odds of being satisfied with the job are 67% higher for public managers in Georgia than in Illinois, holding other variables constant. The effect holds significance even after controlling the interactions between job choice motives and the context. Despite the leading role Georgia played in dismantling the civil service system, and as a part of that, terminating traditional job tenure protection, there is no difference across states for those who considered job security a primary motive.

Let us consider the implications of the results with

**Table 3.** Regression of job satisfaction on job choice motives

Dependent Variable	B	Standard Err.	Exp(B)
Job satisfaction			
Interdependent Variables			
Job choice motives			
Career advancement	.26***	.08	1.29
Smooth working environment	.03	.08	1.03
Job security	.05	.07	1.05
Economic concerns	-.04	.07	.96
Public value	.38***	.08	1.46
Individual Demographics			
Male	-.10	.15	.90
Minorities	.11	.09	1.12
Education	-.11*	.06	.89
Age	.04**	.01	1.04
Married	.19	.18	1.22
Context Variables			
Georgia	.51***	.15	1.67

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<.05 \* p<.01

respect to the hypotheses.

As we see from Table 3, hypothesis H1.1 is not supported. Public managers' job satisfaction seems not be affected by their pursuit of a *Smooth Working Environment*. The results for *Job Security* are also not as expected; there is no significant relationship to job satisfaction. This is in all likelihood related, at least in part, to the fact that there is so little variance in the original job security item (almost all respondents ranked it as "very important").

Our H1.3 suggested that public managers motivated by salary will tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction. The analysis is complicated by the fact that the factor analysis specification did not include salary as a significant loading on any of the emergent factors. Thus, we performed a separate regression analysis, identical to the overall model and including the same controls, but also including the variable "salary motive." The results show that salary is not a significant determinant of public managers' job satisfaction, even though the relationship seems positively related. To a considerable extent, the lack of significance is attributable to the limited variations in the salary choice. Over 90% of public managers rated salary as an important factor in

pursuing a public position.

According to H1.4, public managers motivated by less predictable secondary economic factors will have lower levels of job satisfaction. The relationship of the EXP(B) between the *Economic Concerns* factor and job satisfaction is in the expected direction, but not significant.

Our prediction (H2.0) was that public managers motivated by career advancement will, all else being equal, have higher levels of job satisfaction. That expectation is supported by the results, which show that the Career Advancement factor is associated with a 31% increased likelihood of job satisfaction. Finally, our hypothesis about public values motivation (H3.0) was strongly supported. *The Public Value* factor is associated with a more than 46% increased likelihood of job satisfaction.

### CONCLUSIONS

While expectancy theory is useful in developing our hypotheses, the core idea behind expectancy theory, is not supported in the study. Whether public manager's job choice motives rest on predictable factors such as

*Job Security* and *Salary* or on less predictable factors such as *Smooth Working Environment* and secondary economic concerns, their job satisfaction seems not to be affected by the same factors. Instead, professed motivations and organizational contexts shape the extent to which managers are satisfied with their job. Those whose motives focus primarily on *Career Advancement* and *Public Value* seem more satisfied. Others' motives, though important in the pursuit of a public position, are not affecting their job satisfaction. Public managers in Georgia are more satisfied with their job compared to their peers in Illinois. Whether the higher level of job satisfaction is linked with the massive reform efforts (including pay-for performance and elimination of job protection) in Georgia remains to be explored.

While our study has, it seems, provided an incremental advance in knowledge of the relationship of job choice motives to job satisfaction, several avenues of research remain to be explored. In particular, we are concerned about the framing effect of previous jobs. Does it make a difference if one has worked in other public organizations or in the private sector? Similarly we are concerned about the distinctiveness of public managers. Would we find similar results among business managers or, perhaps more relevant, among nonprofit managers? We can assume that nonprofit managers, as public managers, often have strong public values motivations, but do these have similar impacts on job satisfaction?

## APPENDIX

### NASP-III Sample and Project Design

This study employs data from the third phase of the National Administrative Studies Project, an ongoing set of studies begun in 1985 at Syracuse University. Each new edition of the National Administration Studies Project (NASP) aims to increase our empirical knowledge of public management and administration. NASP-III is an attempt to blend the goals of NASP-I and II while addressing a few new themes of its own. NASP-III aims to collect data on public and nonprofit managers. It expands beyond a single state, surveying managers in Georgia and Illinois, but does not have a national focus. Unlike NASP-II, which focused on a single functional agency (health and human services), the NASP-III sample includes managers from agencies and organizations of numerous functions.

The NASP-III project managers chose Georgia and Illinois as a focus for sampling for three inter-related reasons. First, resources for the project were constrained. Second, project affiliates worked in the two states. Third, both Georgia and Illinois are strong representatives of the U.S. at large. According to the Associated Press, which ranked Census data from each state and the District of Columbia on how closely it matched the national averages on 21 factors such as age, race, education, income, industrial mix, immigration, and proportion of people living in urban and rural areas, Illinois ranked first as the most representative of the nation and Georgia ranked sixth. Illinois and Georgia are similar in industrial mix, the education levels of the population, and migration (National Public Radio 2007) and both states are generally representative of the U.S. population. However, although Georgia and Illinois both have large urban and rural communities and are similar in geographic area (Illinois is 55,583 square miles and Georgia is 57,906 square miles), they have strikingly different cultural, political, and bureaucratic environments. Nationwide, Georgia is one of the leading states for government human resources reform including the dissolution of civil service and the expansion of at-will employment, while Illinois has a history of strong unions and centralized human resource management.

