

## **The Cost of Saving Money: Public Service Motivation, Private Security Contracting, and the Salience of Employment Status**

Cullen C. Merritt, Ph.D.\*

School of Public and Environmental Affairs  
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis  
801 W. Michigan St., BS 4155  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
[merritt1@iupui.edu](mailto:merritt1@iupui.edu)

Sheila Suess Kennedy, J.D.

School of Public and Environmental Affairs  
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis  
801 W. Michigan St., BS 4152  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
[shekenne@iupui.edu](mailto:shekenne@iupui.edu)

Matt R. Kienapple

Kelley School of Business  
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis  
801 W. Michigan St., BS 4155  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
[mkienapp@uemail.iu.edu](mailto:mkienapp@uemail.iu.edu)

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## **ABSTRACT**

The growth of government outsourcing has triggered significant legal and social science research. That research has focused primarily on issues of cost, accountability, and management. A thus far understudied question concerns the relevance and importance of public service motivations (PSM), especially when a government agency is proposing to outsource services that are considered inherently governmental. This exploratory study centers on the use of private security guards to augment government-provided public safety, and investigates the public service motivations of part-time and full-time employees of private security firms that regularly partner with—or seek to protect the public independent of—local police. Findings reveal that the presence or absence of motivations consistent with PSM was not attributable to private sector employment, but to whether informants were part-time or full-time employees.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the 1990s, ground-breaking research by Perry and Wise (1990) triggered scholarly investigation of a previously understudied public administration issue: whether the motivations of public sector employees differed from the work motivations of people opting for employment in private for-profit enterprises, and if so, how. The resulting literature, which continues to grow, confirmed that the motivations differed, and identified elements of what came to be known as Public Service Motivation (PSM), which include the dimensions of attraction to policymaking, commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice (Perry, 1996; see also Kim 2009; Kim, Vandenabeele, Wright, Andersen, Cerase, Christensen, Desmarais, Koumenta, Leisink, Palidauskaite, Pedersen, Perry, Ritz, Taylor, & De Vivo, 2013; Wright, Christensen, & Pandey, 2013). The growth in that literature was paralleled by increases in what is variously

termed privatization, contracting out, or outsourcing, the practice of delivering government services through private sector surrogates intended to reduce government service expenditures or to access an area of expertise that government lacks (see Greve, 2001; Word & Carpenter, 2013).

The use of for-profit contractors to deliver public services raises a number of key public management questions, including concerns about accountability, the relevant agency's capacity for oversight, the "hollowing out" of governmental capacity, and the role of political influence in the choice of contractor; as a result, the practice has generated a robust scholarly literature (e.g., Brown & Potoski, 2005; Getha-Taylor, 2009; Girth, 2012; Hefetz & Warner, 2004; Johnson & Romzek, 1999; Van Slyke, 2003). Contractual arrangements with nonprofit organizations have also grown, as governments have increasingly delivered services through nonprofit entities (Word & Carpenter, 2013; Girth, 2012; Kettl, 2000), and scholars of the third sector have investigated the impact of those arrangements on the missions and management of those organizations (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). This exercise of core governmental authority by non-governmental organizations has become a distinctive feature of what has been dubbed America's "new governance" (Hall & Kennedy, 2008; Salamon, 2002; Kettl, 1993; Kettl, 1998), and has generated substantial legal scholarship in addition to the growing literatures in both public and nonprofit management. (Minow, 2002; Kennedy, 2001; Metzger, 2003; Jensen & Kennedy 2005).

Despite the existence of this robust literature, an understudied question is the extent to which the public service motivations of employees of potential contractors should be considered when government is outsourcing services, especially services that have been considered inherently governmental. Public safety is one such service, despite the fact that private security firms have long been utilized to supplement government law enforcement personnel, especially

when large events outstrip the ability of local police departments to provide adequate coverage. We are interested in generating preliminary empirical examination into whether employees of private security firms hold motivations consistent with PSM when hired to protect the safety of the general public, and whether their motivations differ along employment status designations as part-time and full-time.

