An Analysis of Differences in Work Motivation between Public and Private Sector Organizations

This study contributes to our understanding of the differences in work motivation between the public and private sectors. Data from a survey of 3,314 private sector and 409 public sector employees in Belgium strongly confirm previous research showing that public sector employees are less extrinsically motivated. Differences in hierarchical level are more important determinants of work motivation than sectoral differences. In addition, most observed differences can be wholly or partially explained by differences in job content, not by the sector itself. Evidence is presented to show that motivational differences can be explained by a positive choice of work–life balance.

Reviews of the relevant literature reveal that work motivation among public sector employees and managers is very different from that of their private sector counterparts (Ambrose and Kulik 1999; Rainey and Bozeman 2000; Wittmer 1991; Wright 2001). However, most research on the subject devotes limited attention to the relative importance of the causes of these differences (Baldwin 1991; Boyne 2002). For example, compared to factors such as age or gender, how important is the sector that an employee works in? In particular, the hierarchical level at which an employee works cannot be neglected. In comparing public sector and private sector employee motivation, strong interaction effects have been found between work motivation and management level (Baldwin 1987; Jurkiewicz and Massey 1997; Karl and Sutton 1998; Moon 2000; Rainey and Bozeman 2000). In addition, most of the research fails to control for relevant explanatory variables, often because of very small sample sizes (Baldwin 1991; Boyne 2002). Sometimes, when samples of private sector and public sector employees contain too many differences in gender, age, education, job content, or hierarchical level, differences in work motivation can be explained simply by these demographic or organizational factors.

Motivation is certainly not a passive notion. Employees in the public sector often make a choice to deliver a worthwhile service to society (Rainey 1982). They are motivated by a strong desire to serve the public interest (Boyne 2002; Perry 2000; Perry and Wise 1990), by a sense of service to the community that is not found among their private sector counterparts (Gabris and Simo 1995; Houston 2000), and by an urge to promote the public interest (Box 1999). Public sector employees show a stronger service ethic than private sector employees (Wittmer 1991). Public service motivation comprises elements such as the opportunity to have an impact on public affairs, commitment to serving the public interest, and an interest in achieving social justice (Naff and Crum 1999; Perry 1996, 1997; Perry and Wise 1990). This choice of the “good cause” is certainly not the only choice that public sector employees make. Most workers constantly make choices between work and family. Some opt for a more balanced life with less work–family conflict, whereas others show high degrees of work commitment and organizational citizenship behavior, putting in extra time and effort. Can some of the observed differences between public sector and private sector employees be explained by such a positive choice, adding to a further understanding of the differences in work motivation between public sector and private sector employees?

The purpose of this article is threefold: First, we aim to test some classic hypotheses on the differences in motivation between public sector and private sector organizations (hypotheses 1–4). Second, we attempt to compare these differences to potential moderator variables (hypotheses 5–6). Third, test a choice-based approach to work motivation—that is, does working for the public service also imply choices that are influenced by issues unrelated to work (hypothesis 7).

Differences in Work Motivation between Public Sector and Private Sector Employees

The research has consistently found that private sector employees and managers value economic rewards more highly than do public sector employees and managers (Cacioppe and Mock 1984; Crewson 1997;
Houston 2000; Karl and Sutton 1998; Khojasteh 1993; Rainey 1982; Rawls, Ulrich, and Nelson 1976; Schuster, Colletti, and Knowles 1973; Solomon 1986; Wittmer 1991). Direct economic benefits are less important for public sector employees than for those in the private sector (Newstrom, Reif, and Monczka 1976). Pay is a much greater motivator for private sector employees, supervisors (Jurkiewicz, Massey, and Brown 1998), and managers (Khojasteh 1993) than it is for their public sector counterparts. Unlike private sector managers, public sector managers are not strongly motivated by pay expectancy (Moon 2000). Based on an analysis of 34 empirical studies, Boyne (2002) found support for only 3 out of 13 hypotheses about the differences between public sector and private sector management. This study was not a real meta-analysis, however, because it gave equal weight to all studies included and may have overlooked other significant differences. Although we acknowledge that this might lead to a slightly skewed picture, the fact that one of three positive results indicated less materialism in public managers largely corroborates previous assumptions. For example, based on an analysis of 14 national surveys, Crewson (1997) concludes that economic rewards are most important to private sector employees.

