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## Why choose a public sector job?

### A quantitative study into the motives of newcomers and job switchers

Public managers have to deal with major challenges that put pressure on the public sector as an employer, caused by declining budgets which lead to downsizing, organizational restructuring, and high expectations to perform better with fewer resources (Piatak, 2017; Borst, 2018). These pressures have affected the public image of the model employer and play out at a time when there are already radical changes in the world of work of public employees including a shift from detailed job descriptions to possibilities for job crafting, and from life-time employment to precarious employment (Schaufeli, 2013; Hesketh & Cooper, 2017; Bozeman & Ponomariov, 2009). These radical changes force public organizations to increasingly focus on the management of human capital (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

While public management research increasingly focuses on how to manage this human capital, not much attention is paid to understanding the results of these pressures and radical changes on the underlying recruitment, attraction, and selection of new employees in the public sector (Hansen, 2014; Leisink & Steijn, 2008). However, evidence shows that public managers struggle to attract highly-qualified recruits and tend to lose competitions with private sector employers (Feeney, 2008; Asseburg & Homberg, 2018; Chetkovich, 2003). The classical image of the public sector as a model employer due to its Human Resource Management (HRM) system that treats its employees as valued assets supporting their commitment, motivation and skills, seems no longer applicable (Leisink, Borst, Knies, & Battista, 2019; Morgan & Allington, 2002; Boyne et al., 1999).

In this regard, insight into the motives of newcomers that still choose for a public sector job as well as the employees that switch from the private to the public sector is very relevant (Hansen, 2014). However, the job orientation literature suffers from several limitations and offers only partial insight. First, it has almost always focused on either pre-entry level/first entries (see literature review Korac, Saliterer, & Weigand, 2018), or on sector switchers from the private to public sector (e.g., Su and Bozeman, 2009). The first group of studies is limited because it is not sure whether pre-entry people actually choose a job in the public sector and because there is a large difference in motives between pre- and post-entries (Kjeldsen, 2014). The second group of studies is limited due to its excessive focus on PSM (sectoral motives) and other organizational characteristics which are often hard to influence by organizations (e.g. Kjeldsen, 2014; Su & Bozeman, 2009).

Secondly, the job orientation literature usually distinguishes between motives pertaining to job characteristics and organization

characteristics (e.g. Thomas & Wise, 1999). Within the set of job related motives, a further subdivision is often proposed into, for example, intrinsic and extrinsic job motives (O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1980; Vandenabeele et al., 2001), but studies also select factors of interest without any theoretically informed categorization (e.g., Hansen, 2014; Su & Bozeman, 2009). As a result, only partial insights are provided which are also barely applicable for recruiters and other HRM staff (Vandenabeele et al., 2001).

This study will overcome these limitations in two ways. First, we create an integral conceptual framework of motives from a public HRM perspective. More specifically, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) model will be used to cluster motives. Second, we adopt a comparative focus on public sector switchers, private sector switchers, and newcomers, and examine the differences between these groups in their HRM motives, organizational and sectoral motives. We will apply this perspective to answer the question:

### What are the differences in motives between newcomers and (public and private sector) job switchers to choose for a job in the public sector?

To answer this question, surveys from a representative sample of Dutch public servants starting their job in the public sector (central, regional and local government) will be analyzed from the years 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2014. These public servants answered various questions related to HRM motives including autonomy, work pressure, flexible hours, developmental opportunities, job security, work-life balance, travel hours etc. We will compare the three groups of public sector switchers, private sector switchers and newcomers by building three models applying Structural Equation Modeling. Through this design, this study also makes a methodological contribution to the existing job orientation literature, which is dominated by mono-method and mono-measure approaches. To our knowledge, this is the first study that applies structural equation modeling (SEM) by developing clusters of motives (Cf. Korac, Saliterer, & Weigand, 2018). SEM is particularly useful since we use the AMO model and it has been demonstrated that several clusters within the AMO model also interact: SEM is the outspoken model to analyze these (Blom et al., 2018).

Before the methodological design is described in section 3, section 2 will present a theoretical overview and combine insights from job orientation literature with (public) HRM literature to hypothesize about variations in sector switch motives. The results will be presented in section 4. Conclusions and discussion will follow in section 5.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1 Clusters of motives for job orientation and sector switching

Previous studies have focused on the job orientation of employees by distinguishing various sets of factors that are important to individuals in evaluating and choosing jobs (Thomas & Wise, 1999). These sets of factors are known under various labels, including for example work values (Judge & Bretz, 1992), preferences (Korac, Saliterer, & Weigand, 2018), and motives (Hansen, 2014). While these labels are used interchangeably, we use the term motives as the conceptualization of

motives entails not merely a focus on (passive) intentions, as the concept preferences does, but also on (active) behavior. As this study examines employees who actually chose a job in the public sector, the term motives seems to be more appropriate.

A common division in motives is between job characteristics and organization characteristics, with job characteristics often further subdivided into intrinsic and extrinsic motives (e.g. Thomas & Wise, 1999; O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1980; Vandenabeele et al., 2001). However, studies have also simply selected factors of interest without any categorization (e.g., Hansen, 2014; Su & Bozeman, 2009). Two shortcomings characterize these approaches. On the one hand, these categorizations often do not match and merely give partial descriptions (Vandenabeele et al., 2001). On the other hand, these are barely applicable for recruiters and other HRM staff.

Bearing these limitations in mind, the focus in this study is more overarching and takes a public HRM perspective. From a public HRM perspective we propose a categorization in line with the job orientation literature: organizational motives, job motives, and sectoral motives. We add sectoral characteristics since this class is also often proposed in the specific niche of sector switching within the job orientation literature. Our classification corresponds with the classification, which the public HRM literature uses to classify the motives of internal public employees (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Steijn, 2004; Vermeeren & van Geest, 2012; Wright, 2001; Borst et al., 2017). We regard these also relevant for the analysis of the motives of new public employees.

