

CONTRACTING REGIMES AND THIRD-PARTY GOVERNANCE: A THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT FOR EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION OF PRIVATE SECTOR CONTRACTORS

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ABSTRACT

To date the bulk of public service motivation (PSM) research has focused on demonstrating the differences in public service motivation between public sector and private sector employees, yet no research exist exploring the public service motivation (PSM) of private contractors performing public sector tasks. This article provides a detailed review of the privatization and PSM literature and suggests that PSM among private sector contractors can serve as a mitigating factor in protecting the public interest. This article establishes a set of propositions regarding the role of PSM as a mitigating factor in contracted public services, suggesting that PSM's level of importance is related to the complexity of job task, number of contractors, and presence of a contracting regime. Lastly, the article recommends future directions in PSM research necessary for testing these propositions.

INTRODUCTION

This article reviews the public service motivation (PSM) and privatization literature and develops a theoretical framework to examine the importance of PSM among public service contractors by setting forth conditions where PSM is most important among contractors for promoting the public interest. It also offers several propositions to be tested by scholars wishing to explore the differences in PSM between public sector employees and private sector public service contractors. The article argues that public service motivation among private sector contractors is an important mitigating factor within third-party governance, which implores contractors to serve the public interest. Furthermore, the importance of public service motivation as a contributor to the public interest depends on several factors, including the presence of a contracting regime, specialization of task, and number of competitors in the service market. The intersection of research exploring PSM and privatization is a natural extension of government's increased reliance on third-party service providers and the growing concerns about the motivations and fidelity of private sector workers entrusted with responsibilities previously resting with the government.

The scope and complexity of government responsibilities and tasks have grown considerably over the last century (Kettl, 2002; Kettl, 1995). As the government's role has increased, so have the costs associated with these additional responsibilities. In an attempt to improve the cost effectiveness and efficiency of government administration, many politicians and public choice scholars have borrowed from the field of economic theory by advocating a greater reliance on market mechanisms to deliver governmental goods and services (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Savas, 1982). Privatization (or the shifting of governmental responsibilities, policy implementation, and service delivery to

private sector parties) has resulted in documented cost savings to government (Wilson, 1989; Domberger and Hall, 1996). Underpinning this theoretical assumption is the belief that private sector institutions and their employees are rational actors or self-serving utility maximizers motivated by profit generation and, therefore, more likely to administer programs in an efficient manner (Greene, 2002). The reliance and growth of third-party governance has created an alternative bureaucracy of non-profits and private firms assisting the government (Frederickson, 1996) in diverse tasks such as health provision (Smith, 1996), information technology, (Chen & Perry, 2003) and the war on terror (Avant, 2005).

Critics of privatization and contracting out of public services charge that private sector employees differ significantly from public sector employees (Perry, 1997; Wittmer, 1991). Numerous studies comparing public and private employee service motivations have found that public sector employees have stronger public service motivation (PSM) than their private sector counterparts (Brewer, 2003; Houston, 2000). While some scholars argue comparisons between public sector and private sector job motivation provide little practical utility (Perry, 2000), the less than altruistic motivation of contractors is among the concerns expressed when governments rely on contractors to perform traditional public sector tasks.

Political science literature is ripe with theory and examples of governmental appointees and elected officials moving from the regulatory arena of the public sector into lobbying positions or private industry (see for example: Milbrath, 1963; Zeigler & Baer, 1969; Reed, 1975; Adams, 1983; Salisbury, Johnson, Heinz, Laumann, & Nelson, 1989; Che, 1995). A similar revolving door exists within the contracting realm as public employees move from public agencies to third-party contractors performing similar job functions. Working for a contractor may allow former public sector employees to garner similar public service satisfaction, while obtaining greater pay and job flexibility. As Brewer and Selden (1998) noted, PSM is not limited to the public sector, the private sector can also offer intrinsic rewards valued by those with high public service motivation (Frank and Lewis, 2003). Alonso and Lewis (2001) found that incentive programs (i.e. those that offer merit-based pay) are not counterproductive to PSM. It is possible that contractors may possess more PSM than traditional private sector employees and the public sector employees accepting contracting jobs may carry over a PSM to their new position. Former public sector employees may also carry over professional norms and other aspects of agency socialization that compel them to serve the public interest equally well as a private sector contractor.

PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION LITERATURE

Scholars acknowledge that it is difficult to establish the origins of public service motivation, yet its roots date back to the founding of the United States (Brewer and Selden, 1998; Wamsley, et al., 1990). Perry and Wise were among the scholars to write extensively about public service motivation. Perry and Wise (1990) described public service motivation as “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations” (368). The motives were sorted into three “analytically-distinct categories: rational, norm-based, and affective” (Perry and Wise, 1990: 368). Rational relates to participation in the policy formation process and advocacy for a particular interest, while norm-based positions are focused on duty to the government, social equity, and a desire to serve the public interest.

Affective servants find their conviction to a program because of its social importance (Perry and Wise, 1990).

The rational basis for public service motivation acknowledges that *some* motives can be grounded in individual utility maximization, a key assumption in economic and public choice theories (Perry and Wise, 1990). Affective motivation is associated with a *patriotism of benevolence* advocated by Frederickson (Perry and Wise, 1990). Yet, normative based motives are most commonly associated with public service motivation. Public service also has several behavioral implications, a higher likelihood of membership in a public organization; within public organizations, public service motivation is positively related to performance; and public organization attracting individuals with high levels of public service are less dependent on managing individual performance through utilitarian incentives (Perry and Wise, 1990: 370-371).

Perry (1997) further tested for antecedents of public service motivation, including: parental socialization, religious socialization, professional identification, political ideology, and demographic correlates using regression analysis. While the analysis generated a modest R^2 , it revealed some motivation is associated with childhood, religion, and professional life. Professionalism was positively associated with civic-duty and self-sacrifice, but negatively related to attraction to policy-making.

Perry (2000) also presented a model for explaining behavior motivations in governmental and voluntary organizations. Perry (2000) relied on four premises found in the literature

1. Rational, Normative, and Affective Processes Motivate Humans,
2. People Are Motivated by Their Self-Concepts
3. Preferences or Values Should Be Endogenous to Any Theory of Motivation,
and
4. Preferences Are Learned in Social Processes.

Perry posited public-private survey comparisons offer little utility in examining public service motivation. Instead, he suggests that qualitative methods of “observational, direct, ethnographic, and anthropological research” could assist in linking theory between sociohistorical phenomenon and organizational behavior (486). While Perry and Wise (1990) acknowledged rational choice theory and utility maximization are components of public service motivation, these components of selfless public service motivation appear at odds with traditional economic theory regarding individual behavior (Francois, 2000). Francois (2000) offered an economist perspective on public service motivation and using a series of rigorous economic proofs, demonstrated that under certain conditions, bureaucracy can obtain a greater public service motivation effort from employees than a standard profit-maximizing firm.

MEASURING PUBLIC-SERVICE MOTIVATION AMONG PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ACTORS

Using multivariate analysis to examine a data set generated by the 1996 American National Election Study (NES), Brewer (2003) compared civic attitudes and beliefs of public servants and other citizens with relation to social capital. While Brewer (2003) did not specifically test for public service motivation, his research highlights important differences between public sector and private sector employees. Brewer (2003) found public employment was a predictor of civic participation and that public servants are far more active in civic affairs than private sector employees. The results demonstrate the public sector employees are more altruistic and civic-minded (both components of public service motivation) than private sector employees.

Brewer and Selden (1998) acknowledged that the theory of public service motivation is complex due to the dual meaning of the term public service, which can mean “the act of doing something worthwhile for society” or “refer to the public-sector labor force” (417). Brewer and Selden (1998) utilized the latter definition noting that public service motivation induces individuals to perform public service and it is prevalent in (but not limited to) the public. Most public service motivation measurements have relied on broad surveys with no correlation to the behavioral properties of public service motivation (Brewer and Selden, 1998). Brewer and Selden (1998) used a 1992 Merit Principles Survey to test several hypotheses related to whistle-blowing behavior as an indicator of public service motivation. The results confirmed that whistle-blowing was an indicator of public service motivation and that public service motivation was widely shared among federal government employees.

While Perry (2000) argued that public-private survey comparisons offer little utility in examining public service motivation, Houston (2000) employed data from a national sampling frame in the form of the General Social Survey to compare private and public reward motivation as a basis for public service motivation. Using logistic regression, Houston (2000) determined that public employees are more likely to value intrinsic rewards such as feeling of accomplishment in doing important work, while private sector employees value extrinsic rewards such as higher pay and shorter work hours. Houston’s findings suggest the existence of a public service motivation and mirror previous study findings. However, in contrast to previous studies and inconsistent with public service motivation, Houston (2000) found that public sector employees were consistent with the government stereotype that they valued job security more highly than private sector employees.