Existing research offers insight into individual attributes associated with or influencing one's degree of public service motivation, such as gender (Dehart-Davis, Marlowe, & Pandey, 2006; Kacmar, Carlson, & Brymer, 1999), race (Bright, 2008), education (Crewson, 1997; Wittmer, 1991), nationality (Bullock, Stritch, & Rainey, 2015), and age (Jurkiewicz, 2000; Wittmer, 1991) as well as organizational factors, such as occupational focus and locus (Houston, 2011) and management level (Jurkiewicz & Massey, 1997). However, to our knowledge, an attribute that has not yet been considered as being associated with PSM is whether one is a part-time or full-time employee. The development of empirical research in this area may aid in advancing a recommendation for PSM research offered by Pandey, Pandey, Breslin, and Broadus (2017): "focus on the job as the appropriate unit to study (instead of sector, which is a red herring)" (p. 319). Indeed, evidence demonstrates that individuals maintaining high levels of PSM are attracted to public service-oriented jobs and not necessarily to public-sector organizations (Andersen, Pallesen, & Pedersen, 2011; Kjeldsen, 2014; Pandey et al., 2017); however, a question remains: are high-PSM employees in public service-oriented jobs outside the government sector distributed similarly across personnel in part-time and full-time positions?

In the current study, a clear distinction in motivations between part- and full-time personnel emerged. Specifically, while full-time security guards displayed attitudes often associated with public service motivation, despite their maintaining little desire to work for the

public sector, part-time personnel often indicated a desire to someday pursue public-sector careers despite the lack of what scholars would categorize as a public service motivation. Due to a variety of economic factors, including the continued growth of what has been called the “gig economy” and anticipated growth of the private security industry between 2016 and 2026 as projected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), there has been an influx of part-time employees into private security operations, and at this point, that growth appears likely to remain a permanent fixture of the private-sector job market. When a municipality contracts for street paving or mowing services, the motivations of the low bidders are arguably less relevant. In contrast, when government is outsourcing what many consider more *essential* public services, such as protecting people against dangerous threats (e.g., terrorism, vandalism, theft), the ability of the contractor to adequately discharge its duties depends in large part upon the private organization’s understanding of the nature of public service, and especially upon staffing decisions that reflect that understanding. Public service motivations would seem to be especially important when the public’s safety is at risk, and that is the assumption that prompted this study.

This research begins with a review of literature on the motivations of government and private employees and the connections of those motivations to decisions about outsourcing. We then describe the study’s data and methodology. Third, we elaborate on our findings on the work motivations of private security guards based upon whether they have part- or full-time employment. We conclude by discussing contributions, practical implications, and directions for future research.

## **WORK MOTIVATIONS OF GOVERNMENTAL VERSUS PRIVATE ACTORS**

Research seeking to define motivation in the public service domain has grown, offering fresh insights. Perry and Wise (1990) provided an initial definition, maintaining that public service motivation is “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions or organizations” (p. 368). Even though specific elements of this original definition have been heavily critiqued, proposed refinements typically have not varied extensively from Perry and Wise’s original definition (Pandey et al., 2017; see also Bozeman & Su, 2015). For example, Vandenberg (2007) defines public service motivation as “the beliefs, values, and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate” (p. 547).

In addition to conducting research seeking to define and conceptualize public service motivation, scholars have investigated public service motivation among federal employees (Naff & Crum, 1999); antecedents of public service motivation (Perry, 1997), including the role of government organizations in fostering PSM among public managers (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Vandenberg, 2011); the characteristics of the public-employee work environment that have an impact upon motivation (Wright, 2001); and the ways in which public values are expressed through the actions of government managers (Bozeman, 2007) (see Moulton & Feeney, 2011). A review of these and other studies on motivation suggests that government employees prioritize intrinsic rewards, such as service to society (Baarspul & Wilderom, 2011; Brewer & Selden, 1998; Perry & Wise, 1990) and commitment to the public interest (Perry, 1996; Perry & Wise, 1990; Houston, 2000) and, at least compared to their private sector counterparts, place less value on extrinsic reward motivators such as high incomes (Houston, 2000, p. 725).