Only a few researchers have found no significant differences or differences in the opposite direction. Gabris and Simo (1995) found no significant differences for 20 motivational needs, including the need for monetary rewards. Crewson (1997) found similar results when data were limited to one occupational group, namely, engineers. Maidani (1991) even concludes that public sector employees rate extrinsic factors, such as pay, as more important than do private sector employees. Lewis and Frank (2002) found a subtle difference: Respondents who value high income are more likely to prefer public sector employment but less likely to work for the public sector. Based on this overview, we can formulate our first hypothesis:

**H1:** Compared to private sector employees, public sector employees are less motivated by extrinsic monetary rewards.

There is a broad consensus that public sector employees are more intrinsically motivated. Leete (2000) found that nonprofit organizations rely disproportionately on intrinsically motivated employees. This also seems to be the case in the public sector. Most studies have concluded that public sector workers are less extrinsically and hence more intrinsically motivated (Cacioppe and Mock 1984; Crewson 1997). Public sector employees are more motivated by job content, self-development, recognition, autonomy, interesting work, and the chance to learn new things (Houston 2000; Jurkiewicz, Massey, and Brown 1998; Karl and Sutton 1998; Khojasteh 1993; Newstrom, Reif, and Monczka 1976). Only a minority of studies report findings that public sector employees show weaker internal work motivation than their private sector counterparts (Aryee 1992). This analysis leads to our second hypothesis:

**H2:** Compared to private sector employees, public sector employees are more motivated by intrinsic factors, such as responsibility and self-development.

When it comes to the motivational impact of a supportive working environment, the literature on differences between the public and private sectors is silent. Although there is a large body of studies dealing with the link between motivation and job security, the findings often are conflicting (Baldwin 1987, 1991; Cacioppe and Mock 1984; Crewson 1997; Hammer and Van Tassell 1983; Houston 2000; Jurkiewicz, Massey, and Brown 1998; Karl and Sutton 1998; Khojasteh 1993; Lewis and Frank 2002; Newstrom, Reif, and Monczka 1976; Perry and Porter 1982; Rawls, Ulrich, and Nelson 1976; Wittmer 1991). The general picture is that, all else being equal, public sector employees are strongly motivated by security and stability (Jurkiewicz, Massey, and Brown 1998). Job security refers to workers’ ability to retain a desirable job; job stability refers to the duration of the match between a worker and a job. Most studies, however, deal with job security, not job stability. Job stability is a concept that is closer to job content or working style than job security, which has more to do with external economic conditions. Being motivated by a supportive working environment reflects feelings of safety in one’s role (Kihlgren et al. 2003), which is a broader concept than stability. It also encompasses the need to work in a friendly, harmonious, respectful atmosphere. There is some evidence that federal government executives consider their coworkers, colleagues, and bosses significantly more important than do business executives (Posner and Schmidt 1996), and public employees seem to respond more favorably to a people-oriented leadership style than do private employees (Zeefane 1994). Hence, we formulate our third hypothesis as follows:

**H3:** Compared to private sector employees, public sector employees are more motivated by a supportive working environment.

The research on work and organizational commitment offers mixed results. Early research by Buchanan (1974a, 1974b, 1975) reinforced the belief that public sector managers have a lower level of organizational commitment than business executives. Similar findings have been reported by Rainey (1989). In a comparison of 474 Australian public sector employees and 944 private sector employees, Zeefane (1994)
found higher commitment among the latter. Moon (2000) found that public sector managers have a lower level of organizational commitment than do private sector managers, especially in terms of their willingness to expend extra effort. Goulet and Frank (2002) report the lowest organizational commitment among public sector employees and managers in a sample consisting of for-profit, nonprofit, and public sector employees and managers.

