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Public or Nonprofit? Career Preferences and Dimensions of Public Service Motivation

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Abstract

While the foundational claim that PSM attracts individuals to the public sector is well established in the research literature, much uncertainty still exists about its influence on the choice between the public versus the nonprofit sector, which also frequently exhibits a strong public service mission. Little is known also about how discrete dimensions of PSM differ in their effects on such job preferences. This article addresses these shortcomings by drawing on a study that combines the measurement of separate dimensions of PSM with a policy-capturing design that allows disentangling the effects of sector from those of other job attributes that usually correlate with it: the service orientation of the job and job security. Results show that dimensions of PSM display relevant differences in their effects on preferences across job attributes. These findings have important implications for the choice of PSM measurements in scholarly research and job selection.

Introduction

How does public service motivation (PSM) affect students' career preferences? PSM is a concept based on the premise that some individuals are motivated to serve the public interest in their professional careers (Perry, 1996; Kim et al., 2013). They are said to feel a special type of "calling" that Perry and Wise (1990) defined as a "predisposition to respond to motives founded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations" (p. 368). They are hence more likely to choose careers that provide more opportunities to satisfy their desire to help others and benefit society.

The foundational claim that PSM attracts individuals to the public sector has been substantiated by a large body of research (Houston, 2000; Lewis & Frank, 2002; Steijn, 2008). This paper addresses two shortcomings in the literature on the influence of PSM on career choice.

First, the PSM construct is multidimensional, based on a combination of rational, normative, affective and self-sacrifice motives. The dimensions of PSM are not interchangeable, in that each represents a "distinct and potentially unique form of PSM" (Kim & Vandenabeele, 2010; p. 706). Consequently, different dimensions can have different effects on behavior and different dimensions can have countervailing influences on the same outcome. Even if PSM is based on a multidimensional concept, it is frequently operationalized in the relevant literature using an overall measure, hence leading to a one-dimensional approach. As a result, the influence of its different dimensions on career choice has not been sufficiently explored (Vandenabeele et al., 2004; Rose, 2012; Clerkin & Cogburn, 2012; Anderfuhren-Biget et al. 2014).

This study examines how discrete dimensions of PSM differ in their effects on career preferences. To this end, we adopt the PSM instrument developed by Kim et al. (2013) including four dimensions: *attraction to public service*, defined as an instrumental dimension based on the idea of service provision; *commitment to public values*, the normative dimension; *compassion*, the affective dimension; and *self-sacrifice*.

Second, while the influence of PSM on the choice between a job in the private sector versus a job in the public or the nonprofit sector is well established (e.g., Lewis & Frank, 2002; Steijn, 2008), its influence on the choice between the public versus the nonprofit sector needs more systematic research. This is a more interesting comparison because the nonprofit sector tends to have a strong public service mission and an environment that resembles the nature of public organizations. Only recently have studies begun to study the comparison between the preference for the government and the nonprofit sector in the US (Carpenter, Dovespike, & Miguel, 2012; Clerkin & Cogburn, 2012; Rose, 2012). In Europe, the number of studies is much smaller (Vandenabeele, 2004, 2008) and they compare the preference for the public and the private sector. The literature on work-related values has compared employees in the private sector with those in the public sector (Lyons et al. 2006) and with those in the nonprofit sector (De Cooman et al. 2011), but it has hardly focused on differences between public and nonprofit organizations.

Studying the motivating factors that lead individuals to careers in the public vs. the nonprofit sector cannot be done without also considering other job preferences, because sector is related to other job attributes in the real world. For example, jobs in the public and the nonprofit sector may be seen as more likely than private-sector jobs to provide public service opportunities. Likewise, public organizations are generally perceived as providing higher levels of job security than private and nonprofit organizations (Tepe &

Vanhuyse, 2017). These concomitances may lead to confound the effects that these different job features have on career preferences (Christensen & Wright, 2011). Do individuals with high levels of PSM prefer jobs in the public sector because they share the values of public organizations (i.e., an influence of job sector), because such jobs tend to allow for a more direct interaction with users (i.e., service orientation), or because they usually provide a stable environment for them to realize their goals (i.e., job security)?

Observational studies are limited in their ability to separate these effects. It is necessary to use a research design that helps disentangle how PSM influences the importance that university students attach to sector independently of other job attributes that are usually associated with sector. Following Christensen and Wright (2011), this study uses a policy-capturing experiment based on survey vignettes to manipulate the employment sector, the service orientation of the job and the employment security aspects of hypothetical job offers. Forcing respondents to choose among different scenarios combining sector, job design and job security, it is possible to study how PSM dimensions independently influence each specific career preference.

By combining a policy-capturing design with the measurement of different dimensions of PSM, this research provides new insights into the role of PSM on job choice. While other studies have already compared preferences for the government and the nonprofit sector, our empirical strategy allows us to examine distinct facets of PSM while also separating sector preferences from preferences for other related job attributes.

Moreover, it does so in the much less studied context of a Southern European country. This can be viewed as an asset in itself, given that PSM has been shown to be culture specific (Wright, Hassan, & Christensen 2017) and to have different consequences in different contexts. In Spain, youth unemployment is very high and the public sector is

just coming out of a hiring freeze and other public reduction policies. The similarity of Spain's situation to other Southern European countries such as Italy, Portugal or Greece makes it an interesting case to study the interaction between PSM dimensions and job security.

Results confirm that variations in PSM dimensions affect career preferences and that using overall PSM measures might mask important effects. Overall PSM appears to enhance the appeal of nonprofit vis-à-vis public jobs and service-oriented positions, and is apparently unrelated to the value attached to job security. However, when the effects of PSM dimensions are separately assessed, our analysis reveals that compassion and self-sacrifice promote interest in the nonprofit sector, while commitment to public values promotes interest in the public sector. Attraction to public service drives the preference for public service-oriented jobs, independently of the sector. Both attraction to public service and commitment to public values are positively related to the value of job security, and only individuals with very high levels of self-sacrifice are ready to forgo stability in a context of high youth unemployment.

Theoretical framework

Career choice is a subject that has attracted academic, professional, and public attention. The aim of research in this domain is often to predict preferences based on the interplay between individual characteristics and values (Judge & Bretz, 1992), organizational attractiveness and image (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993), and economic and social constraints (Albert & Luzzo, 1999). In this study, we examine the effect that the different dimensions that make up PSM may have on the choice of job sector, the possibility to make real these values in a service-oriented job, and how these lead some to forgo higher levels of job security.