The amount of public administration research into the motivations of private-sector employees pales in comparison to the research analyzing the motivations of government workers. In general, “private sector employees are collectively portrayed as motivated by status, opportunity to advance, autonomy, and high pay, while being unconcerned with worthwhile contributions to society...” (Jurkiewicz et al., 1998, p. 231). According to Baarspul and Wilderom (2011), this assumption is commonly held to be valid among scholars studying motivation in public administration, but empirical evidence for that assumption is mixed. Research finds that private actors are motivated by monetary gain (Bullock, Stritch, & Rainey, 2015; Buelens & van den Broeck, 2007; Houston, 2000); prestige (Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2006; Wittmer, 1991; Jurkiewicz, Massey, & Brown, 1998), and job security (Crewson, 1997; Houston, 2000). Kovach’s (1995) longitudinal study found that although private managers’ perceptions of subordinate motivations had varied little over a 50-year period, the motivations themselves had changed; of the 10 primary motivational influences, good wages, job security, and interesting work were the only factors that ranked in the top 5 both in 1995 and 1946. Houston’s (2000) study reinforces core findings in this research area, specifically the conclusion that private employees are not motivated by a sense of service to the degree found among public employees.

There are a few contrary studies, however, that have found no distinctions between the motivations of government and private actors (Crewson, 1997; Gabris & Simo, 1995; Rainey, 1983). Maidani (1991), for example, found no difference between government and private actors on the importance of intrinsic motivational factors. Interestingly, Jurkiewicz and her colleagues’ (1998) study demonstrates that “the data on private sector employees change some long-held beliefs and bolster others. The singular most surprising artifact is the level of importance of

‘chance to benefit society’...It may be that the answer to the often asked question, ‘where has the ethic of public service gone’ is this: it has gone to the private sector” (p. 245).

The data and methodologies of studies investigating public service motivation have garnered considerable attention. Pandey and colleagues (2017) conducted a systematic review of the data and methodologies of 128 studies (106 of which were empirical) conducted between 2008 and 2015 exploring the meaning, influences, or effects of public service motivation. These studies mostly use cross-sectional quantitative data collected through survey questionnaire, with only three studies solely using qualitative data (Ritz, 2011; van Eijk & Steen, 2014; Schott et al., 2015). Few studies analyzed by Pandey et al. used mixed methodologies. The data collected mostly originated from Europe, the United States, and Asia, with a small number of studies utilizing data collected from multiple countries. Finally, Pandey and colleagues’ systematic review reveals that data collected for studies on PSM were primarily obtained from employees of government organizations at the federal, state, and local levels, and included front-line employees, middle managers, and senior managers. Other studies relied on data collected from students at the undergraduate and graduate levels as well as those seeking professional degrees. Professions analyzed include those within health (e.g., nurses, physiotherapists, doctors), social services (e.g., teachers, social works), and public safety and law enforcement (e.g., police officers, firefighters, lawyers).

Given the range of data and methodologies employed in research on PSM, we are left to wonder what accounts for the discrepancies between studies finding differences and those finding no differences in the work motivations of public and private employees. The evidence suggests that individuals maintaining high levels of PSM are attracted to public service-oriented jobs and not necessarily to public-sector organizations (Andersen, Pallesen, & Pedersen, 2011;



Kjeldsen, 2014; Pandey et al., 2017). As a consequence, scholars may benefit from clearly distinguishing between “public sector motivation” and “public service motivation”, the latter of which is not necessarily confined to personnel operating in the government sector (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008, p. 3; Pandey et al., 2017; Houston, 2011; Bozeman & Su, 2015) and not necessarily uniform across part-time and full-time employees. Assuming the validity of these observations, it may be reasonable to explore certain questions public administration scholars have yet to raise about the work motivations of the private actors supplementing government services, with particular attention to their association with employment status.