Some other studies, however, have reported a higher level of commitment among public sector managers or no difference (Rainey 1983). Farid (1997), for example, compared the organizational commitment of 54 and 43 middle managers from public sector and private sector organizations, respectively, and found no significant differences. Most studies report inconclusive or inconsistent findings (Balfour and Wechsler 1991). Steinhaus and Perry (1996) conclude that, compared to an industry typology, a dichotomous public sector/private sector distinction is not very useful in explaining differences in commitment.

In a critical review of the empirical literature—and in an effort to “debunk negative stereotypes”—Baldwin (1991) concludes that private sector and public sector employees are equally motivated. However, Baldwin’s summary table makes clear that most of the cited studies deal with public sector managers, not street-level public sector employees. Baldwin’s conclusion of equal motivation, then, may be relevant only for managers and not for other employees.

Different organizational (Kline and Peters 1991) or national cultures (Cho and Lee 2001) can explain many differences. Nevertheless, the fact that public sector managers have weaker organizational commitment than their private sector counterparts is one of the three hypotheses supported by Boyne’s overview of 34 empirical studies (Boyne 2002). Balfour and Wechsler (1991) found different correlations between public sector employment and several dimensions of commitment. The only consistent finding is a negative correlation between public sector employment and the willingness to expend extra effort. This dimension, “willingness to exert considerable effort,” is one of the three factors associated with commitment (Steinhaus and Perry 1996, 278). Worker motivation is often defined as working long and intense hours (Baldwin 1990). This analysis leads to our fourth hypothesis:

**H4:** Compared to private sector employees, public sector employees report fewer working hours and less willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization.

Work motivation is dependent not only on the sector of employment but also on factors such as age (Jurkiewicz 2000; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Sheehy 1995; Wittmer 1991), gender (Kacmar, Carlson, and Brymer 1999; LeFkowitz 1994; Mathieu and Zajac 1990), education (Crewson 1997; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Wittmer 1991), and especially management level (Jurkiewicz and Massey 1997; Karl and Sutton 1998; Moon 2000). When these demographic factors are examined, the literature seems to imply that they are less important than sectoral differences. (The major exception might be hierarchical level.) On this basis, we can formulate our fifth and sixth hypotheses:

**H5:** Hierarchical level is at least as important as differences in the sector of employment in explaining motivational differences.

**H6:** Sector of employment is more important than demographic data such as gender, age, or education in explaining motivational differences.

As reflected in hypothesis 4 and indicated by some of the foregoing studies on commitment, public sector employees report fewer working hours than their private sector counterparts. We hypothesize that this is a positive choice, not a lack of dynamism. If this hypothesis is true, then public sector employees will spend more time with their families and report less work–family conflict. Therefore, we formulate our seventh hypothesis as follows:

**H7:** Compared to private sector workers, public sector workers experience less work–family conflict.

**Results**

Table 1 reports the beta values of seven simultaneous regression analyses. (The research design and methodology are described in the appendix.)

We assumed that civil servants are less extrinsically motivated (hypothesis 1). Our findings on motivation by salary largely confirmed this assumption: Civil servants were significantly less motivated by salary ($t = –11.84, p < .001$). This was the highest $t$ value for sectoral differences.

Hypothesis 2 is not confirmed by the data; rather, the opposite seems to be true. Civil servants were less motivated by self-development ($t = –1.93, p = .053$) and slightly less motivated by responsibility ($t = –1.38, p = .17$). Differences in self-development were marginally significant, supporting the position of some researchers that public sector employees are less motivated by challenge and personal growth (Jurkiewicz, Massey, and Brown 1998).
Hypothesis 3 is partially supported by the data. Our scale measuring “being motivated by a supportive working environment” had a clear loading on “certainty” and could be considered a proxy for “motivation by stability.” Public sector workers were more strongly motivated by the desire to work in a supportive working environment ($t = 3.45$; $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 4 is strongly supported. Public sector workers reported significantly fewer working hours ($t = −8.94$; $p < .001$). The same was true for “total commitment to work,” for which public servants were less unconditionally committed ($t = −7.28$; $p < .001$).