Rather than relying on survey data, Brewer, Selden, and Facer (2000) used an intensive research technique known as Q-methodology to examine the motivations of 69 individuals (federal, state, and local government employees, and students in public administration or government programs). Q-methodology requires that individuals sort statements about a topic according to how much they agree or disagree with each statement, which in turn simulates an individual’s worldview. (Brewer, et al., 2000). Unlike surveys where questions are answered independently, the placement or selection of items in a Q-methodology influences the placement of other items (Brewer, et al., 2000). The results of the research identified four conceptions of public service motivation: samaritans, communitarians, patriots, and humanitarians. Samaritans are strongly motivated by helping other people and see themselves as guardians of the underprivileged. Communitarians believe a unique connection exists between public

servants and citizens and they are stirred by civic duty. Patriots act for larger causes, such as the public good and the benevolence identified by George Frederickson. Humanitarians are motivated by strong sense of social justice and join samaritans in striving to make society fair (Brewer, et al., 2000). The desire for economic rewards was not a defining characteristic any of these conceptions of the public interest. The study found that all four public service motivation groups shared the rational, norm-based, and affective bases identified by Perry and Wise (1990).

SHORTCOMINGS OF PSM RESEARCH

Theoretically, a strong public service motivation acts as a mitigating factor to protect and promote the public interest. However, several major shortcomings exist with the PSM literature. As the literature review illustrates, the bulk of the public and private sector comparative literature draws on general population comparisons to highlight differences between public and private sector employees without considering the tasks or job responsibilities of those employees. These findings demonstrate that public sector employees differ from private sector employees in job satisfaction factors and motivation. Public sector employees' stronger sense of public service motivation is used as an argument against contracting out of public services to the private sector.

The shortcoming of this reasoning is that it fails to account for differences between private sector contractors and private sector employees at large. The application of the broad studies comparing the public and private sector service motivations to generalize about the government contracting represents a form of selection bias and these comparisons suffer from external validity problems. Selection bias occurs because the population of interest in applying PSM as a criterion for contracting requires that the comparative population be representative of government workers and government contractors. Broad population based studies are unable to draw a distinction between private sector contractors performing public tasks and private sector workers at large. It is conceivable that motivational differences also exist between private sector contractors performing public sector functions and the private sector at large. Broad comparative PSM studies are also not generalizable to these private sector contractors and assigning general private sector motivations to private sector contractors creates external validity problems.

For example, assume a city was considering contracting out public building security and parking enforcement in its downtown. Such a move would save the city money and ease the burden on an overworked police department. An important concern for the city was not only revenue collection and costs, but also attitudes and motivation for service among its public workers. The existing PSM research to be discussed in this article would offer no insight to the city in making this decision. Broad comparative studies fail to consider the motivational factors of private sector contractors performing public tasks and the motivation behind this work. In this example it is possible the private sector enforcement in the downtown area would primarily occur from private sector workers whose motivations mirror the private sector at large. It is also possible that private sector contract work for public sector tasks requires or is desirable work for prior public servants (in this example, police officers) who carry over PSM from their prior work.

The questions in need of examination include:

- What are the differences between public and private employees working in the same sector?
- Do the motivations of public employees and private contractors performing the same public task differ?
- What can scholars and practitioners infer about the importance of these differences if they exist?

To date, no study has explored the difference in public service motivation among public sector employees and private sector public service contractors.

PRIVATIZATION LITERATURE

The advent of New Public Management (NPM) in the United States concentrated its efforts on customer service initiatives and achieving results, rather than conforming to a process (Kettl, 2000; Rosenbloom, 1998). NPM took roots in the national government in the form of National Performance Review (NPR), a report and movement lead by Vice President Al Gore to make public administration more businesslike by removing politics from performance review and treating citizens as customers (Rosenbloom, 1998). NPM relies on market-like mechanisms and privatization to deliver higher levels of customer service at a lower price. Ironically, NPM relies on the traditional management belief in dichotomy between politics and administration (Rosenbloom, 1998; Rosenbloom and O'Leary, 1997).