The HRM literature makes a further subdivision of the job characteristics which we apply to job motives. Increasingly, the Job Demands-Resources model is accepted by HRM scholars as an overarching model which can be leveraged to frame HRM practices (Shantz, Alfes, & Arevshatian, 2016). Just like HRM practices, job resources are factors that help employees to deal with the execution of their job and include developmental opportunities, autonomy, and job security (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). However, the JD-R framework adds to the HRM literature through its distinction between negative and positive job characteristics. These negative job characteristics including for example workload and work pressure are labeled as job demands which are defined as factors that cost energy to deal with. We, therefore, propose to subdivide the job motives also into positive and negative job motives.

While the JD-R model is a good overarching model for subdividing job characteristics/motives, a downside of the JD-R model is its premise that all job resources are equally important (Borst et al., 2017). Several public HR scholars argue that distinctions need to be made within the job resources cluster since clusters of resources differ in their impact on employees' outcomes (Borst et al., 2017). The public HRM literature suggests such a further classification of job characteristics by making use of the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) model (Blom, Kruijten, Van der Heijden, & Van Thiel, 2018). Within the AMO-model, the ability dimension is defined as employees having the skills, knowledge, and abilities to perform. The motivation dimension is defined as employees' willingness and drive to perform. The opportunity dimension refers to employees having the responsibility, authority, and opportunity in their work to solve problems and make decisions (Appelbaum et al., 2000). We propose that this AMO model can be used to subdivide the

job motives into these ability, motivation, and opportunity enhancing motives.

In sum, from the above discussion it can be deduced that from a public HRM perspective the motives of individuals to choose for a job in the public sector are ideally typified in three main categories, namely aspects related to the job, the organization, and the sector. We propose that job-related aspects can be subdivided into demand-related and resource-related motives derived from the JD-R model. Moreover, we propose that the resource-related motives can be further subdivided into ability-related, motivation-related, and opportunity-related job motives. As the data used lack information about ability-enhancing motives, this resource-related class will be discarded below. In other words, in section 2.2, we will develop hypotheses for demand-related motives (2.2.1), motivation-enhancing motives (2.2.2), opportunity-enhancing motives (2.2.3), organizational motives (2.2.4), and sectoral motives (2.2.5).

## 2.2 Differences between groups of employees in their motives to choose for a job in the public sector

### 2.2.1 Demand-related motives

Schaufeli and Taris' (2014, pp. 64-65) overview of researched job demands in the JD-R model shows that workload and work pressure are two typical and frequently studied job demands. Workload and work pressure refer to quantitative demands including amount of tasks and amount of time needed, work pace including expected time to complete a task, and emotional demands including the experienced intensity of work (e.g. Mintz-Binder & Sanders, 2012). We argue that perceived workload and work pressure are demand-related motives which feature choices for a job in the public sector.

While studies about workload and work pressure are abundant in semi-public organizations including healthcare and education, systematic empirical comparisons of the workload and work pressures of public and private employees are absent. Studies on related concepts such as hours worked and work stress are ambiguous. Public opinion has it that compared to private employees, public employees work fewer hours and are less willing to exert extra effort, and there is evidence to support this image (Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007). However, several scholars show no variations in for example work stress or work effort between public and private employees (Macklin, Smith, & Dollard, 2006; Frank & Lewis, 2004).

Also in the sector choice literature there is no consensus about these demands. Bozeman and Ponomariov's (2009) empirical study among non-switchers and switchers from the private to the public sector shows that demand-related motives including a desire for less red tape and a low conflict environment (which can be seen as drivers of workload and work pressure (Quratulain & Kahn, 2013)) did not differ between the two groups. The same results seem to hold for newcomers in the public sector. A literature review of studies that cover individuals at the pre-entry level shows that work-life balance (WLB) is an indecisive factor to choose specifically for a job in the public sector (Korac et al., 2018). WLB might be seen as a factor indicating experienced work pressure (e.g., Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011). On the basis of previous studies the following hypotheses are posed:

**Hypothesis 1a:** Demand-related motives including workload, and work pressure are neither more, nor less decisive factors for private employees who shift job to the public sector in comparison with public employees who switch to another public organization.

**Hypothesis 1b:** Demand-related motives including workload, and work pressure are neither more, nor less decisive factors for newcomers in the public sector in comparison with public employees who switch to another public organization.

**Hypothesis 1c:** Demand-related motives including workload, and work pressure are neither more, nor less decisive factors for newcomers in the public sector in comparison with private employees who shift job to the public sector.

### 2.2.2 Motivation enhancing motives

Blom et al. (2018) distinguish between motivation-enhancing HRM practices such as external rewards, performance management, and (internal) promotion opportunities. Examples of rewards include high pay, fringe benefits, and advancement (Borst & Lako, 2017; Chen, Bozeman, & Berman, 2015). We argue that perceptions of these factors can be motives for choosing a job in the public sector.

Similar to the image that public employees work less hard, public opinion has it that high salary and promotion opportunities are low relative to the private sector due to external government-controlled constraints on these HRM practices (Brewer & Walker, 2013, cf. Blom et al., 2018). Many studies confirm that public sector employees are less interested in high pay and promotion opportunities than private employees (e.g. Buelens & Van Den Broeck, 2007; Frank & Lewis 2004; Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2006). However, a large study among 32 countries found far more mixed results regarding salary although the authors themselves conclude that they predominantly find evidence that public sector workers are less motivated by monetary gain than their private sector counterparts (Bullock, Stritch, and Rainey, 2015). By contrast, public opinion has it that public employees have far more fringe benefits due to the model employer status of the public sector relative to the private sector (Bozeman & Ponomariov, 2009). However, it appears that public employees are not more interested than private employees in fringe benefits (Lyons et al., 2006).