For both variables, hierarchical level was even more important ($t = 23.18$; $p < .001$ and $t = 21.76$; $p < .001$), lending strong support to the view that hierarchical level is a strong moderator variable in comparing public sector and private sector employees.

The most pronounced finding confirms hypothesis 5: Hierarchical level seems to be the most important factor in explaining differences in motivation. Hierarchical level was highly significant for all variables, especially for all variables such as commitment and responsibility or closely related variables.

Table 1 also shows that gender was also significant for working hours. The literature, as well as other data in our survey that are not reported here, shows that women work fewer hours in the office. However, they work significantly more hours at home, globally enjoying less free time than men. It is clear from table 1 that gender was significant for motivation by salary and motivation by good relationships. Age was significant for a number of variables. These results are easy to interpret: Older employees have a lesser tendency to leave the organization, want to work in a supportive environment, and are less motivated by salary. Management level seems especially important in explaining working hours and commitment to work, lending strong support to Baldwin (1987) and Karl and Sutton (1998), and contradicting Moon (2000).

The pattern of results in table 1 does not support hypothesis 6. Only once was “sector of employment” the variable with the highest explanatory power—gender, age, and education seem to be at least as important.

How can the motivational differences between the public and private sectors be explained? Sector may be linked to job content, which, in turn, may determine respondents’ motivational patterns. Perhaps it is not the sector itself but the jobs available in the public sector that lack motivational appeal (Wright and Davis 2003). Many jobs in large bureaucracies—private sector or public sector—lack motivating characteristics such as skill variety, feedback, or task identity (Aryee 1992). Perhaps the observed differences between the sectors are better explained by differences in job content. Table 2 shows that both samples were dramatically different on that dimension.

The private sector has a much higher percentage of marketing and sales functions, and the public sector has a much higher percentage of administrative functions. Given the large differences in represented functions, the observed differences between both sectors may be (partially) attributable to differences in job content, not to differences in sector of employment. Unfortunately, the very small number of commercial employees in the public sector makes it statistically impossible to correct for this difference. Therefore, we applied two indirect methods. First, we compared commercial and administrative functions within the private sector. Second, we compared both sectors for administrative functions only. The results are presented in table 3.

The pattern of results in table 3 is very clear. Differences between the private and public sectors are directly mirrored in the differences between administrative and commercial functions within the private sector. There seems to be a general motivational pattern that is associated with administrative jobs, be
Table 2 Differences in Function between the Private and Public Sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Private Sector (percent)</th>
<th>Public Sector (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General management</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics and purchasing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and marketing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and accounting</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information communications and technology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical support</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (R&amp;D, engineering, etc.)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Motivation by salary

Working hours and total commitment to the job, 75 percent for motivation by respect, 50 percent for work–family conflict, and almost zero for motivation by salary.

Emphasizing that public sector employees are motivated by a “good cause” may explain why they are less motivated by money. However, it offers no explanation as to why they consistently report fewer working hours and less total commitment to work, even when differences in job content are taken into account.

Working for the good cause may also require long working hours or pose greater challenges. Public sector employees may make fundamental choices and prefer to lead a more balanced life. Perhaps they invest more in their private lives and simply do not want to join the “rat race.” Research on the relationship between working hours and health shows a link between hours of work and ill health and between work–family conflict and lack of satisfaction with one’s personal life (Sparks et al. 1997). Do public sector employees try to escape this vulnerability? Is work–family balance a motivational factor? (Saltzstein, Ting, and Saltzstein 2001).

Table 1 shows that, as predicted in hypothesis 7, public sector employees reported less work–family conflict ($t = -4.09; p < .001$). Other data in the survey strongly support this view. Other analyses (not reported in table 1) show that they also reported higher satisfaction with family life ($t = 4.21; p < .001$), more hours for private time ($t = 6.80; p < .001$), and even longer sleeping hours ($t = 1.96; p = .05$).