## **MOTIVATION AND OUTSOURCING**

Over the past quarter-century, a burgeoning public affairs literature has centered on practices variously labeled privatization, outsourcing, or contracting out, in which a private-sector contractor or other non-governmental designee acts as a proxy for government in the delivery of services “under the aegis of governmental authority and paid from the public purse.” (Gilmour & Jensen, 1998, p. 247; see also Seidman & Gilmour, 1986; Kettl, 1988; Salamon, 1989). Despite this reality of modern-day governance, public administration studies concerning motivation largely focus their analysis either on (a) government actors or (b) private actors in for-profit positions that do not necessarily implicate public goals. More recent investigations have aimed to better understand the work motivations of organizational actors advancing public goals outside of the public sector (Moulton & Feeney, 2010). The practices of privatization, outsourcing, and contracting out have not only led to an increase in the magnitude of private activities aimed at advancing public goals, but have also created new challenges for the public service environments within which such private actors operate. For example, Milward and Provan (2000) have written

extensively about the “hollowing out” of government capacity that has accompanied the embrace of contracting out public services. Another recurring question raised by the literature is whether certain government responsibilities are so “inherently governmental” that they should not be assumed by non-governmental actors (Kennedy & Jensen, 2004).

Scholars have also raised a number of concerns triggered by what has been called “third-party government,” beginning with basic issues of definition; as Paul Starr (1988, p. 7) noted, “The terms public and private are fundamental to the language of our law, politics and social life...” In the United States, legally and constitutionally, “public” means “governmental,” and “private” means “nongovernmental.” The literature addressing the multiple issues involved in privatization and government contracting has rested upon an unquestioned acceptance of that distinction. However, the public-private distinction is increasingly less clear in reality (Bozeman, 1987), as evidenced by the growing practice of doing the public’s work with private-sector actors. The blurred boundaries between public and private resulting from privatization and government contracting also have implications for what the term “public” means in the context of public service motivation (Pandey et al., 2017); “does the public signal ownership of organization delivering services or location where individuals receive service or does it signify public as in normative public values, which infuse and animate public institutions” (Pandey et al. 2017, p. 321)?

Adding to the complex environment of modern-day governance is the provision of certain public services by private sector companies whose employees include both part-time and full-time workers (Parfomak, 2004). Researchers have generally ignored the implications of increases in the use of part-time employees—and potential consequences of that use for the satisfactory performance of public functions—despite the fact that the number of private firms

relying upon part-time workers will likely remain high for the foreseeable future, due in no small part to an incentive contained in federal health care legislation. According to Even and Macpherson (2016), “At its passage, the 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA) required that firms with 50 or more employees provide health insurance for their full-time workers or be subjected to penalties beginning in 2014. Many analysts argue that the law created incentives for large firms to shift from full-time to part-time workers to escape the penalties and cost of health insurance” (p. 1). Dillender, Heinrich, and Houseman (2016) have noted that, “Employers can potentially circumvent the mandate by reducing weekly hours below the 30-hour threshold” (1). Given this increased incentive to employ part-time workers, public administrators need to know whether there are meaningful differences in motivation between part-time and full-time employees, and how such differences, if they exist, affect the performance of private-sector contractors—especially because the specific roles of part- and full-time workers performing public services are often indistinguishable (Scott & McPherson, 1971).

Whether employees are part-time or full-time is at the core of their “organizational identity” (Wegge, Van Dick, Fisher, Wecking, Moltzen, 2006; Giannikis & Mihail, 2011; Kallenberg, 1995) and has implications for work motivation (Wegge et al., 2006). Specifically, an employee’s attachment to the organization (based on the employee’s organizational identity), which is typically stronger among full-time employees than their part-time counterparts, may enhance motivation to adhere to organizational norms, such as being friendly to citizens, and/or the manner in which the employee navigates problems linked to their core tasks, such as communicating with sometimes unfriendly citizens (Wegge et al., 2006, p. 77; see also Haslam, 2004). As a result of these distinctions in organizational identity, part-time and full-time employees, even when undertaking similar responsibilities, should not be viewed as homogenous

groups characterized by the same work-related wants and needs (Taylor, 2008). Just as there are employees who work purely or primarily for tangible rewards such as income, there are also employees who work for less tangible or more altruistic reasons, such as motivation to serve the public (Taylor, 2008).

## **METHODOLOGY**

We explored the work motivations of private-sector actors based upon their status as part-time or full-time employees of security services companies. We determined that grounded theory methodology was appropriate for this study because our objective was to illuminate theory on work motivation with insights grounded in the private security environment, a context which warrants additional empirical investigation in public administration research. According to Suddaby (2006), grounded theory is characterized by systematic data collection aimed at developing or enhancing theories that address the interpretive realities of actors in social settings. Furthermore, grounded theory requires a “continual interplay” between data collection and data analysis, which frequently occur in concert (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010).