It seems that the image of relatively low salary and promotion opportunities in the public sector vis-à-vis the private sector, and the image that the public sector provides more fringe benefits than the private sector is especially salient among newcomers but not so much among private sector employees. Chetkovic (2003) shows for example that salary is frequently cited by newcomers as a major reason to choose for the private sector over the public sector. The literature review of Korac et al. (2018) confirms not only that salary is negatively related with the preference for public sector employment among newcomers but also adds that career advancement/promotion opportunities are also negatively related to a preference for public sector employment. The results for fringe benefits are mixed but merely two studies tested this relationship before (Korac et al., 2018). Contrastingly, the results about these motives in the private sector are inconclusive. While some studies find a negative correlation between high income motives and preference for the public sector (Van de Walle, Steijn, & Jilke, 2015; Ko &

Jun, 2015), others find insignificant correlations (Wright & Christensen 2010; Lewis & Frank, 2002). As shown by Bozeman and Ponomariov (2009), the same insignificant differences related to advancement/promotion opportunities and fringe benefits are found between non-switchers and private-to-public switchers. In other words, while public employees find motivation enhancing motives relatively the least important to choose for a job in the public sector, newcomers find these relatively the most important and private sector employees feature somewhere in between. This discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 2a:** Motivation enhancing motives including salary, fringe benefits, chance for promotion, and career development opportunities are more decisive factors for private employees who shift job to the public sector than for public employees who switch to another public organization.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Motivation enhancing motives including salary, fringe benefits, chance for promotion and career development opportunities are more<sup>1</sup> decisive factors for newcomers in the public sector than for public employees who switch to another public organization.

**Hypothesis 2c:** Motivation enhancing motives including salary, fringe benefits, chance for promotion and career development opportunities are more decisive factors for newcomers in the public sector than for private employees who shift job to the public sector.

### 2.2.3 Opportunity enhancing motives

Blom et al. (2018) argue that typical motivation enhancing factors are aimed at providing employees with interesting work through responsibilities, and opportunities to solve problems and make decisions (Vermeeren, 2014; Blom, Kruijven, Van der Heijden, & Van Thiel, 2018). It is therefore argued that individuals' perceptions of interesting work content and autonomy can be seen as motives to choose a job in the public sector.

Public opinion has it that the work content and autonomy of public employees are relatively limited due to several barriers including red tape, formal regulations, and hierarchical control (e.g., Chen et al., 2018; Rainey and Bozeman 2000). However, many studies show that public sector employees find interesting work content more important than their private sector counterparts (Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2006; Frank & Lewis, 2004; Karl & Sutton, 1998). Still, other studies find no difference between public and private sector employees (Houston, 2011). Also the need for autonomy seems to differ insignificantly between public and private sector employees (Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007).

The sector choice literature about these opportunity-enhancing motives is also rather ambiguous but predominantly supports the image that autonomy and work content are limited in the public sector. While for example Korac et al. (2018) show that interesting work and autonomy are insignificant (but not negative) motives for newcomers to prefer public sector employment, Chetkovic (2003, p. 671) concludes that many newcomers believe that the only government jobs open to them at this stage would be "routine and narrow in scope, with no room for

<sup>1</sup> To clarify: Newcomers find these motivation enhancing motives more decisive than other groups of employees but at the same time rate these motives negative in the public sector.

influence or autonomy". Also Van de Walle et al. (2015) show that newcomers who hold these two opportunity-enhancing motives are less drawn to the public sector. However, Georgellis, Lossa, and Tabvuma (2011) find that the nature of work is a significant motive for private employees to switch to the public sector. While it can be argued, based on these latter results, that opportunity motives are more important for private employees that switch to the public sector than for newcomers, the other insignificant results give insufficient reason to expect that private sector switchers find these motives more important than public-to-public switchers. Therefore, the following hypotheses are posed:

**Hypothesis 3a:** Opportunity-enhancing motives including work content, and autonomy are less decisive factors for private employees who shift job to the public sector than for public employees who switch to another public organization.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Opportunity-enhancing motives including work content, and autonomy are less decisive factors for newcomers in the public sector than for public employees who switch to another public organization.

**Hypothesis 3c:** Opportunity-enhancing motives including work content, and autonomy are less decisive factors for newcomers in the public sector than for private employees who shift job to the public sector.

#### 2.2.4 Organizational motives

Borst et al. (2017) distinguished organization-related resources, including the mode of leadership, the result-oriented focus of the organization and the provision of information as a separate cluster in the JD-R framework that can stimulate attitudes and inherently performance. In line with this framework, Knies & Leisink (2008) also suggested that these factors can be seen as organizational motives for individuals to choose for a job in the public sector.

Public organizations are mostly characterized as bureaucratic organizations with hierarchical management, standardized procedures, and hard to measure and ambiguous goals. These factors are often labeled as hindering and tedious. It is therefore no surprise that Hansen (2014) finds that a desire for flexible and flat organizational structures is a decisive factor for employees to leave the public sector for the private sector. However, Bozeman and Ponomariov's (2009) study shows no significant differences in bureaucratic motives between nonswitchers and private to public sector switchers. In contrast, Korac et al. (2018) do confirm that newcomers find the superior relationships and management a strong negative motive to choose public sector employment. In addition, Chetkovich (2003) argues that newcomers also find that other organizational factors, including the effectiveness, and bureaucracy of the public sector, make the public sector less attractive as an employer. This discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 4a:** Organizational motives including the result orientation of the organization, the way the organization is managed, the way the managers manage, and the information provision and communication within the organization are neither more, nor less decisive factors for private employees who shift job to the public sector in comparison with public employees who switch to another public organization.

**Hypothesis 4b:** Organizational motives including the result orientation of the organization, the way the organization is managed, the way the managers manage, and the information provision and communication within the organization are more<sup>2</sup> decisive factors for newcomers in the public sector than for public employees who switch to another public organization.

**Hypothesis 4c:** Organizational motives including the result orientation of the organization, the way the organization is managed, the way the managers manage, and the information provision and communication within the organization are more decisive factors for newcomers in the public sector than for private employees who shift job to the public sector.

### 2.2.5 Sectoral motive

The most often mentioned sectoral motive in sector choice literature is Public Service Motivation (PSM) (Kjeldsen, 2014; Korac et al. 2018). The image exist that public sector employees have higher levels of PSM than private sector employees because individuals who are oriented toward helping others and contributing to society believe that this is most favorably matched by seeking employment in public organizations (Leisink & Steijn, 2008, Cf. Kjeldsen, 2014). Although many studies in the sector changing literature (e.g., Bozeman & Ponomariov, 2009; Korac et al. 2018) as well as sector comparison literature (e.g., Lyons et al., 2006) confirm this relationship, these same studies also confirm that, to a large extent, PSM also exists among private employees. Additionally, it is also shown that in public organizations, some dimensions of PSM barely play a role for employees' attitudes such as satisfaction and motivation, while in semi-public organizations (including education and healthcare), they do (e.g. Borst, 2018).