This pattern of results clearly supports a positive choice approach. Public sector employees are less motivated by money and work challenge and less committed to long working hours than their private sector counterparts, for the simple reason that they are more motivated by leading a balanced life.

**Discussion**

Table 1 demonstrates that, with the exception of motivation by salary, hierarchical level seems to matter.

Table 3 * Values Associated with Beta Values in Seven Simultaneous Regression Analyses: Effect of Function and Sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Difference between Administrative and Commercial Functions, Private Sector*</th>
<th>Difference between Private and Public Sector, Administrative Functions Only†</th>
<th>Difference between Private and Public Sector, All Functions (See Table 1)‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working hours</td>
<td>$-3.73^{***}$</td>
<td>$-2.98^{**}$</td>
<td>$-8.94^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>$-1.55$</td>
<td>$-4.92^{***}$</td>
<td>$-7.28^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation by salary</td>
<td>$-2.50^*$</td>
<td>$-4.35^{***}$</td>
<td>$-11.84^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated by working in a supportive environment</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.92 ($p = .06$)</td>
<td>3.45***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation by self-development</td>
<td>$-1.49$</td>
<td>$-0.79$</td>
<td>$-1.93$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation by responsibility</td>
<td>$-3.48^{***}$</td>
<td>$-0.23$</td>
<td>$-1.38$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work–family conflict</td>
<td>$-2.00^*$</td>
<td>$-2.17^*$</td>
<td>$-4.09^{***}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A positive sign indicates that in the private sector, administrative functions scored higher than commercial functions on this variable.
† A positive sign indicates that civil servants scored higher on this variable.
‡ A positive sign indicates that civil servants scored higher on this variable.

$^* p < .05; ^{**} p < .01; ^{***} p < .001.$
more than differences in sector. This result corroborates the findings of research showing that motivational patterns differ significantly for higher- and lower-level public sector employees. The former are more private sector–like, with high commitment, high satisfaction, and smaller gaps between what they want and what they get (Jerkiewicz and Massey 1997).

Job content is also a very strong moderator variable. Once again, motivation by salary seems to be the important exception. On the other hand, differences in internal motivation (self-development and motivation by responsibility) seem to be completely the result of differences in job content. Commitment to the job (Lee and Olshfski 2002) is at least as important as commitment to the organization or to the public interest. Hence, we can understand the conflicting nature of our findings with much of the literature.

Our results confirm most of our hypotheses on the differences in work motivation between public sector and private sector employees, and they may point to reasons why other researchers have found conflicting results. For example, differences in work motivation can be strongly confounded by factors such as gender, age, job content, or hierarchical level. If samples are not carefully matched on those variables, or if the effects are not partialed out in the statistical analyses, unexpected differences can be easily explained by such confounding variables.

Do our observed differences support the stereotype of the lazy bureaucrat? Are fewer working hours, even when job content is controlled for, and weaker overall commitment to work reflections of a negative working attitude? Alternatively, do public sector employees make a positive choice by choosing a well-balanced life? Our data support the latter view. Public sector employees make positive choices. They do not opt for the rat race. They want respect for their own working rhythms, their personal lives, their quality time, and their family priorities. Although this idea seems to correspond with casual observation, we could identify only a single study showing that public sector employees are more strongly motivated by work–family balance: They are less inclined than private sector managers to relocate their family for a better job (Posner and Schmidt 1996). Of course, many other alternatives remain open. Therefore, as part of a larger study of the so-called psychological contract, we set up a similar study (with 462 workers from the public sector and 3,407 from the private sector) to deal directly with this unexpected finding. In that study, respondents were asked to what degree they are motivated by a more balanced work–family relationship. The results indicate that public sector employees are significantly more motivated by a balanced work–family relationship. Respondents from the nonprofit sector were even more motivated by a balanced work–family relationship. However, differences in hierarchical level and in the percentage of part-time versus full-time workers explain many of the observed differences. Because we could not find theoretical or empirical support in the extant literature, we set up a research program dealing with this question of sectoral differences in work–family balance. Preliminary evidence from this program, specifically dealing with that question, suggests that civil servants are indeed more motivated by balancing the work and family spheres. The lack of empirical studies in this field—whether supporting or disconfirming our positive choice hypothesis—is certainly striking. Considering the many gaps that remain to be filled, further efforts in this area are likely to constitute a fruitful avenue of research.