Multidimensional measures of PSM

Researchers often use a global scale to quickly assess the overall level of a construct. This has also been the case with PSM where some studies have used a single item to measure PSM, such as “the desire to help others” or “to benefit society”. A majority of studies, however, have used the 24-item scale comprising four distinct dimensions developed by Perry (1996). Alternatively, some studies have used a smaller number of items (e.g., five) taken from the original 40 items proposed by Perry to create his scale. More recently, some studies have used an “international scale” elaborated by a group of researchers from twelve countries (Kim et al., 2013), with the aim to respond to some concerns regarding the generalizability of Perry’s scale in countries other than the US.

In both Perry’s (1996) and Kim et al.’s (2013) scale, PSM is a construct composed of four dimensions, but the number of items and their meaning is not exactly the same. Perry and Wise (1990) had defined PSM based on a typology of motives that included rational, normative, and affective motives. Perry (1996) elaborated his measurement scale organizing these motives into four dimensions: attraction to policy making, commitment to the public interest or civic duty, compassion, and “self-sacrifice”.

Based on the international research experience and several critiques to Perry’s instrument, Kim and Vandenabeele (2010) proposed a number of changes to the multidimensional measure, including renaming the first two dimensions as attraction to public participation and commitment to public values. Together with compassion, they were to represent instrumental (for rational), value-based (for normative), and affective motives, respectively. They maintained a separate self-sacrifice dimension as the foundation of the concept.

The main differences between the two multidimensional scales are therefore in these two dimensions. As explained by Perry and Vandenabeele (2015), the subscale attraction to policy making was originally designed to tap the individual's commitment to the governance system. However, in the international scale, this dimension lost the references to politics and policy making. Instead, it appears to be designed to capture the idea of a personal disposition to serve the public, helping others, getting involved in the community, and actively contributing to the common good. Commitment to the public interest or civic duty in the original scale captured the desire to fulfil a societal obligation but included a number of items that according to some critics overlapped with the self-sacrifice dimension (Kim and Vandenabeele 2010). In the international scale, the corresponding dimension only includes public values that individuals want to achieve through their actions. In this study, we rely on Kim et al.'s (2013) international scale to measure PSM dimensions, as it was purportedly conceived to overcome known shortcomings in the original scale.

Preference for the government or for the nonprofit sector?

Perry and Wise (1990) predicted that “the greater an individual's PSM, the more likely the individual will seek membership in a public organization” (p. 370). This hypothesis has been empirically confirmed, comparing professionals working in the public sector and in the private sector (Lewis & Frank, 2002; Steijn, 2008). Independent of other factors—job security being the most important one—the presence of a public ethic in the mentality of certain individuals has a positive impact on the attractiveness of government jobs (Rainey, 1982; Houston, 2000).

When looking at the influence of different facets of PSM, a study of Belgian students by Vandenabeele et al. (2004) established the relationship between the dimension attraction

to policy making and the preference for government jobs. The same result was later confirmed by Rose (2012), who argued that the rational component of PSM involves a desire to be part of the policy-making process.

There are fewer studies examining the divide between government and nonprofit and the effect of PSM. This is a more interesting and difficult comparison as public servants share more similarities with nonprofit workers than with private employees, and the nonprofit sector is expected to share more characteristics with those of the public sector than the private sector (Taylor 2012).

Arguing that PSM plays a more important role in person-job fit than person-organization fit, Christensen and Wright (2011) nevertheless found that for law students the effect of PSM on the probability of accepting a job in the nonprofit sector was higher than the same effect on the probability of accepting a job in the public sector. Rose (2012) found that young students were more likely to view the nonprofit sector rather than government as the place to work if they wanted to serve other people and society. Bright (2016) also found that PSM is a significantly better predictor of nonprofit career preferences.

Taking PSM dimensions into consideration, the self-sacrifice dimension appears to be the driver of the interest in nonprofits, according to Clerkin and Cogburn (2012). For Rose (2012), it is both the normative and the affective dimensions represented by the commitment to public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice that explain the interest of students in nonprofits over government.

In order to construct the hypotheses on the effects of the different facets of PSM on sector choice, it is convenient to review what we know about nonprofit sector job attraction. Nonprofits tend to have a strong public service mission and an environment

that resembles the nature of public organizations (Taylor, 2012). One of the key challenges facing the nonprofit sector is the attraction and retention of talent, as the private and the public sector often pay higher (McGinnis Johnson & Ng, 2015). However, nonprofits have the advantage of being managed as private enterprises following business management practices. The literature reports more satisfaction with the work and more commitment with the organization in nonprofits than in government entities (LeRoux & Feeney, 2013). They count with more trust in their management and they generally operate with more autonomy, including the possibility of offering pay increases. Management in the public sector has less autonomy and flexibility, which limits the responsibility management can assume (Lee & Wilkins, 2011). Additionally, the nonprofit sector is perceived as a sector with desirable emotional connotations, while the public sector is often perceived as less desirable because of its association with politics, the state, and the bureaucratic type of organization (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016). Individuals working in the public sector are supposed to be more interested in higher salaries, security, and benefits such as pension plans (Lee & Wilkins, 2011). Research in the US shows that undergraduate students believe that nonprofit organizations are a better destination for those who want to make a difference helping people than the public sector (Light, 2003). For all these reasons, the public-benefit functions of nonprofit organizations should be more evident to university students who are more likely to equate helping others with working for a nonprofit.

Based on these considerations, we propose that the affective and the self-sacrifice dimensions of PSM should be positively associated with a preference for the nonprofit sector. The emotional and humanitarian component of the compassion dimension is openly associated with individuals working in the nonprofit sector. Similar arguments can apply to self-sacrifice, which is defined as giving more weight to societal good than

individual interest and being more likely to forgo material rewards (Lee & Jeong, 2015).

Additionally, self-sacrifice has been described as being at odds with the government sector or the civil service in some national contexts (Vandenabeele et al., 2006).

On the contrary, individuals with a higher commitment to public values, including values that are guaranteed by the democratic system, should identify those values with the government, which could explain their preference for the public sector. However, there is no reason to expect that attraction to public service, as designed in the international scale with no references to politics or policy, should determine the preference for a specific vehicle in terms of the public or nonprofit sector to make real the desire to help others.

Hypothesis 1. Higher levels of commitment to public values will increase preferences for employment in the public sector relative to employment in the nonprofit sector.

Hypothesis 2. Higher levels of compassion and self-sacrifice will increase preferences for employment in the nonprofit sector relative to employment in the public sector.

Service orientation of the job

The preferences for future employment among university students have also been studied by the literature on PSM from the perspective of the fit between the person and the working environment. The ongoing debate is whether the person-organization or the person-job fit is more important—that is, whether individuals with high PSM find certain organizations more attractive because of their values and missions or because they provide jobs with tasks and responsibilities that are more interesting given their public values.