These nuances are also reflected in the sector choice literature about newcomers. Korac et al. (2018) show for example that PSM in total, and the self-sacrifice and attraction to public policy making dimensions are typical motives for newcomers to prefer public sector employment. However, the dimensions commitment to the public interest and compassion are insignificant motives to prefer public sector employment. In contrast, Bozeman and Ponomariov (2009), do confirm that non-switchers have a significantly higher motive to have the ability to serve the public and the public interest than private to public sector switchers.

Although the overall image is confirmed for private-to-public switchers, especially the nuances in the newcomers' group provoke discussion in the sector switching literature whether we need to move beyond PSM as an overarching motive for sector choice (Kjeldsen, 2014). Kjeldsen (2014) argues for example that several public service jobs are almost identical within the public and private sectors (e.g., teaching and nursing). In line with this argument, we focus on the motive to what extent individuals actually prefer to work in the public sector and not in for example the private or the healthcare sector; we do not focus on PSM because this is possibly not the most representative proxy for the sectoral motive. However, drawing on the PSM literature, it can be

<sup>2</sup> To clarify: as in the case of the motivation-enhancing motives, while it is expected that newcomers find these motivation enhancing motives more decisive than other groups of employees, they rate these motives negatively in the public sector.

argued that public switchers possibly find sector motives the most important, followed by respectively newcomers, and private-to-public sector switchers. The following hypotheses are therefore posed:

**Hypothesis 5a:** The sectoral motive to choose particularly for the public sector over the private sector is a less decisive factor for private employees who shift job to the public sector than for public employees who switch to another public organization.

**Hypothesis 5b:** The sectoral motive to choose particularly for the public sector over the private sector is a less decisive factor for newcomers in the public sector than for public employees who switch to another public organization.

**Hypothesis 5c:** The sectoral motive to choose particularly for the public sector over the private sector is a more decisive factor for newcomers in the public sector than for private employees who shift job to the public sector.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Data collection

Every other year, the Dutch Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations conducts a "Personnel and Mobility Survey" (Personeels en Mobiliteitsonderzoek; POMO)<sup>3</sup>. To test the hypotheses, we used the data collected in 2004 ( $n = 3.546$ ), 2006 ( $n = 4.726$ ), 2008 ( $n = 5.578$ ) and 2014 ( $n = 2.517$ ). We chose to follow the definition of "public" in the legal sense by focusing on employees entering municipalities, provinces, water boards, central government (including police and military), and the legal authorities. The samples of these four years are representative for the complete population of people entering the Dutch public sector. Unfortunately, we were unable to use the samples of 2010 and 2012 since our key variables (motives to switch to and/or choose for the public sector) were formulated in a different way than in the other years.

As our hypotheses focused on public employees, private employees and newcomers, other employment statuses were not included. We also excluded 111 respondents who scored none of the motives to choose for the public sector and another 661 respondents who had one or more missings on the (observed) control variables. We ended up with a total dataset of 9.401 respondents entering the public sector. See table 1 for the demographics.

<sup>3</sup> The authors would like to thank the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations for granting permission to make use of the dataset. For details on the data see [www.overheidensarbeid.nl](http://www.overheidensarbeid.nl)

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the data

	Respondents (n)	Respondents (%)
Year		
2004	1.727	18.4%
2006	2.722	29.0%
2008	3.473	36.9%
2014	1.479	15.7%
Public organization		
Central government	2.462	26.2%
Municipalities	3.134	33.3%
Provinces	590	6.3%
Waterboards	373	4.0%
Judicial organization	191	2.0%
Police	1.700	18.1%
Military	951	10.1%
Former employment status		
Public organization	3.360	35.8%
Private organization (e.g., industry, agriculture, service)	4.693	49.9%
Newcomer (i.e., left school at most 1.5 years ago)	1.348	14.3%

### 3.2 Measures

The respondents scored all measures on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (totally unimportant) to 5 (very important), unless stated otherwise. Since this is the first study that we know of that uses structural equation modeling in the stream of sector choice literature (cf. Korac, Saliterer, & Weigand, 2018), several scales are created, based on the AMO and the JD-R framework.

The dependent variables *public switcher versus private switcher*, *public switcher versus newcomer*, and *newcomer versus private switcher* were dummy variables, based on the survey questions: "What was your situation before you started with your new job?", and "In what government sector do you work in your new job?". We coded these as 0 and 1, in line with the operationalization of job switching/sector switching by Hansen (2014).

*Motivation-enhancing motives* was measured using four items: salary, fringe benefits, chance for promotion and career development opportunities. These practices are aimed at increasing employee motivation by providing direct incentives and fair rewards, and by providing guidance regarding the behaviors that are expected, supported, and rewarded (Vermeeren, 2014; Blom, Kruyen, Van der Heijden, & Van Thiel, 2018). Typical related practices are for example contingent rewards, performance management, and (internal) promotion opportunities (Blom, Kruyen, Van der Heijden, & Van Thiel, 2018). Salary, fringe benefits, chance for promotion and career development opportunities can be framed as *motivation enhancing motives*.

*Opportunity-enhancing motives* was measured using two items: work content and autonomy. These practices are aimed at increasing employee opportunities by providing employees with interesting work through responsibilities, and opportunities to solve problems and make decisions (Vermeeren, 2014; Blom, Kruyen, Van der Heijden, & Van Thiel, 2018). Work content and autonomy can be framed as *opportunity-enhancing motives*.

*Demand-related motives* was measured using two items: workload and work pressure. , These are typical job demands (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, pp. 64-65) . Hence, workload and work pressure can be framed as *demand-related motives*.

*Organizational motives* was measured using four items: the result orientation of the organization, the way this organization is managed, the way the managers manage, and the information provision and communication within the organization. This scale for organizational motives was validated by Knies and Leisink (2008).