As previously noted, a significant majority of research on work motivation is gained from quantitative survey data (Jurkiewicz et al., 1998; Pandey et al., 2017). In a domain of inquiry with few qualitatively driven insights, let alone in private sector contexts in which personnel are charged with roles having public importance, “the validity of the PSM concept and its inquiries in quantitative research can be enhanced by first being grounded in real life situations and observations through interviews from a broader perspective” (Ritz, 2011, p. 1133). Especially important for uncovering any distinctions between part- and full-time employees, grounded theory enables the researcher to go “into the field with an open-mind to explore the issue at

hand...the results can be surprising, running contrary to the researcher's expectations" (van Eijk & Steen, 2014, p. 365). At a time when the outsourcing of traditionally public services is growing, fresh insights may be helpful to public agencies trying to understand the extent to which potential contractors' employees—both part- and full-time—display public service motivations.

Below we describe the current study's research context, case selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures, all of which are part of an ongoing study of employee work motivations, performance, and management in public safety organizations.

### **Research Context**

The subjects for this study were selected from two private security firms in the Midwest. Large security firms have long made "extensive use of part-time employees, especially in the security function, where the demand may fluctuate considerably over short periods of time" (Scott & McPherson, 1971, p. 275). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009), of the roughly one million security guards working in the United States in 2006, approximately 15% worked part-time.

We intentionally selected the private security firms from which to draw our sample because both firms have been in operation for over two decades and are among the largest in the region, employing over 1,000 part- and full-time workers. Additionally, both organizations in this study aim to offer innovative security management to government and private clients in various cities throughout the Midwest; to government, they offer law enforcement support, security staffing, and event services. Working either alongside government law enforcement or independently, they service venues and events (often large in scale) in which public safety is a

primary concern, including airports, schools, college and professional sporting events, music concerts, state and county fairs, parades, and graduations. To provide these services, the security firms in the current study employ senior managers, middle managers, and front-line staff who interact with and protect the general public. The firms in question are defined by relatively flat hierarchies, and senior and middle managers sometimes provide front-line security support. Both organizations seek to maintain a diverse workforce with respect to age, gender, professional background, and race, among other demographic characteristics.

### **Case Selection**

Case selection for this exploratory study involved a purposive sample of 17 private security guards, 10 part-time and 7 full-time, across two private security agencies. The sample size of the present study, while relatively small, aligns with the recommended number of participants interviewed for a single qualitative study. According to Beitin's review of standards for qualitative research samples, "Thomas and Pollio (2002) suggest that an appropriate sample size for phenomenological research can range from 6 to 12 participants...Creswell (1998) recommended between 5 and 25 participants, with another researcher (Boyd, 2001) prescribing a more flexible range of 2-10. These differences extend to other common qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory, and make it difficult for qualitative research to predetermine a sample size" (p. 243-244).

Collecting a purposive sample is standard practice when conducting grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), when a grounded theory study begins, "the researcher brings to it some idea of the phenomenon he or she wants to study. Based on this knowledge,

groups of individuals, an organization, or a community representative of that phenomenon can be selected for the study” (8). To identify our sample for the current study, we partnered with one senior manager from each security firm and requested to interview employees with (to the extent possible) variation in descriptive characteristics, such as employment status, gender, race, age, educational background, and length of tenure. We provided senior managers with a formal invitation to our study that they could distribute to prospective participants. The formal invitation provided the background, purpose, and goals of the study; consent processes; confidentiality associated with results; and the study team’s names, affiliations, and contact information. Aside from this request to senior managers regarding our purposive sample preferences, the research team did not participate in participant recruitment processes and had little influence on the number and composition of study participants. As a result, the research team was unable to determine the extent to which study participants represented typical, extreme, deviant, or exemplary cases within the general population or even within their own organizations.