It makes sense to argue that both types of fit are important for potential employees (Leisink & Steijn, 2008). However, more recent research has focused on the role of the person-job fit (Steijn, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Christensen & Wright, 2011; Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013) and argued that it is this specific characteristic of the job, its “service orientation”, that is more relevant to make jobs attractive to individuals with PSM. Following this argument, the sector would be less relevant as service-oriented jobs can be found in any type of organization.

Specification of the service orientation of the job is an important question for the research design. For university students, one way to visualize that a prospective job is service oriented is to present it as a job where there is direct interaction with the beneficiary, as opposed to jobs where the main tasks are performed in a planning office without any contact with service users. Some experimental studies have taken this approach for public service professionals (Grant, 2012; p. 459).

For university students, it was assumed that a job where there is interaction with the beneficiary provides more opportunities to satisfy the need to help others. This may not be the case for seasoned professionals who have worked several years in the front line and who are more subject to burnout as a consequence of daily interaction with citizens (Christensen & Wright, 2011). However, for unexperienced students, the vision of an interaction with citizens can be an effective way to focus their attention on being exposed to the problems of other human beings with the possibility that their contribution has a meaningful impact on their lives.

Attraction to public service, as it was redesigned in the international scale, captures the idea of helping others—probably better than the attraction to policy making dimension from Perry’s (1996) original scale. The specific items for this dimension refer to a

proactive attitude, consisting of getting involved, tackling problems, providing services, and contributing to the common good. Kim and Vandenabeele (2010) imagined this dimension as an instrumental dimension closely related to the idea of a job that is designed to be of service to other people.

Hypothesis 3. Higher levels of attraction to public service will increase preferences for jobs with a high service orientation relative to jobs with a low service orientation.

Job security

Job security is a central question given the association between security and the public sector (Frank & Lewis, 2004). It is even more important after a very strong economic crisis with high youth unemployment. In some European countries like Spain, labor reforms have created a dual job market with protected stable jobs on one side and temporary jobs on the other.

For university students who are interested in making a difference in society, the prospect of having a temporary/insecure job versus a more stable/secure working position could be less important in the beginning of their careers. However, with the economy growing again and a generation of baby boomers arriving at retirement age, government jobs should open up progressively and the prospect of a government job should become more attractive.

The PSM literature has indicated the need to study the motivational dynamics of multiple incentives (Perry 2014). Having a pro-social motivation, as PSM, does not mean that external motivators are weak. Individuals pursuing job security are trying to satisfy their basic needs for economic security, which is compatible with the higher order needs of making a difference in society and helping others. Indeed, job security

may provide the necessary support for PSM to be satisfied and nurtured (Chen & Hsieh, 2015). Therefore, the attractiveness of employment for any person looking for a job should increase with more security, and this premise should also apply to university students with pro-social motivations like PSM. The political and social context after a profound economic crisis could actually increase the desire of altruistic students to help others, but this should not affect their expectation of a good quality job in terms of security.

Both the attraction to public service and the commitment to public values dimensions have a proactive disposition to serve the public that may be related with the desire for a stable versus a temporary job. The instrumental-rational nature of these dimensions requires a stable environment to demonstrate its potential. The effect of the compassion and self-sacrifice dimensions is hard to anticipate. The former refers to the idea of “caring” about others and feeling empathy for their situation, while the latter is related to the ideas of putting the interest of others before self, making it more likely to forgo material rewards.

Having a stable and safe job is of primary interest for university students facing a difficult job market. Putting the interest to help others before their own interest to have a stable job is probably the clearest example of self-sacrifice. Thus, those individuals with very high levels of self-sacrifice might be ready to renounce a much-desired job characteristic to be able to work in a place that allows them to help others. Confirming this relationship is important as this is the basic idea behind the concept of PSM: some individuals might prefer a job where they can have an impact on society rather than to secure a job for themselves in a difficult economic environment.

Hypothesis 4. Higher levels of self-sacrifice will decrease preferences for permanent jobs relative to temporary jobs.

Hypothesis 5. Higher levels of attraction to public service and commitment to public values will increase preferences for permanent jobs relative to temporary jobs.

Empirical Strategy

We used a policy-capturing study designed to calibrate the relative importance of a job's sector, service orientation, and security in students' job preferences. As used in similar studies (Judge and Bretz 1992, Christensen and Wright 2011), policy-capturing methodology allows researchers to assess how decision makers weight the information available to them when making evaluative judgments (Karren & Barringer, 2002).

Participants are presented and asked to rate a series of scenarios in which key pieces of information (job attributes) are manipulated by the researcher. The goal is hence to evaluate the influence of the manipulated attributes on students' preferences, or more specifically to assess how individual differences in PSM moderate the influence of such attributes.

Participants

The study was conducted on a sample of first-year undergraduate students at a large public university in Barcelona, Spain. As noted by Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2013), surveying students who have not entered the labor market allows controlling for endogeneity bias introduced by the possibility that individuals increase their PSM once they are employed in public services, as socialization effects are mostly absent. By the same logic lead, we focused on first-year students rather than graduate or advanced

undergraduates to avoid any socialization influences that may occur during their training.

As one of the main and largest public universities in the country, the institution where the sample was drawn serves a broad and diverse population of students.¹ Unlike previous studies looking at PSM's effects on various aspects of career choice (Christensen & Wright, 2011; Carpenter, Doverspike, & Miguel, 2012, Clerkin & Cogburn, 2012; Rose, 2012), the sample covers students across the full spectrum of academic disciplines. We distributed questionnaires in seven schools comprising a dozen majors in the social, health, and natural sciences, collecting 1,086 fully completed questionnaires, for a response rate of 56 percent.² There is no reason to expect that our sample deviates in any respect relevant for the present study from the Spanish undergraduate student population, most of whom are enrolled in state-funded universities. However, to the extent that the sample was drawn from a single university, caution should be used when generalizing our results to other settings.

Procedure

The questionnaire presented participants with a sequence of scenarios describing different job offers with varying attributes in terms of sector, service orientation, and security.³ The scenarios combined the following job attributes:

¹ Although based on the metropolitan area of Barcelona, the university recruits approximately 40% of its students from more rural areas and from elsewhere in Spain and abroad. It also attracts students with a broad range of interests and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, thanks to its comprehensive academic offering and student financial aid programs (more than 25% of students are grant holders).

² Majors included law, business, business and law, political science, sociology, primary school teaching, medicine, veterinary, biology, biotechnology, environmental biology, and food technology.

³ Respondents were asked to assume all the jobs offers were drawing upon their area of studies and were offering an average salary level in the sector.