Our results contribute to the debate on the new managerialism in the public sector (Box 1999; Van Gramberg 2000). Public sector managers exhibit a motivational profile that is similar to private sector managers at a lower management level. However, many of the concepts introduced by the New Public Management movement are aimed at higher-level profiles: entrepreneurship, empowerment, or total commitment. This new language simply may not appeal to many civil servants in managerial positions. Just as tax officers or prison guards have the greatest difficulties in perceiving their target groups as clients, managers in the civil service may not easily perceive themselves as new managers. The new management techniques often require total commitment, a price that many public sector employees may not be ready to pay.

References


Appendix: Methodology and Research Design

Data Collection
Data were collected in Belgium through a large-scale survey in the Flemish newspaper *Vacature*, which specializes in recruitment communication and job advertising and is distributed as a supplement to four national newspapers and two magazines. Respondents could reply to the survey, titled “How Hard Do the Flemish Work?” on paper or on the Internet. Respondents answered 125 questions dealing with the number of hours spent on work, leisure time, sleep, and family; other questions dealt with work motivation, job and life satisfaction, psychosomatic complaints, and intention to leave the job. Ten questions dealt with biographical data, including sector of employment.

Sample, Missing Values, and Outliers
The sample of 5,853 respondents was more or less representative of the professional working population, with overrepresentation of males (73 percent) and professional (white-collar) workers (only 1 percent blue collar workers). Different age groups, educational backgrounds, marital statuses, sectors of employment, education levels, and management levels were well represented. In order to compare motivational variables and working hours, only answers from full-time workers were analyzed. Out of 5,853 respondents working full time, 3,314 could be identified as working in the private sector and 409 in the public sector. An additional 782 respondents belonged to the so-called hybrid sector (Wittmer 1991). A total of 424 were employed in education and 358 in healthcare. Finally, 1,258 respondents replied “other,” such as the unemployed, farmers, lawyers, students, and retired persons; 90 respondents did not answer the question.

Private and public sector employees did not differ statistically on gender (both groups had about 26 percent female respondents), reported management level (on a five-point scale ranging from employee to senior manager), education, and marital status. The only statistically significant difference was age: The public sector group was significantly older than the private sector group (average age was 39 for public sector respondents and 36 for private sector respondents; $t = 5.73; p < .001$).

Any large-scale survey is hindered by the problem of missing values. The share of missing values was 1.19 percent, ranging from 0.35 percent to 0.50 percent for questions on gender, age group, and education to 4 percent on more personal questions. These figures are well below the 5 percent that is considered acceptable (Cohen and Cohen 1983). To deal with outliers, a straightforward policy was adopted. Typographical errors were corrected and other data were respected as much as possible. The highest reported number of working hours was 120. Inspection of this case revealed that the person reportedly slept only four hours per night, did not invest in family life, and took only one hour off per week.

About 1 percent of respondents reported total activities that required more than 168 hours per week. In those cases, we limited the reported off-work time so that the maximum of 168 was not surpassed.