*Sector motives* was measured with one item: the extent to which the preference to work in the public sector and not in for example the private or the healthcare sector played a role in the job choice. This item was measured on a 4-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (no role at all) to 4 (extremely important role). Although this variable is measured with only one item, it gives at least an important indication to what extent sector motives play a role. Moreover, as stated before, it is common practice within this stream of public administration literature, to measure motives with single indicators (observed variables).

*Control variables.* Several control variables were included which have been found to affect sector choice (e.g. Hansen, 2013; Korac et al., 2018). A distinction can be made between control variables related to the demographics of the respondents and control variables related to the characteristics of the job. In relation to the demographic controls, we included *gender* (1 = male, 2 = female), *age* (continuous variable), *migration background* (0 = native, 1 = immigrant), and *educational background* (reflecting the Dutch educational system: 1 = primary education; 2 = prevocational secondary education; 3 = sgeneral secondary education and pre-university education; 4 = secondary vocational education; 5 = higher professional education; 6 = university education; 7 = PhD. Related to the characteristics of the job, the literature shows a distinction between characteristics of the old job, and characteristics of the new job. As this study includes private sector switchers, public sector switchers, and a large sample of newcomers, we focus on characteristics of the new job. We included *contract type* (1 = permanent contract, 2 = temporary contract), *full-time equivalent* (1 = part-time, 2 = fulltime), *job level versus educational level* (ranging from 1 (a significantly lower job level relative to educational level) to 5 (a significantly higher job level relative to educational level)), *job level* (1 = employee, 2 = manager), and *salary* (classes increasing by € 500 with 1 = < € 1.500 and 9 = > € 5.000).

### 3.3 Strategy of analysis

To test the hypotheses, structural equation modeling is applied using Mplus version 7.4 (Muthén, Muthén & Asparouhov, 2016). A two-step approach was adopted; firstly, the measurement model was examined, followed by the analysis of the structural model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Since the measurement model included a large number of categorical variables of which many had skewed answer distributions (floor and ceiling effects), we applied the Weighted Least Squares Means and Variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimation method. The WLSMV estimation method does not assume normally distributed variables and provides the best option for modelling categorical data (Brown, 2006). After the development of the measurement model, the factors for the

structural model are automatically corrected for skewedness and made continuous.

To test the measurement model, several fit measures were analyzed. In large samples (as in this research), the chi-square test almost always leads to the rejection of the model because the differences between the sample covariances and implied population covariances lead to a higher chi-square value when the sample size increases (Hu & Bentler, 1999). As a result, a number of alternative fit measures have been developed from which we use one of every “family” (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) are used to assess whether the model fits the data. The measures of CFI and TLI indicate fit with a threshold above .90 and excellent fit above .95. An RMSEA value indicates mediocre fit below .10, good fit below .08 and excellent fit below 0.05 (Byrne, 2012; Hu & Bentler, 1999;). In addition, construct reliability (C.R.) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were calculated for the individual constructs to test respectively the reliability and validity of our variables.

Furthermore, as some indicators in some years are not filled out, imputation is used. As in every year at least one indicator of every individual construct is filled out by the respondents, Mplus can make a real close estimate of the imputed numbers for the other indicator(s) of the individual constructs. To test whether this imputation is fairly reliable, we also included a robustness analysis of the structural models of the years 2006 and 2008 (the years in which every indicator of every single construct is filled out) to check whether the fit measures as well as the regression parameters are comparable with the overarching model so that we know for sure that the imputation is reliable.

#### **4. Results**

First, the measurement model of the study's central variables is constructed in order to assess its measurement quality and convergent and discriminant validity. Then, descriptive statistics and correlations are reported. We then examine our hypotheses on differences between groups of employees in their motives to choose for a job in the public sector by means of a structural equation model.

##### **4.1 The measurement model**

The values of the measurement model were .960 (CFI), .946 (TLI), and .084 (RMSEA) which indicate model fit. A Harman's single-factor test, in which all items are loaded onto one dimension, was performed to test for common method bias. This model had a significantly worse fit (CFI=.817, TLI=.774, RMSEA=.172) compared to the measurement model, indicating that common method bias is unlikely to influence the results (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

All items significantly loaded onto the appropriate factor (loadings  $\geq$  .56). The factors also show construct reliability (C.R.) since the C.R.'s of respectively motivation-enhancing motives, opportunity-enhancing motives, demand-related motives, and organizational motives are .798, .704, .802, and .872, exceeding the rules of thumb of .6 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Also the average variances extracted (AVE's) of the constructs are satisfactory since they all exceed the rule of thumb of .5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). More specifically, the AVE of motivation-enhancing motives is 0.502, the AVE of opportunity-enhancing motives is

0.556, the AVE of demand-related motives is 0.670, and the AVE of organizational motives is .630. We conclude from the above statistics that the reliability of our constructs is sufficiently warranted. Furthermore, the AVE of all constructs exceeds the squared correlations (see table 1 for the correlations) between the other constructs which means that their discriminant validity is sufficiently warranted.

## 4.2 Descriptive statistics

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations (S.D.), and correlations of the studied variables.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations (N=9,401)**