- Sector: a job in the *public sector* / in the *nonprofit sector*;
- Service orientation: a job with a direct interaction with the service user (*high*) / a job mainly oriented toward design and planning tasks without a direct interaction with the user (*low*);
- Security: a *permanent* contract / a *temporary* contract

Each respondent was thus exposed to and had to evaluate their interest in eight different job scenarios—that is, one for each possible combination of the three attributes (i.e., 2 [sector] \times 2 [service orientation] \times 2 [security]). For example, when presented with the scenario combining public sector, high service orientation, and permanent contract, participants read the following: “A job in the public sector with a stable/permanent contract. In this job, there is a direct service interaction with the users”. Then they were asked to rate how interested they would be in that job. The same procedure was followed for the remaining scenarios (see the online appendix for the text of all job scenarios).

The students took the survey in a class-controlled environment. The nature of the nonprofit sector, and especially the use of the generic “third sector” terminology, raised comprehension questions in a few instances. Researchers were instructed to provide related terms like third sector, associations, or foundations to avoid longer explanations. If students asked about cooperatives and social enterprises, the answer was to use the criteria regarding whether they could distribute any profit among founders, directors, or staff.

Measures

The dependent variable is respondents’ rated interest in each job scenario, coded on a seven-point Likert scale running from 1 (Not at all interested) to 7 (Highly interested).

Data are arranged in stacked form, with each job scenario (eight per respondent) as an observation. The manipulated job attributes are coded as dummy variables: sector (1=nonprofit, 0=public), service orientation (1=high, 0=low), and security (1=permanent, 0=temporary).

The dimensions of PSM were measured using the international scale proposed by Kim et al. (2013). This instrument is composed of 16 items, four for each of four dimensions: attraction to public service (APS), commitment to public values (CPV), compassion (COM) and self-sacrifice (SS). Respondents were asked to express the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the items using a seven-point scale running from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). A confirmatory factor analysis was performed to test the four-dimension model on the sample. Since the use of ordinal scales violates the assumption of multivariate normality, we used robust maximum likelihood estimation (Yang-Wallentin, Jöreskog, & Luo, 2010). We restricted each item to load only on its latent dimension and allowed for correlations between the latent dimensions but not between measurement errors. The model showed an acceptable fit to the data (Satorra-Bentler scaled χ^2 [$df=98$] = 371.78, $p < 0.05$, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.051 [90% CI = 0.046, 0.055, $p_{close} = 0.383$], SRMR = 0.040), and all items loaded significantly on their dimension ($p < 0.01$), the standardized coefficients ranging between 0.641 and 0.861. We calculated composite scores by averaging respondents' answers to the four questions for each dimension. The respective Cronbach's alphas achieved acceptable levels of internal consistency (APS=0.85;

CPV=0.78; COM=0.88; SS=0.87). All our models are also replicated using a PSM overall score, calculated based on the answers to all 16 items ($\alpha=0.92$).⁴

Models also control for personal characteristics that can be related to career choices and PSM: gender (1=female; 0=male), age (in years), and the respondent's estimation of the chances of finding a job after finishing the studies, measured on a scale running from 1 (Not at all likely) to 7 (Very likely). The correlation matrix of the variables included in the models, along with univariate descriptive statistics, is shown in the online appendix.

Results

Because we treat each individual response as an observation, we have eight observations (i.e., ratings of scenarios) per respondent. The fact that more than one decision is analyzed at a time is a likely source of autocorrelation potentially biasing and reducing the efficiency of estimations. Thus, we use hierarchical linear modeling (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) to control for the multilevel structure of the data (job ratings nested within respondents).

Our interest lies in how respondents' interest in a job is shaped by the job's attributes, as defined by sector, service orientation, and security. To this end, respondents' interest ratings are regressed on each of the attributes to estimate their influence on the process of preference formation, while controlling for individual-level characteristics. Table 1 presents the results of two baseline models: model 1 uses the overall PSM measure; model 2 uses the individual dimensions of PSM.

⁴ As shown in Tables A2 and A3 of the online appendix, using structural equation modeling instead of composite scores to measure PSM and its dimensions does not substantially change the results reported below.

[Table 1]

The estimates for the job attributes indicate the extent to which, on the 1-7 scale, a job with the given attribute is preferred to a job without that attribute, that is, the expected difference in ratings for two different sets of jobs. Both models yield the same results. Respondents rate a job in the nonprofit sector 0.34 points lower than a job in the public sector, holding individual characteristics and all other job attributes constant. A job with direct interaction with beneficiaries (i.e., high in-service orientation) is 0.69 points more interesting to one mainly oriented toward design and planning tasks (low service orientation). Students are also 0.90 points more interested in a permanent position than in a temporary one. Job security thus ranks highest in importance for job preferences, followed by service orientation and job sector.

The coefficients for the individual characteristics (such as gender or the various PSM scores) can be interpreted as the effect of a given variable on the interest to accept any job among those considered in the scenarios, holding constant its attributes and all other individual characteristics.⁵ Results indicate that women are, on average, 0.22 points more interested in the job positions shown to respondents in the survey. Interest in a job also increases with age but is unaffected by the perceived probability of finding a job upon completion of the studies. As shown in model 1, students' level of overall PSM is positively associated with interest in a job. However, according to model 2, while attraction to public service and self-sacrifice show a positive, statistically significant association with interest, the coefficients of both commitment to public values and compassion do not significantly differ from zero.

⁵ It is worth noting that respondents were only presented with scenarios of jobs in the public and the nonprofit sectors; hence, results cannot be generalized to jobs in the private sector.

We hypothesized that the relative importance of job attributes would vary depending on individuals' levels of PSM. By adding interaction terms between PSM measures and job attribute dummies, we estimate how variations in PSM moderate the weight of each type of information in job preferences.⁶ Table 2 contains the results of two interaction models; model 1 uses the overall PSM measure, while model 2 uses the separate dimensions. Given the complexities posed by the interpretation of interactive models, we routinely turn to the graphical illustration of predicted values and accompanying measures of uncertainty of the substantive effects of interest. In the following sections, we examine each job characteristic in turn.

[Table 2]

Job sector

The estimates of model 1 in Table 2 indicate that overall PSM enhances the preference for a job in the nonprofit sector compared to one in the public sector. Specifically, for each unit on the 1-7 scale of PSM, a student's interest in a nonprofit job vis-à-vis a public job increases by 0.34 points on a 1-7 scale.⁷ To fully understand the implications of the estimated model, graph 1 in Figure 1 depicts how interest in a nonprofit job compared to a public job varies across respondents' overall level of PSM. Positive values on the vertical axis indicate that students are on average more likely to prefer a position in the nonprofit sector, while negative values indicate a greater interest in a position in the public sector. For example, for a respondent with the lowest score on PSM, the model predicts that nonprofit positions are rated two points lower than public

⁶ We tested our interaction models in Table 2 against the corresponding baseline models in Table 1. In all cases, the likelihood ratio tests resulted in statistically significant improvements.