Privatization can range from divesting public service to private sector actors to initiatives utilizing private sector resources for public services (Brudney, 1987; Auger, 1999). Within the context of United States public administration, privatization relates more to "the relocation of service implementation activities" (Auger, 1999: 436) and contracting is privatization's most common form (Korosec, 2002). Government reliance on contractors is not a new phenomenon, yet the scale and scope of this reliance has increased significantly in the last several decades (see for example: Kettl, 2002; Smith, 1996; Greene, 2002; Kettl, 1995). As NPM takes root in governance, contracting becomes the "medium of communication in the public sector" (Lane, 2000). While privatization can be a function of political culture (Ward, 1992), it is most often advocated because of reliance on competition and reduced costs (Pouder, 1996; Smith, 1996). Market competition is an important component of ensuring effective and efficient contracting (Brown and Potoski, 2004), but government contract structures often differ from a private sector competitive model (Smith, 1996). While an ample supply of private sector service providers exist in some areas (Korosec, 2002), such as janitorial and garbage collections services, competition often does not exist in more complex governmental tasks, such as hazardous waste clean-up or development of high tech weapons systems (Morgan, 1992; Kettl, 1995). Government contracting for a complex objective creates artificial markets that otherwise would not exist (Kettl, 1993). While contracting for complex tasks, government agencies may deliberately engage in inefficient purchasing or contracting to allow for continued competition among contractors and maintenance of capacity of contractors for future work (Kettl, 2002). Always accepting the lowest bid for contracts provides short-term benefits and cost-savings, but may drive losing bidders out of business and create a monopoly for the

winning contractor (Kettl, 2002). Capacity maintenance is important for preventing monopolies, yet agency behavior toward capacity maintenance is not in accordance with short-term utility maximization.

Proponents of privatization argue that shifting public services to private agencies allows for market competition and, in turn, saves money and improves service (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Savas, 1982). Privatization has resulted in documented cost savings to government (i.e. taxpayers) in fire protection, ambulance service, grounds maintenance and a host of other areas (Wilson, 1989; Domberger and Hall, 1996). Critics charge that privatization can achieve these efficiencies because the private sector is not required to follow the legal rules and requirements placed on government (Frug, 1991). In accordance with the privatization and the New Public Management movements have been efforts to improve customer service within government by treating citizens as customers (Fountain, 2001; Kettl, 2000). Critics of the movement toward customer service cite the difficulty of citizens both being the owners of government and its “customers”—a case rarely found in the private sector (Kettl, 2000). Others charge that while the customer service techniques may improve service, they often lead to increased political inequality and accountability problems (Fountain, 2001; Peters, 2001). Contracting coupled with the lack of political oversight has also been associated with corruption (Frederickson, 1999; Kettl, 1993) in the Department of Defense (Pasztor, 1995; Frederickson, 1999) and Housing and Urban Development (McAllister and Spolar, 1989; Kobrak, 1996; Frederickson, 1999). Contracting without proper oversight can facilitate political patronage and corruption.

Some scholars have taken a more moderate view of contracting of services (the most common form of privatization) (Korosec, 2002). Rather than expressing opposition or support, they establish conditions where privatization (particularly contracting) is suitable for governments to undertake. Steel and Long (1998) compared government contractor and county employees engaged in road maintenance and construction in Oregon. Their findings relied on surveys and road expenditure data to reveal economic justification for contractor use in urban areas where competitive markets exist, yet county employees were better suited for projects in rural counties lacking a competitive market. This survey confirmed assertions made by other scholars regarding the importance of competition among contractors for government service (Wilson, 1989; Goodman and Loveman, 1991).

Kettl (1993) indicated that privatization and contracting were less useful when efficiency is not the main goal. Contracting poses practical problems for local government managers; when contractors are engaged in performing highly technical or specialized tasks, government managers need not only a technical skill set for evaluating contractor work, but also a managerial and financial skill set they often lack (Van Slyke, 2003, Wamsley et al., 1990; Frederickson, 1999). When governments increase its use of contractors, it also reduces its own expertise and public management capacity (Van Slyke, 2003). Devolution of responsibilities to the private sector may reduce the institutional foundations and integrity of public agencies. Even if private sector employees demonstrate a public service motivation equal to public sector employees, they still lack legitimacy as a guardian of the public interest, grounded in constitutional tradition and principles (Terry, 1990; Rohr, 1989). Critics of public choice argue that privatization creates a climate of undercutting the public service ethic by reducing all non-financial motivations and, therefore, can lead to increased corruption (Meier, 1993; Perry and Wise, 1990). Others charge that customer service

ethic replaces a public service ethic, recasting the role of the state and its relationship to citizens (Fountain, 2001).

WHEN IS PSM IMPORTANT IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING?