The Problem of Autoselection
Our sample is clearly autoselective. This can cause problems of external validity (Rogelberg and Luong 1998). The only meaningful solution for problems of autoselection is to determine the variable by which respondents autoselect themselves and incorporate this variable into the final analysis (Heckman 1979). In practice, this variable is seldom known. If this hypothetical variable (e.g., interested in surveys, reading a widely distributed newspaper, higher socioeconomic class) is introduced in the analysis—in our case, a simultaneous regression analysis—the only assumption that must be made is independence of this hypothetical variable and our focal dummy variable (public sector employee versus private sector). This assumption is certainly realistic. It is difficult to conceive of a variable that would be an important determinant of autoselection and, at the same time, strongly correlates with the difference between the private and public sectors and does not strongly correlate with the other variables in the model. To put it differently, even if such an autoselection variable existed, its influence would be extremely small because most of its influence would be absorbed by the other variables, such as age, gender, or hierarchical level—variables that are much more likely to be influenced by autoselection. Of course, if our analyses were based on comparing means and standard deviations with an absolute norm or with averages from other studies, the conclusions could be very misleading. We would report means and standard deviations of respondents ready to answer a survey. However, we primarily report differences. In these cases, autoselection is a much lower threat to external validity.

Furthermore, selection by the researcher (e.g., “a large, midwestern municipality”), the most common practice in this kind of research, results in exactly the same problem. Researchers have to assume independence of the selection variable and the criterion variable. In practice, this is often questionable. One has easy access to the “local administration” and difficult access to the company or vice versa. The collection period in both organizations is different, and the distribution of questionnaires within both
organizations follows different patterns. Nevertheless, even if this assumption is sometimes questionable, most publications seem to accept it and even seem to accept the clear restriction of range following from this research design.

**Scale Development**

Publishing a survey in a well-known, widely distributed magazine has the advantage of reaching a large number of respondents. However, there are also some constraints. Available space is limited, making it impractical to collect data through existing scales that are widely studied but also lengthy. Therefore, based on existing scales, we constructed a number of shorter five-point Likert scales. A total of 23 questions dealt with work motivation and commitment. Based on factor analysis, we constructed four motivational scales: motivation by salary (Cronbach’s alpha = .69) had three items (e.g., “A high salary is important to me”); motivation by opportunities for self-development (Cronbach’s alpha = .70) had four items (e.g., “If I work very hard, it is because I can develop myself completely in my job”); motivation by responsibility (Cronbach’s alpha = .78) had three items (e.g., “Assuming responsibility is important to me”); and motivation by working in a supportive working environment (Cronbach’s alpha = .72) had four items. Intercorrelations between the scales ranged from .11 to .36.

The first three scales correspond to widely known motivational measurements. Many observations point to validity here: For example, the score for motivation by salary was highest in the hotel and catering business, very high in banking, and lowest in education, and the score for motivation by opportunities for self-development was extremely low in the transport business.

The scale for motivation by working in a supportive working environment had four items:

- “Respect for everybody’s work rhythm is important to me.”
- “A quiet working atmosphere is important to me.”
- “Certainty is important to me.”

The validity of this scale can only be inferred from our own data: Older people and women were more motivated by working in a supportive working environment; for higher-educated respondents and those at higher hierarchical levels, it was less important. The highest scores were in health care and education (followed by “public sector,” in our more restricted sense); the lowest scores were reported in consultancy, distribution, and construction. The scale also correlated moderately with measurements of soft behaviors such as satisfaction with colleagues.

The scale for total work commitment (Cronbach’s alpha = .76) had seven items describing the employee’s total commitment—for example, “If I work hard, it is because my job is my life,” or “Most of the time, I am preoccupied by my work.” Items were taken from existing scales measuring organizational citizenship behavior and work drive. The scale primarily reflects the willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization (Steinhaus and Perry 1996, 278). Work–family conflict (Cronbach’s alpha = .70) had two items, one of which was “How often did you experience conflicts between work and family?”

**Method**

We performed multiple simultaneous regression analyses for seven dependent variables: four motivation scales, reported working hours, total commitment to work, and work–family conflict. Independent variables were the sector of employment (public versus private), gender, age, education, and management level. For our focus, the most important methodological concern was to ensure that other variables were kept quite separate when discussing a particular variable, so that motivational differences between employees from private sector and public sector organizations could not be explained by differences in age, gender, education, or organizational level.