⁷ Note that this does not imply that as PSM increases, interest in a public job decreases in absolute terms; it does so only relative to interest in a nonprofit job.

positions. Indeed, preference for a job in the public sector is prevalent across PSM levels, but the difference in favor of the public sector decreases as PSM increases, at a rate of 0.34 points per unit on the PSM scale. This is to the extent that, among those with the highest PSM score, predicted interest in a public job is not significantly different than is interest in a nonprofit job.

[Figure 1]

The picture becomes much more complex when job attributes are interacted with individual dimensions of PSM (model 2 of Table 2). In line with expectations, higher levels of commitment to public values decrease preferences for employment in the nonprofit sector relative to employment in the public sector (Hypothesis 1), whereas both compassion and self-sacrifice increase preferences for employment in the nonprofit sector (Hypothesis 2). Attraction to public service does not have a statistically significant effect on job sector preferences.

Graphs 2 to 4 of Figure 1 show how preference for a job in the nonprofit sector vis-à-vis one in the public sector varies across levels of these three PSM dimensions. Students with low-to-medium scores on commitment to public values do not significantly favor one sector over the other (as the zero line is within the confidence interval for this less populated range of values), whereas students with higher levels on this PSM dimension are increasingly likely to favor a job in the public sector relative to a job in the nonprofit sector. The effects of both compassion and self-sacrifice go in the opposite direction: as these increase, the advantage in preference for public jobs over nonprofit jobs is reduced. Self-sacrifice indeed has the largest influence of all on job sector preferences. It is important to note that controlling for other factors, such as the service orientation of the job, does not prevent respondents' PSM from independently affecting preferences

over the sector of employment. In sum, both compassion and self-sacrifice increase the likelihood of individuals accepting a job in the nonprofit sector vis-à-vis a job in the public sector, whereas commitment to public values promotes interest in public jobs. Overall, these results provide strong evidence in support of hypotheses 1 and 2.

Service orientation

Through the differentiation between a job with a direct interaction with service users and a job consisting of design and planning tasks, this study simulated the conditions to examine how individuals' PSM dimensions affect the likelihood of accepting jobs that have a service orientation or provide a better person-job fit. Model 1 of Table 2 indicates that there is a significant interaction between the service orientation of the job and overall PSM: as PSM increases, interest in a job with direct interaction with users—compared to a job low in service orientation—also increases. As shown in graph 1 of Figure 2, the model predicts that students scoring lowest on PSM prefer a job with low service orientation over one with high service orientation. By contrast, students above the midpoint on the PSM scale are significantly more attracted to high service-orientation positions.

[Figure 2]

We hypothesized that preferences for jobs that provide direct interaction with service users would be primarily shaped by the attraction to public service dimension of the PSM instrument. The estimates in model 1 of Table 1 show this is indeed the case in our sample. The interaction between job service orientation and attraction to public service is positive and statistically significant. As shown in graph 2 of Figure 2, highly service-oriented jobs are clearly preferred among respondents with high values on the attraction

to public service dimension, while those with lower values do not significantly favor one type of job over the other.

None of the remaining PSM dimensions appears to affect preferences over this job characteristic. Our results overall lend support for Hypothesis 3.

Job security

According to the estimates of model 1 in Table 1, the interaction term between job security and overall PSM is not statistically significant. This suggests that preferences for a permanent contract vis-à-vis a temporary contract are unaffected by students' PSM as measured by the higher-order measure.

However, the estimates of model 2 in Table 1 suggest that this null result may be a consequence of different PSM dimensions pushing the preferences in different directions. Indeed, job security concerns are significantly affected by individual levels of attraction to public service, commitment to public values, and self-sacrifice, but not by levels of compassion. Yet, while attraction to public service and commitment to public values both heighten preferences for a secure job relative to a temporary job, the permanent character of the job becomes less of a factor for job preference as self-sacrifice increases.

The estimates depicted in Figure 3 show that the relative appeal of a permanent position dissipates among students with very low levels of attraction to public service and commitment to public values. By contrast, the appeal of security diminishes among students with high levels of self-sacrifice, even if permanent jobs remain significantly more valued than temporary ones across all levels of this affective dimension. Results thus lend support for hypotheses 4 and 5.

[Figure 3]

Discussion and Conclusions

Career choices depend on a number of factors, and individual values is an important one (Judge & Bretz, 1992). PSM as a type of public ethic can be very useful to understand career preferences in public and nonprofit organizations. However, this study shows that the presence of a high level of an overall measure of PSM can be insufficient to understand preferences related to the sector, the type of job, and job security. It is necessary to study the different dimensions to uncover the links between the different facets of PSM and preferences for the public or the nonprofit sector, or for certain jobs with more service orientation and job security in either of the two sectors.

Analyses based on the use of overall measures of PSM might mask interesting patterns that can only emerge when distinct subscales are used. This is precisely what the analysis reveals in connection with sector preferences. Public or nonprofit? Previous studies in the US (Clerkin and Cogburn 2012, Rose 2012, Bright 2016) indicate that PSM is a better predictor of nonprofit career preferences. This study, in a European context, has found that student interest in the nonprofit sector is enhanced by self-sacrifice and compassion but reduced by commitment to public values. These results complement the literature on work-related values and managers' preferences in the public and nonprofit sectors (Lee and Wilkins 2011).

The question on how PSM affects the choice for a specific job with a more public-service orientation also needs to be reconsidered. Kim et al.'s (2013) scale clarified the distinction between what Kim and Vandenabeele (2010) defined as an "instrumental" dimension, based on the idea of service provision, and a purely "public values"

dimension, and the results of this study show that the instrumental dimension is indeed the one driving the preference for a service-oriented job.

Finally, a crucial issue in the PSM literature gained some empirical understanding.

Overall, PSM appears as compatible with valuing job security by virtue of the PSM facets that express attraction to public service and commitment to public values.

However, individuals with high levels of self-sacrifice care less about job security.

Since self-sacrifice is considered the foundation of the whole PSM construct, it can be stated that PSM in its purest form implies the sacrifice of a highly valued incentive.

The implications for the literature of PSM are important, particularly for the discussion about its measurement and the choice between different PSM measurement instruments.

Since specific outcomes may appear to be unrelated to overall PSM while they are positively associated with some dimensions but negatively with others, it seems reasonable to recommend the use of the dimensions in any analysis. As each dimension emphasizes a different aspect, different forms of PSM may be more meaningful depending on the aim of the analysis. This is not to say that PSM is not meaningful as a whole (Perry and Vandenabeele 2015) but that the analysis using specific dimensions allows us to better understand them and to clarify the relationship between PSM and various outcomes.