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1 Gender	1.42	.493	-																
2 Age	33.56	10.590	-.057***	-															
3 Migration background	.05	.228	.045***	-.059***	-														
4 Education level	4.50	1.338	.143***	.089***	.000	-													
5 Contract type	1.79	.410	.045***	-.312***	.018	-.059***	-												
6 Full-time equivalent	1.49	.500	-.367***	.175***	-.020	-.070***	.039***	-											
7 Job vis-à-vis education level	2.89	.787	-.056***	.126***	-.057***	-.064***	-.102***	.023*	-										
8 Job level	1.16	.365	-.122***	.248***	-.016	.136***	-.160***	.087***	.135***	-									
9 Salary	3.81	2.299	-.108***	.518***	-.025*	.536***	-.304***	.100***	.206***	.395***	-								
10 Public vis-à-vis private sector	.58	.493	.005	-.244***	-.006	-.118***	.274***	.030**	-.080***	-.104***	-.234***	-							
11 Public vis-à-vis newcome	.29	.452	.004	-.641***	-.042**	-.118***	.384***	.149***	-.168***	-.200***	-.503***	X <sup>6</sup>	-						
12 Newcome vis-à-vis private sector <sup>2</sup>	.78	.416	.000	.476***	.033**	.007	-.120***	-.113***	.087***	.112***	.307***	X <sup>6</sup>	X <sup>6</sup>	-					
13 Motivation enhancement motives <sup>3</sup>	3.53	1.053	.007	-.184***	.053***	-.223***	.061***	.095***	.072***	-.048***	-.218***	.097***	.097***	.013	-				
14 Opportunity enhancement motives	4.23	0.848	.018	-.025*	.029**	-.121***	.006	.055***	.128***	.068***	-.057***	.012	.016	.005	.678***	-			
15 Demand motives	3.22	1.003	.036***	-.052***	.031**	-.226***	.033***	.009	.044***	-.057***	-.176***	.072***	.083***	.017	.644***	.580***	-		
16 Organizational motives	3.38	1.015	.007	-.027**	.045***	-.249***	.024*	.053***	.068***	.013	-.151***	.028*	.037*	.011	.704***	.718***	.766***	-	
17 Sectoral motives <sup>4,5</sup>	2.44	1.012	-.003	-.008	.037***	.041***	-.010	.034**	.031**	-.005	.046***	-.177***	-.145***	-.015	.120***	.105***	.096***	.114***	-

a) \*  $\leq 0.05$  \*\*  $\leq 0.01$  \*\*\*  $\leq 0.001$

b) S.D. = standard deviation, <sup>1</sup> N = 8.053 <sup>2</sup> N = 4.708 <sup>3</sup> N = 6.041 <sup>4</sup> N = 7891 <sup>5</sup> N = 6812, <sup>6</sup> 3866, <sup>7</sup> N = 5104, <sup>8</sup> Correlations high due to overlap between dependent variables

As table 2 shows opportunity-enhancing motives are rated by far as the most important motives to choose for a job in the public sector, followed by motivation-enhancing motives, organizational motives, and demand-related motives (with respective means of 4.23, 3.53, 3.38, and 3.23). The sectoral motive is less comparable based on the mean due to its scale of 1-4 instead of 1-5. However, by using the linear transformation procedure, we can calculate the mean on a 5 point scale to be 2.92.

When looking at the importance of these motives for the three groups, it seems that there are no significant differences between the private sector switchers and newcomers in their motives to choose for a public sector job. However, it seems that both private-to-public sector switchers and newcomers find motivation-enhancing motives, demand-related motives, and organizational motives more important than public sector switchers, while public sector switchers find the sectoral motive more important than these other two groups. Additionally, opportunity-enhancing motives seem to be equally (un-)important for all three groups.

However, while providing insightful results, these bivariate comparisons do not paint a complete picture because the significance of bivariate relationships can change when controlling for the integrated control variables. The multivariate results will therefore be presented via structural equation models below.

#### 4.3 Structural equation models

In table 3, the three structural models are shown which were constructed with the three dependent variables. Model 1, 2 and 3 show respectively the results of the differences in motives between public and private job switchers, between public job switchers and newcomers, and between newcomers and private job switchers. In each model, 2 different analyses were conducted: the first analysis includes the control variables, the job related motives, and the organization related motives, while the second analysis adds the sectoral motive. The addition of the sectoral motive is tested in a separate analysis since the sectoral motive was not included in the 2014 survey.

Table 3: Structural equation models

	Model 1: Public vis-à-vis private job switchers		Model 2: Public job switchers vis-à-vis newcomers		Model 3: Newcomers vis-à-vis private job switchers	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
Gender	-.055 (.033)	-.062 (.037)	-.159* (.064)	-.123 (.071)	.057 (.049)	.054 (.054)
Age	-.020*** (.002)	-.022*** (.002)	-.145*** (.004)	-.140*** (.004)	.136*** (.003)	.133*** (.003)
Migration background	-.056 (.061)	-.015 (.068)	.023 (0.125)	.091 (.131)	-.145 (.105)	-.218 (.112)
Educational background	-.063*** (.015)	-.068*** (.016)	.297*** (.028)	.248*** (.031)	-.346*** (.021)	-.294*** (.023)
Contract type	.550*** (.031)	.562*** (.034)	.267*** (.063)	.213** (.069)	.047 (.049)	.104 (.054)
Full-time equivalent	.019 (.039)	.010 (.044)	.323*** (.084)	.308** (.098)	-.060 (.071)	-.098 (.080)
Job vis-à-vis education level	-.066*** (.020)	-.057** (.022)	-.085* (.040)	-.038 (.046)	-.051 (.029)	.022 (.032)
Job level	.011 (.042)	.034 (.046)	-.064 (.107)	-.012 (.116)	.070 (.089)	.063 (.093)
Salary	-.044*** (.010)	-.057*** (.011)	-.326*** (.026)	-.325*** (.027)	.185*** (.022)	.174*** (.024)
Motivation enhancing motives	.031 (.025)	.089*** (.028)	-.149** (.049)	-.078 (.059)	.199*** (.037)	.155*** (.042)
Opportunity enhancing motives	-.004 (.028)	-.008 (.031)	.043 (0.060)	.088 (.069)	-.084* (.043)	-.145** (.046)
Demand-related motives	.122*** (.025)	.123*** (.028)	.182** (.058)	.185** (.066)	-.088* (.037)	-.103** (.040)
Organizational motives	-.101*** (.030)	-.097*** (.030)	-.029 (0.066)	-.074 (.070)	.012 (.047)	.072 (.048)
Sectoral motives		-.247*** (.016)		-.169*** (.035)		.054* (.025)
N	8.053	6.812	4.708	3.866	6.041	5.104
R <sup>2</sup>	.191 <sup>a</sup>	.253	.838 <sup>b</sup>	.823	.717 <sup>c</sup>	.689
Model fit	CFI = .952, TLI = .943, RMSEA = .052	CFI = .949, TLI = .940, RMSEA = .055	CFI = .962, TLI = .955, RMSEA = .049	CFI = .962, TLI = .955, RMSEA = .050	CFI = .946, TLI = .936, RMSEA = .053	CFI = .938, TLI = .927, RMSEA = .057

\* ≤0.05 \*\*≤0.01 \*\*\*≤0.001

<sup>a</sup>Model with only the control variables had an R<sup>2</sup> of .182

<sup>b</sup>Model with only the control variables had an R<sup>2</sup> of .834

<sup>c</sup>Model with only the control variables had an R<sup>2</sup> of .709

First, according to hypothesis 1 a, b, and c, it was expected that demand-related motives are neither more, nor less decisive factors to work for employees in either of the sectors in comparison to the other sectors. However, as the results in table 3 show, demand-related motives are significantly more decisive motives for both newcomers and private job switchers than public job switchers (respectively  $\beta = .122, p \leq .001$ , and  $\beta = .182, p \leq .01$ ). Additionally, demand-related motives are significantly more important for newcomers than private job switchers ( $\beta = -.088, p \leq .05$ ). In other words, hypotheses 1 (a, b, and c) are rejected.