In his examination of contracting relations, Smith (1996) posits agencies engaging contractors often develop long-term relationships governed by specific norms and expectations (Smith, 1996). Smith (1996) defines these long-term, interdependent relations as “contracting regimes.” These “regimes” result in a close, cooperative relationship between government agencies and contractors (Smith, 1996; Kettl, 1993). A mutually dependent relationship exists with agencies relying on contractors for program delivery and contractors relying on agencies for revenues to sustain their businesses (Kettl, 1995). Government contract funds assist in legitimizing a contractor, enhancing its prestige and protecting it from competitors (Smith, 1996). Paradoxically, attempts to privatize portions of the public sector have in turn governmentalized private sector government contractors (Kettl, 2002).

Building on Smith’s (1996) theory of contracting regimes, I posit that these interdependent relationships develop in all aspects of government (not only social and health services). Yet, it is possible for agencies and contractors to have working relationships without the establishment of a contracting regime. Contracting interactions require a set of conditions be met before a symbiotic relationship can be developed. Several conditions lead to the development of a contracting regime (not all are necessarily required):

- Highly technical, specialized, or complex task;
- Limited number of qualified contractors (thus a monopolized or not truly competitive marketplace);
- Government creates an artificial marketplace that would otherwise not exist in the private sector;
- Frequent exchange of personnel from agency to contractor; and
- Long-term, mutual reliance on other party for sustainability.

As contracting interdependent relations develop into established regimes governed by their own rules and norms within the bureaucracy, it is important that these interdependent contracting regimes be governed by a set of values that promote all aspects of the public interest. Much of the larger debate surrounding privatization relates to private contractors ability to serve the public interest (not only efficiency and cost-savings). It is often assumed (and documented in the literature) that general private sector employees are motivated by a different set of values than public employees. Measuring public service motivation is one method of determining if these contracting regimes can promote the public interest.

Other scholars have suggested similar linkages between types of PSM and contracting (Dicke and Ott, 1999; Dicke and Ott, 2002). Dicke and Ott (1999, 2002) focused on the moral linkage between contracting accountability in human services and stewardship theory. Stewardship theory is similar to public service motivation in that it focuses on agents with cooperative motivations who act in the best interest of their principals rather than themselves (Davis, Schoorman, and Donaldson, 1997). While Dicke and Ott

As Smith (1996) suggested, contracting regimes lead to the development of specific norms and standards of behavior between contractors and public sector contract managers. It is possible that contracting regimes could influence the service motivations of government contractors, leading them to share a form of public service motivation. The convergence of values toward public service is more likely when the contractors and public managers share the same values and commitments toward organizational goals (Davis, Schoorman, and Donaldson, 1997; Dicke and Ott, 2002). Private contractors may be "governmentalized" to the extent they share the organization's goals. The revolving door of public sector employees moving to the private sector could also translate into higher levels of PSM within certain contracted industries. Perry (1997) found a positive correlation between professional identification and civic duty and self-sacrifice. Because contractors and agency personal share professional affiliations and their respective codes of ethics, it is plausible professional ethics could influence public service motivation.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Alternative delivery mechanisms (including contracting) are likely to continue to grow as a tool used by local, state, and federal governments. Contracting deserves thorough examination if it will continue to be used by government. This article sets forth a set of propositions regarding role of the PSM as a mitigating factor in contracted public services, suggesting that PSM important is related to the complexity of job task, number of contractors, and presence of a contracting regime. Further research is required to determine if contractors share the same level of PSM as public sector employees and whether or not PSM impacts the quality or protection of public interest associated with the service performed. The shortcoming of previous PSM comparative studies is that they focused on broad comparisons of the public and private sector rather than the narrow focus required for evaluating the practical implications associated with differences in work motivations. A narrower comparison between public and private sector employees within the same industry sector would yield greater understanding of these differences. More importantly, an analysis focusing on the motivation differences between public sector employees and private sector contractors performing similar public sector tasks would provide greater insight into PSM differences and the possible role PSM might serve as a mitigating factor in promoting and protecting the public interest during contracted services.

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ABOUT IPMR

IPMR	<p>The International Public Management Review (IPMR) is the electronic journal of the International Public Management Network (IPMN). All work published in IPMR is double blind reviewed according to standard academic journal procedures.</p> <p>The purpose of the International Public Management Review is to publish manuscripts reporting original, creative research in the field of public management. Theoretical, empirical and applied work including case studies of individual nations and governments, and comparative studies are given equal weight for publication consideration.</p>
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