At the more practical level, the management of human resources in the public and nonprofit sectors should consider not only overall PSM in evaluating job candidates but also its separate dimensions. We know that the public sector is going to have less difficulty attracting individuals interested in higher salaries, security, and such benefits as pension plans (Lee & Wilkins, 2011). It may also attract those who seek to get involved in public service work as a way to achieve important societal goals. This

profile is coherent with the ideal of an impartial government that does not show compassion or ask for sacrifices of its civil servants. However, governments willing to be seen as caring for people may find it harder to recruit highly compassionate and self-sacrificed individuals, as these are more inclined to choose the nonprofit sector.

In the case of the nonprofit sector, we know managers have an objective difficulty to attract talented and motivated individuals because the sector is perceived as paying less than the private or the public sector (McGinnis Johnson & Ng, 2015). This can be compensated for with individuals who are higher on compassion and self-sacrifice. This profile corresponds to the image of the sector, but it is also a limitation to attract individuals who see the public sector as having a more crucial role to make some public values a reality. Both sectors can improve their attractiveness by showing interest in redesigning jobs to satisfy the particular need to interact and directly help beneficiaries that some individuals with PSM have.

It is important to note a few limitations of the current study. First, because our analysis was limited to student from a single university, the results need to be generalized with caution. PSM is culture specific and can have different consequences in different places. Barcelona and its metropolitan area have a higher level of youth unemployment compared to other European cities. At the same time, it is a city with a political culture characterized by high levels of participation in associations and a tradition of well-run local government. From this perspective, survey respondents could be more interested in job security and, at the same time, could be more likely to link government with serving the community.

Second, because the scenarios presented to participants did not include private jobs, our findings can only apply to non-private jobs. Additionally, the study specified certain

characteristics of the jobs but did not present different types of organizations within the public or the nonprofit sector. More importantly, it did not manipulate salary across job scenarios either. Salary is one of the most important reasons for accepting or not accepting a job, and a number of studies report that there exists a nonprofit wage penalty (McGinnis Johnson & Ng, 2015). We cannot rule out that at least part of the effect for sector is capturing such a wage gap, even if respondents were clearly told to assume an “average salary”.

Third, we cannot be sure whether the uncovered relationships hold for individuals facing actual employment decisions. Two recent studies provide evidence of PSM’s effect on the employment sector after graduation (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013; Wright, Hassan & Christensen, 2017), but their results are contradictory. This is one way to proceed with further research.

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of ordinal variables with misspecified models. *Structural Equation Modeling*, 17 (3): 392–423.

Table 1. Predicting job preferences (baseline models)

	(1)		(2)	
	b	(SE)	B	(SE)
Respondents' characteristics				
Female	0.23**	(0.06)	0.22**	(0.06)
Age	0.02*	(0.01)	0.02*	(0.01)
Likelihood of finding a job	-0.02	(0.02)	-0.02	(0.02)
PSM				
Overall	0.55**	(0.04)		
Attraction to public service (APS)			0.34**	(0.05)
Commitment to public values (CPV)			-0.02	(0.05)
Compassion (COM)			0.03	(0.05)
Self-sacrifice (SS)			0.17**	(0.03)
Job characteristics				
Sector: Nonprofit	-0.34**	(0.03)	-0.34**	(0.03)
Service orientation: High	0.69**	(0.03)	0.69**	(0.03)
Security: Permanent	0.90**	(0.03)	0.90**	(0.03)
Constant	0.18	(0.27)	0.53 ⁺	(0.31)
Variance components				
Respondent intercept	0.74**	(0.04)	0.72**	(0.04)
Residual (within-respondent)	1.59**	(0.03)	1.59**	(0.03)
Model fit				
Deviance ($-2 \times \log$ likelihood)	30,384.59		30,356.70	
Observations	8,688		8,688	
Respondents	1,086		1,086	

Entries reflect estimates of two-level random intercept models.

⁺ $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

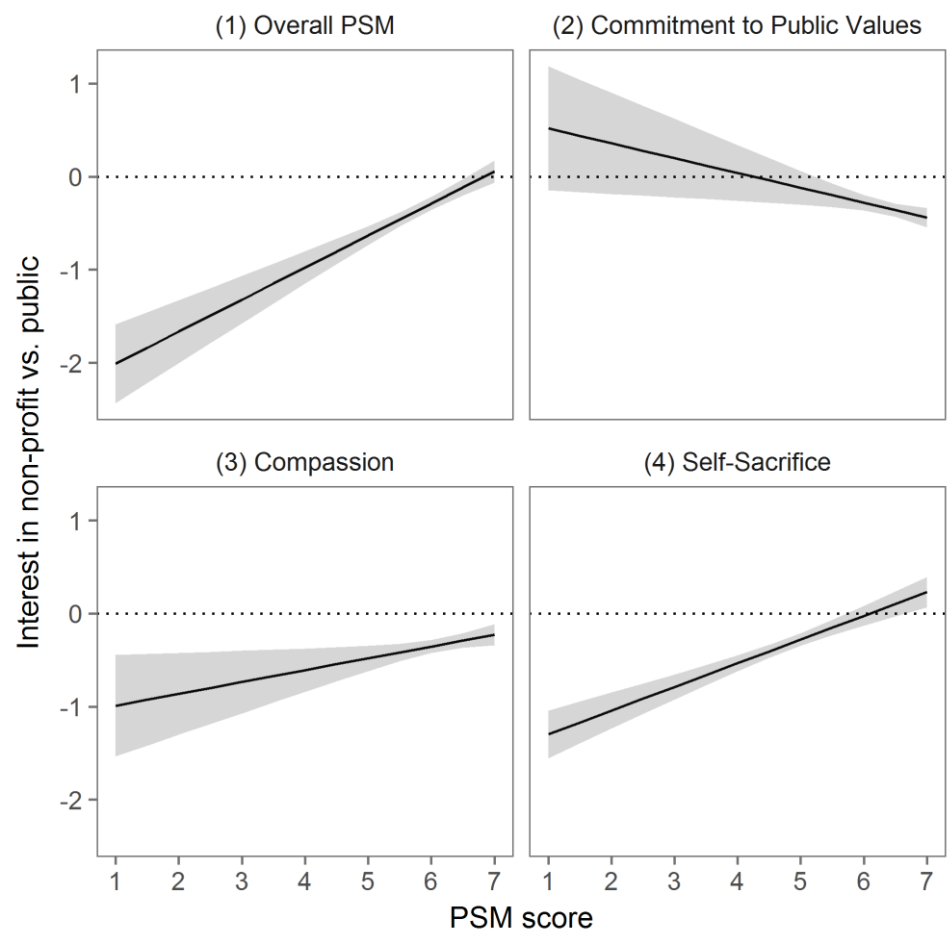
Table 2. How PSM affects the importance of job attributes for job preferences
(interaction models)