The population of managers in Georgia was drawn from the Georgia Department of Audits' (DoA) comprehensive list of state employees who were on state agency payrolls during the 2003/2004 fiscal year. We removed employees at technical colleges, commissions, authorities, the office of the governor, and institutions from the judicial or legislative branch. In addition we removed employees at institutions with fewer than 20 employees. 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.

## Survey Administration

The survey administration included a pre-contact letter, Wave I survey with letter, follow-up postcard mailing, Wave II mailing, follow-up contacts by phone call and email, and a final Wave III mailing. The survey was closed January 1, 2006. We received 549 responses in Wave I, 135 in Wave II, and 111 in Wave III from the public sector respondents. There are no significant differences between response waves.

Regarding the response rates, the study began with a sample of 2,000 public sector respondents but the sample was reduced to 1,849 (912 Georgia, 937 Illinois) because of respondents who had retired (16 cases) or were no longer working for the state (135 cases). The survey was closed with 432 responses from Georgia and 358 from Illinois public managers. Comparison of the sampling population, respondents and nonrespondents showed that respondents and nonrespondents do not significantly vary by state, gender, job rank, salary (for Georgia), or agency of employment.

## REFERENCES

- Alonso and Lewis (2001). Public Service Motivation and Job Performance: Evidence From the Federal Sector. *The American Review of Public Administration* 31(4): 363-380.
- Bartel (1981). Race Differences in Job Satisfaction: A Reappraisal. *The Journal of Human Resources* 16(2): 294-303.
- Bozeman, B. and B. Ponomariov. (2008) Sector Switching from a Business to a Government Job: Fast Track Careers or Fast Track to Nowhere? *Public Administration Review* 69(1):77-91
- Bright, L. (2008). Does Public Service Motivation Really Make a Difference on the Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intentions of Public Employees? *The American Review of Public Administration* 38(2): 149-166.
- Brunetto and Farr-Wharton (2005). The impact of NPM on the job satisfaction of a range of Australian public sector employees. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* 43(2): 289-304.
- Clark (1997). Job satisfaction and gender: Why are women so happy at work? *Labour Economics* 4(4): 341-372.
- Crewson (1997). Public-Service Motivation: Building Empirical Evidence of Incidence and Effect. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*. 7(4): 499-518.
- DeSantis, V. S. and S. L. Durst. (1996) Comparing Job Satisfaction among Public-and Private-Sector Employees. *American Review of Public Administration*. 26(3): 327-344
- Judge, Thoresen, Bono et al. (2001). The job satisfaction-job performance relationship: A qualitative and quantitative review. *Psychological Bulletin* 127(3): 376-407.
- Korunka, Scharitzer, Carayon et al. (2003). Employee strain and job satisfaction related to an implementation of quality in a public service organization: a longitudinal study. *Work & Stress* 17(1): 52-72.
- Lewis, G. B. and S. A. Frank, S.A. 2002. Who wants to work for the government? *Public administration review*. 62 (4). 395-404.
- Locke, E. A. (1976). The nature and causes of job satisfaction. In *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology*. Edited by M. Dunnette (1297-1349). Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.
- Mitchell (1974). Expectancy models of job satisfaction, occupational preference and effort: A theoretical, methodological, and empirical appraisal. *Psychological Bulletin* 81(12): 1053-1077.
- Perry and Wise (1990). The Motivational Bases of Public Service. *Public Administration Review* 50(3): 367-373.
- Petty, McGee and Cavender (1984). A Meta-Analysis of the Relationships Between Individual Job Satisfaction and Individual Performance. *Academy of Management Review* 9(4): 712-721.
- Scarpello and Campbell (1983). Job Satisfaction: Are all the parts there? *Personnel Psychology* 36(3): 577-600.
- Tietjen, M. A. and R. M. Myers. (1998) Motivation and job satisfaction. *Management Decision* 36(4): 226-231
- Vroom, V. (1964) *Work and Motivation*. New York, NY:

Wiley Publishing.

Wright, B.E. and B. S. Davis. (2003). Job Satisfaction In The Public Sector: The Role of the Work Environment. *The American Review of Public Administration* 33(1): 70-90.

Wanous, Reichers and Hudy (1997). Overall job satisfaction: How good are single-item measures? *Journal of Applied Psychology* 82(2): 247-252.

**Xuhong Su** is a doctorate student in the Department of Public Administration and Policy at University of Georgia. Her research interest focus on public management and organizational theory, and can be reached by xuhongsu@uga.edu

**Barry Bozeman** is Ander Crenshaw Professor and Regents' Professor of Public Policy at the University Georgia. He holds appointments as Adjunct Honorary Professor of Political Science at the University of Copenhagen and as Distinguished Visiting Scholar of Public Policy and Research Professor of Political Science at Arizona State University. His research has been published numerous journals in public management and policy areas. He can be reached at bbozeman@uga.edu.

**Received: March 1, 2009**

**Accepted with no revision: April 30, 2009**