Second, hypotheses 2 a, b, and c were tested which respectively expected that motivation-enhancing motives are more decisive motives for private-to-public switchers than for public job switchers (H2a), more decisive for newcomers than for public job switchers (H2b), and more decisive for newcomers than private-to-public sector switchers (H2c). All three need to be rejected since the difference between private-to-public switchers and public switchers is insignificant ( $\beta = .031, p = ns$ ), the motivation-enhancing motives are more important for public switchers than newcomers ( $\beta = -.149, p \leq .01$ ), and are more important for newcomers than for private-to-public sector switchers ( $\beta = .199, p \leq .000$ ).

Third, hypothesis 3a and 3b stated that opportunity-enhancing motives are less decisive factors for respectively private-to-public switchers and for newcomers than for public switchers, while 3c stated that that these motives are less decisive factors for newcomers than for private-to-public switchers. As table 3 shows, no significant results were found between public sector switchers and both private to public switchers and newcomers. Hypotheses 3a and 3b therefore need to be rejected. Additionally, hypothesis 3c also needs to be rejected since newcomers find opportunity enhancing motives significantly more decisive than private to public switchers ( $\beta = -.084, p \leq .05$ ) instead of the hypothesized opposite relationship.

Fourth, according to hypothesis 4a it was expected that organizational motives are equally decisive for both private-to-public switchers and public switchers. Additionally, according to respectively hypothesis 4b and 4c it was expected that these motives are more

decisive factors for newcomers than for both public switchers and private-to-public switchers. Again, all three need to be rejected since public job switchers find organizational motives more decisive than private to public switchers ( $\beta = -.101, p \leq .001$ ), while the other two group comparisons show no significant differences in the (un-)importance of organizational motives.

Fifth, table 3 shows in accordance with hypothesis 5a and 5b that public switchers find the sectoral motive more important than private to public switchers and newcomers respectively (respectively  $\beta = -.247, p \leq .001$ , and  $\beta = -.169, p \leq .001$ ). However, in conflict with hypothesis 5c, the sectoral motive is more decisive for private to public switchers than for newcomers ( $\beta = -.054, p \leq .05$ ).

Finally, it needs to be noted that although the fit measures of all the models in table 3 have a good fit to the data, the additional explained variance of the central variables is rather low beyond the control variables. This will be reflected on in the discussion below.

## 5. Discussion

### Confrontation results with literature

The comparison of motives between public employees, private employees, and newcomers provide several new insights. First, on the level of sector, public employees find the motive to work specifically in the public sector more important to choose for another job in the public sector than private employees that switch to the public sector and newcomers. This is in line with the literature (Kjeldsen, 2014; Korac et al., 2018). An additional interesting finding is the relatively higher importance that private employees attribute to choosing a job in the public sector over newcomers. However, this relation is rather small and could be attributed to sample size.

Second, on the level of the organization, the image that public organizations are bureaucratic organizations with hierarchical management, standardized procedures, and hard to measure and ambiguous goals relative to the private sector (Hansen, 2014) might explain why this is the second lowest scoring cluster of motives to enter the public sector. While the literature suggested that newcomers on the job market hold to this image and therefore are likely to choose a private over a public job (Chetkovich, 2003), the results show that there is no difference between newcomers and public sector job switchers. This unexpected finding could partly be explained by the phenomenon of socialization (Wright and Christensen 2010; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2013; Korac et al., 2018). Borst (2018) argues that public employees might become socialized in the hierarchical and bureaucratic system and therefore are used to the bureaucracy and red tape. Newcomers have less former experience and might therefore be more open and malleable than private employees who already have a career history (Carr, Pearson, West & Boyar, 2006; Cooper-Thomas, Anderson, & Cash, 2011). Since the survey questions are asked a year after the respondents entered the public sector, the newcomers have been socialized in the meantime and may rate the organizational motives as high as public employees (Korac et al., 2018). Socialization might also be the reason why the results show that public employees find organizational motives more important than private-to-public switchers since these latter have been less socialized in the organization yet.

Third, when looking at the motives related to the job resources, both the motivation-enhancing and opportunity-enhancing motives show some unexpected results. Opportunity-enhancing motives, including work content and autonomy, are rated as the most important cluster of motives across all groups of employees, and show barely any differences in importance across groups. Newcomers seem to find these motives somewhat more important to choose for a job in the public sector than the private job switchers but the difference is negligible. These results might be explained by the fact that, while the job switching literature shows that the overall image of the public sector with respect to work content and autonomy is less positive than the private sector (Chen et al., 2018; Rainey and Bozeman 2000), employees that actually choose for the public sector are very much interested in, and dedicated to the specific job content of the public sector. This explanation is in line with job-switching studies which show that the need for interesting work content and autonomy does not differ between public and private employees (Houston, 2011; Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007).