	(1)		(2)	
	b	(SE)	b	(SE)
Respondents' characteristics				
Female	0.25**	(0.06)	0.22**	(0.06)
Age	0.02*	(0.01)	0.02*	(0.01)
Likelihood of finding a job	-0.01	(0.02)	-0.01	(0.02)
PSM				
Overall	0.21**	(0.06)		
Attraction to public service (APS)			0.18*	(0.07)
Commitment to public values (CPV)			0.01	(0.08)
Compassion (COM)			-0.07	(0.07)
Self-sacrifice (SS)			0.08 ⁺	(0.04)
Job characteristics				
Sector: Nonprofit	-2.35**	(0.26)	-1.32**	(0.30)
Service orientation: High	-0.99**	(0.31)	-0.92*	(0.36)
Security: Permanent	0.58*	(0.23)	-0.14	(0.27)
Interactions				
Nonprofit × Overall	0.34**	(0.04)		
Nonprofit × APS			0.00	(0.05)
Nonprofit × CPV			-0.16*	(0.06)
Nonprofit × COM			0.13*	(0.05)
Nonprofit × SS			0.25**	(0.03)
High service × Overall	0.29**	(0.05)		
High service × APS			0.22**	(0.06)
High service × CPV			-0.07	(0.08)
High service × COM			0.10	(0.07)
High service × SS			0.02	(0.04)
Permanent × Overall	0.06	(0.04)		
Permanent × APS			0.10*	(0.05)
Permanent × CPV			0.17**	(0.06)
Permanent × COM			-0.02	(0.05)
Permanent × SS			-0.11**	(0.03)
Constant	2.16**	(0.36)	2.28**	(0.41)
Variance components				
Respondent intercept	1.78**	(0.09)	1.77**	(0.09)
Residual (within-respondent)	0.58**	(0.01)	0.58**	(0.01)
Nonprofit slope	1.04	(0.06)	0.98	(0.05)
High service slope	1.59**	(0.08)	1.57**	(0.08)
Permanent slope	0.80**	(0.05)	0.77**	(0.05)
Model fit				
Deviance ($-2 \times \log$ likelihood)	27,695.31		27,587.87	
Observations	8,688		8,688	
Respondents	1,086		1,086	

Entries reflect estimates of two-level random slope models.

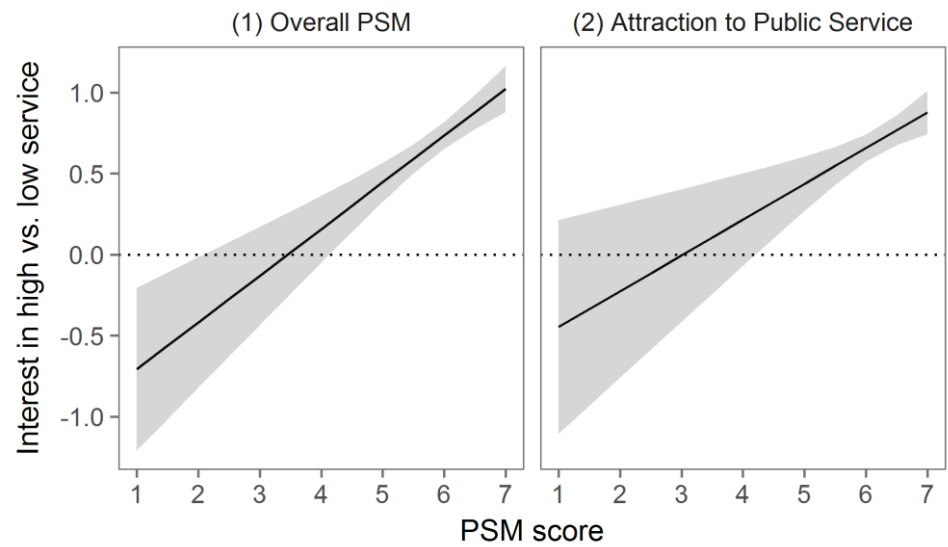
⁺ $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Fig. 1 How PSM Affects Preferences for Job Sector



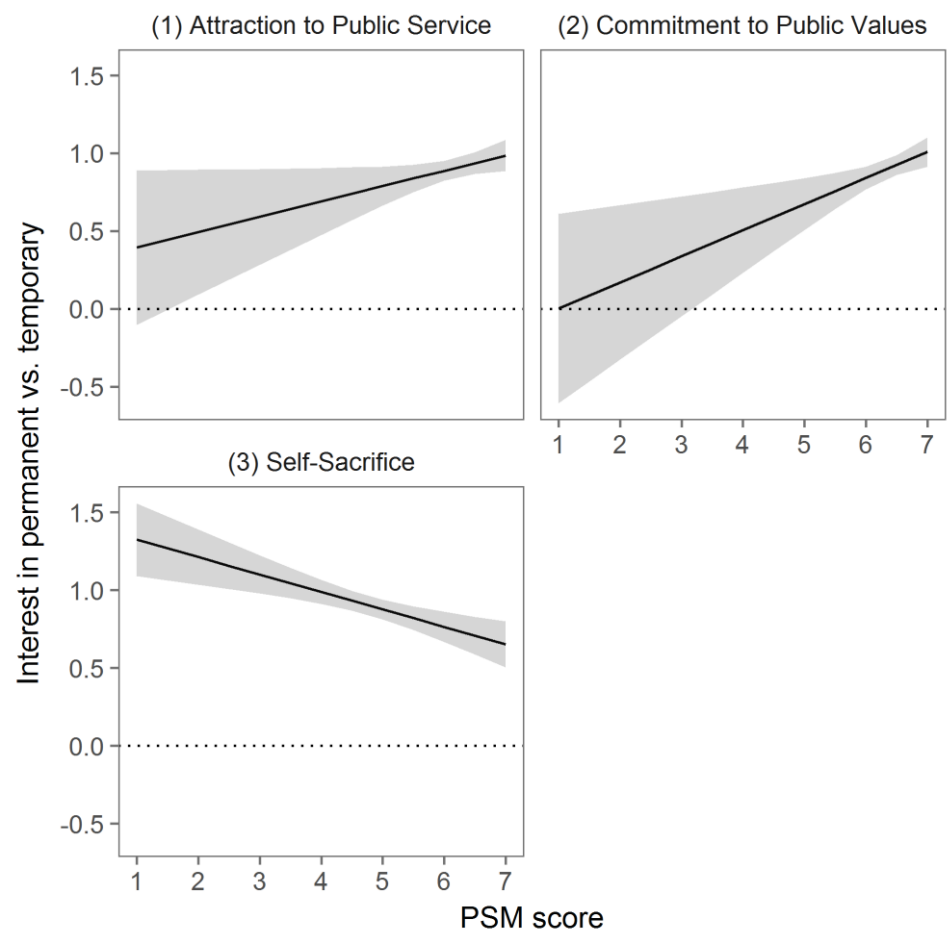
Note: predicted marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals, as estimated by models 1 (graph 1) and 2 (graphs 2-4) in Table 2.

Fig. 2 How PSM Affects Preferences for Job’s Service Orientation



Note: predicted marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals, as estimated by models 1 (graph 1) and 2 (graph 2) in Table 2.

Fig. 3 How PSM Affects Preferences for Job Security



Note: predicted marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals, as estimated by 2 in Table 2.

Supplemental Appendix

Job descriptions presented in the survey

Opening question: “In an effort to better understand your career preferences, please indicate the extent to which you would be interested in a job possessing the following characteristics:”

- 1) A job in the public sector with a stable/permanent contract. In this job, there is a direct service interaction with the users.
- 2) A job in the public sector with a stable/permanent contract. In this job, tasks are mainly design and planning and thus there is not a direct service interaction with the users.
- 3) A job in the public sector with a temporary contract. In this job, there is a direct service interaction with the users.
- 4) A job in the public sector with a temporary contract. In this job, tasks are mainly design and planning and thus there is not a direct service interaction with the users.
- 5) A job in the third sector with a stable/permanent contract. In this job, there is a direct service interaction with the users.
- 6) A job in the third sector with a stable/permanent contract. In this job, tasks are mainly design and planning and thus there is not a direct service interaction with the users.
- 7) A job in the third sector with a temporary contract. In this job, there is a direct service interaction with the users.
- 8) A job in the third sector with a temporary contract. In this job, tasks are mainly design and planning and, thus, there is not a direct service interaction with the users.

Table A1. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of variables included in the models

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Likelihood of accepting job	4.42	1.71	1	7	-										
2 Overall PSM	5.85	0.80	1.19	7	0.27*										
3 APS	6.16	0.92	1	7	0.27*	0.84*	-								
4 CPV	6.37	0.76	1.25	7	0.18*	0.77*	0.62*	-							
5 COM	6.12	0.94	1	7	0.21*	0.85*	0.63*	0.64*	-						
6 SS	4.76	1.28	1	7	0.23*	0.82*	0.54*	0.41*	0.55*	-					
7 Sector: Nonprofit	0.50	0.50	0	1	-0.10*	-	-	-	-	-	-				
8 Service orientation: High	0.50	0.50	0	1	0.20*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			
9 Job stability: Permanent	0.50	0.50	0	1	0.26*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
10 Female	0.63	0.48	0	1	0.11*	0.20*	0.24*	0.18*	0.21*	0.06*	-	-	-	-	
11 Age	19.79	3.99	18	59	0.05*	0.06*	0.01	0.05*	0.02*	0.10*	-	-	-	-0.05*	-
12 Likelihood of finding a job	3.76	1.61	1	7	-0.04*	-0.06*	-0.06*	-0.07*	-0.07*	-0.03*	-	-	-	-0.02*	-0.04*

Note: n = 8,688. The correlations between the manipulated independent variables (sector, service orientations, job security) and other variables are zero by design.

* $p < .05$

Table A2. Replication of models in Table 2 of the main text using structural equation modelling (structural part)

	(1)		(2)	
	b	(SE)	b	(SE)
Respondents' characteristics				
Female	0.21**	(0.06)	0.22**	(0.07)
Age	0.02*	(0.01)	0.02*	(0.01)
Likelihood of finding a job	-0.02	(0.02)	-0.02	(0.02)
PSM				
Overall	0.57**	(0.05)		
Attraction to public service (APS)			0.44**	(0.08)
Commitment to public values (CPV)			-0.09	(0.10)
Compassion (COM)			-0.02	(0.07)
Self-sacrifice (SS)			0.20**	(0.05)
Job characteristics				
Sector: Nonprofit	-0.34**	(0.04)	-0.34**	(0.04)
Service orientation: High	0.69**	(0.04)	0.69**	(0.04)
Security: Permanent	0.90**	(0.03)	0.90**	(0.03)
Constant	3.40**	(0.18)	3.43**	(0.17)
Variance components				
Respondent intercept	0.74**	(0.04)	0.69**	(0.04)
Residual (within-respondent)	1.59**	(0.04)	1.59**	(0.04)
Observations	8,688		8,688	
Respondents	1,086		1,086	

Entries reflect estimates of two-level random intercept models. PSM (model 1) and its different dimensions (model 2) are latent variables based on continuous indicators.

+ $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table A3. Replication of models in Table 3 of the main text using structural equation modelling (structural part)

	(1)		(2)	
	b	(SE)	b	(SE)
Respondents' characteristics				
Female	0.23**	(0.06)	0.22**	(0.06)
Age	0.02*	(0.01)	0.02*	(0.01)
Likelihood of finding a job	-0.01	(0.02)	-0.01	(0.02)
PSM				
Overall	0.21**	(0.06)		
Attraction to public service (APS)			0.18 ⁺	(0.11)
Commitment to public values (CPV)			0.06	(0.14)
Compassion (COM)			-0.14	(0.11)
Self-sacrifice (SS)			0.11 ⁺	(0.06)
Job characteristics				
Sector: Nonprofit	-0.34**	(0.04)	-0.34**	(0.04)
Service orientation: High	0.69**	(0.04)	0.69**	(0.04)
Security: Permanent	0.90**	(0.03)	0.90**	(0.03)
Interactions				
Nonprofit × Overall	0.34**	(0.05)		
Nonprofit × APS			0.03	(0.09)
Nonprofit × CPV			-0.31*	(0.12)
Nonprofit × COM			0.16 ⁺	(0.09)
Nonprofit × SS			0.33**	(0.05)
High service × Overall	0.31**	(0.06)		
High service × APS			0.36**	(0.11)
High service × CPV			-0.25 ⁺	(0.15)
High service × COM			0.14	(0.12)
High service × SS			-0.01	(0.06)
Permanent × Overall	0.07 ⁺	(0.04)		
Permanent × APS			0.13 ⁺	(0.07)
Permanent × CPV			0.26**	(0.10)
Permanent × COM			-0.07	(0.08)
Permanent × SS			-0.16**	(0.05)
Constant	3.37**	(0.17)	3.37**	(0.16)
Variance components				
Respondent intercept	1.83**	(0.08)	1.78**	(0.08)
Residual (within-respondent)	0.58**	(0.03)	0.58**	(0.03)
Nonprofit slope	1.04**	(0.07)	0.96**	(0.08)
High service slope	1.58**	(0.07)	1.55**	(0.11)
Permanent slope	0.80**	(0.06)	0.76**	(0.06)
Observations	8,688		8,688	
Respondents	1,086		1,086	

Entries reflect estimates of a two-level random-effects model. PSM (model 1) and its different dimensions (model 2) are latent variables based on continuous indicators.

⁺ $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$