Moreover, the motivation-enhancing motives including salary, promotion, development opportunities, and fringe benefits are more important for public-to-public switchers and private-to-public switchers than newcomers. The image exists that relative to the private sector, public employees have a lower salary, less promotion and development opportunities but higher fringe benefits. While the promotion opportunities by themselves are one of the main reasons why public employees switch to another public organization, and score this motive higher than newcomers (who cannot be promoted yet) (Bozeman & Ponomariov, 2009), private employees might find this motive more important than newcomers due to the image of the public sector as providing more elaborate fringe benefits than the private sector (Leisink, Borst, Knies, & Battista, 2019). While newcomers are at an early career stage and oriented on challenging work including advancement, private-to-public switchers are often further along their career path and more likely to choose for the attainment of a balance between work and nonwork demands (Litano, & Major, 2015). Private employees might, therefore, be more interested in these fringe benefits that provide for a better work-life balance than newcomers. This explanation also draws support from the results which show that public-to-public and private-to-public switchers are equally interested in fringe benefits (in line with Lyons et al., 2006). In addition, switching into the public sector increases career opportunities for both public-to-public switchers and private-to-public switchers because the movers are more likely to be promoted and end up supervising a larger number of subordinates (Bozeman & Ponomariov, 2009).

Fourth, both private employees and newcomers find job demand-related motives more important than public employees to choose for a(nother) job in the public sector. While the sector switching literature shows that demand-related motives including red tape do not differ between public switchers, private switchers and newcomers to choose for the public sector (e.g. Bozeman & Ponomariov, 2009; Korac et al., 2018), actual job demands including work pressure and workload are important. The latter is confirmed when public and private employees are actually asked how they perceive their workload and work pressure (Macklin, Smith, & Dollard, 2006; Frank & Lewis, 2004).

### Limitations

Although these results give some interesting insights about the job motives of several employee groups, it is important to notice that the additional explained variances of these clusters of motives are small. Both methodological and substantive explanations are relevant. The most important methodological arguments are related to the questions reflecting the independent variables. First, the survey questions related to the motives to choose for the job are asked a year after the respondents entered the public sector. This might distort the actual perception employees had before they entered their job because respondents are socialized in their new job and might have a hard time to remember their initial motives. As a result, the variance across persons might be distorted. However, at the same time one of the contributions of this study is exactly the point that it looks at respondents who actually entered the public sector instead of the job switching studies which are usually focused on pre-entries who merely intend to enter the public sector, resulting in largely different results (Kjeldsen, 2013).

A second and even more important methodological argument is that the questions are focused on figuring out the motives to choose for a particular *job*, not sector. As a result, high variance exists in responses between respondents because they apply for different jobs within the public sector and therefore for high variance surrounding the regression line (this is confirmed when we actually look at the sectoral motive which provides for more than 6% additional variance) (Hansen, 2014).

A substantive argument for the low explained variance is that there are many motives which might influence job choice, especially when the dependent variable is merely a binary variable (whether you are either a private-to-public sector switcher, a newcomer or a public-to-public sector switcher). That the central variables in this study have a relatively limited influence could therefore possibly be expected. However, the beta's of the central variables are often almost equally large as the control variables while these explain a lot more in the variance of the binary dependent variable. Since the fit measures are good and the regression effects are rather large, it might therefore be questionable whether the r-squared is the most important to look at. Important or not, this study shows the largest explained variance relative to all other newcomers and pre-entry studies published so far (Korac et al., 2018) which makes the model in this study the most comprehensive model that can be built upon in future research.

### Theoretical contributions and future research suggestions

Multiple future research suggestions are in place. First, more focused research with a specific dependent variable measuring the job-switching behavior of employees might be important to overcome variance problems. Although this study overcomes the limitations of intended job switching measures by analyzing the choice for the public sector objectively (Kjeldsen, 2013; Korac et al., 2018), the operationalization might be seen as too distant since it merely measures whether respondents nowadays work in the public sector combined with what respondents did that year before. More focused operationalizations including multi-item measures could actually measure the actual behavior of sector choice (Korac et al., 2018).

Second, more specific independent variables measuring motives based on sector instead of jobs could overcome additional variance problems and noise in the relation with sector choice. A major

contribution of this study to the sector choice literature is that for the first time a comprehensive validated and useful structural equation model is build based on organizational, sectoral and job motives deduced from the AMO and the JD-R framework (Korac et al., 2018). However, the framework is build based on secondary data. Consequently ability-enhancing motives were excluded due to data limitations. Further refinement in future research is needed by developing a specific model through reframing the full AMO and JD-R model into designate motives. Future research should study the full model and analyze which bundles of HR motives influence switching behavior more specifically.

Third, this study explains 83.8% of the variance in the job motives of newcomers relative to public-to-public employees, 71.7% of the variance of newcomers relative to public-to-private employees and 19.1% of the variance of public-to-public versus private-to-public employees. As mentioned before, these variances are high relative to the existing sector switching studies. At the same time, a large amount of variance in sector switching behavior, especially in the public versus private model, is still unexplained. While demographics, characteristics of the new job, and motives that can be influenced by organizations are included in the model, individual traits and values have received little attention. The latter holds for this model and the sector switching literature as a whole (Korac et al., 2018). Future research might focus on these relatively stable personality characteristics of employees as these are harder to influence but important in light of recruitment and selection processes (Korec et al., 2018).

## 6. Conclusion

This study answered the question: **What are the differences in motives between newcomers and (public and private sector) job switchers to choose for a job in the public sector?** Based on a representative dataset of Dutch job entrants to the public sector of the years 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2014 this study analyzed sectoral, organizational, and job motives (job resources and job demands) across the three groups. In sum, on the level of sector, public employees find the motive to work specifically in the public sector more important to choose for another job in the public sector than private-to-public switchers, and newcomers. On the level of the organization, the results show that public-to-public switchers find organizational motives more important than private-to-public switchers while there is no difference between newcomers and public-to-public switchers. On the level of the job, the importance of opportunity-enhancing motives, existing of work content and autonomy, is indifferent across groups. Moreover, the motivation-enhancing motives including salary, promotion, development opportunities, and fringe benefits are more important for public-to-public switchers and private-to-public switchers than newcomers. Additionally, both private employees and newcomers find demand-related motives more important than public employees to choose for a(nother) job in the public sector. Despite these interesting findings, these clusters of motives play a relatively small part in job switching behavior. Notwithstanding this side note, thanks to this study we know that jobseekers find opportunity-enhancing motives the most relevant to choose for a public sector job, followed at a large distance by respectively motivation-enhancing motives, organizational motives, demand-related motives and finally sectoral motives. In addition, we know which motives are relatively more important for which target group.



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