Overall, the composition of the study’s sample indicates that senior managers selected respondents that aligned with our purposive sample preferences. With the exception of gender (the study would have benefitted from additional female respondents), the current study’s sample accounting for both part-time and full-time employees was comprised of desirable variation with respect to: age (ranging from younger than 20 to over 50), race (white and nonwhite), education (ranging from pursuing a high school diploma to possessing a master’s degree), years employed in the current position (ranging from less than a month to 3 years), years employed by the organization (ranging from less than 1 month to 11 years), number of employees supervised (ranging from 0 to 800). In addition, the research team was impressed with the variation in

respondents' employment histories prior to becoming a part-time or full-time security guard, which included, but was not limited to, no prior employment, a real estate broker, a case manager for youth, a teacher, a police officer, and a member of the military. Part-time employees in the current study mostly worked between 20-30 hours/week, while full-time employees within our sample typically worked 40-60 hours/week, indicating there was variation between hours worked within part-time and full-time employee samples.

When comparing part-time and full-time samples, there were few distinguishing characteristics beyond employment status. The part-time employee sample was comprised of a greater proportion of nonwhite employees as well as security guards who supervised fewer employees. Otherwise, both samples contained security guards with similar variations in ages, educational backgrounds, years employed in their current positions, years employed by the organization, and employment history prior to becoming a security guard. Respondent characteristics associated with our sample are included in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

## **Data Collection**

We collected data through open-ended, semi-structured in-person and telephone interviews from March 2017-August 2017. 13 in-person interviews were conducted in conference rooms at the security firms where informants were employed. The remaining four interviews were conducted over the telephone to accommodate respondent availability. Interviews with part-time employees averaged approximately 40 minutes in length, while interviews with full-time employees averaged just under 50 minutes in length. We employed a grounded approach to data collection in which the knowledge and experiences of private security guards exclusively guided emerging themes regarding work motivations.



During interviews, we engaged respondents in conversation around their perceptions of their firm's mission, organizational responsibilities, and their own initial and current work motivations in light of the organizational mission and responsibilities. We asked why informants decided to work for a private organization rather than a government agency. For further insight into respondent motivations, we also aimed to understand their perceptions of their organization's service recipients, problems they experience when executing their job responsibilities, and whether self-accountability or accountability to/supervision by their organization/superiors more strongly motivates effective job performance. Finally, we asked respondents to explain their firm's training procedures and to suggest how training might be improved. Throughout the data collection process, researchers focused upon identifying emerging themes, while remaining alert to new insights that might be offered during subsequent interviews. We recorded interview responses after receiving consent, and later transcribed responses verbatim prior to coding and analysis. The complete interview protocol for the study is included in the appendix.

### **Data Analysis**

A team of three researchers followed a process of open coding prescribed by Strauss (1987) in order to identify and categorize patterns emerging from the data. Each coder engaged in an iterative process of close reading of qualitative data, extensive annotation, open coding, and frequent comparisons of codes within and across cases. Researchers subsequently aggregated codes into primary dimensions of work motivation based on thematic relationships and across part- and full-time employment statuses. After proceeding through these analyses independently,

the team confirmed inter-coder reliability by comparing coding patterns and emerging themes, and engaged in exhaustive discussions to resolve discrepancies.

The data analysis process ultimately yielded agreement on the primary motivations of part-time and full-time security guards participating in this study. These trends were distinctive across employment status and are discussed in the following section.

## **FINDINGS**

The objective of this study was to explore the motivations of individuals working for companies offering private security services. Because providing for the public safety is a core responsibility of government, determining whether the motivation of part- and full-time security service employees is consistent with that public purpose provides the contracting agency with an important data point. This area was chosen based upon the frequency of collaboration between private security firms and local public law enforcement agencies. Interviews revealed that the private actors, whether part- or full-time, had consistent understandings of their employers' missions and that their public safety roles were comparable. This allowed us to interpret work motivations from within analogous environments.

A clear distinction in motivations between part-time and full-time employees emerged from our analysis, with the latter exhibiting motivations consistent with PSM, unlike their part-time counterparts. Specifically, part-time employees' motivations centered on pay scales; their conceptions of duty were focused upon clients, fellow employees, and their supervisors rather than the broader public; and they viewed employment with these firms as an opportunity to gain experience that might lead to later careers in government. In contrast, full-time employees expressed a motivation to protect the general public and a commitment to developing and/or

sustaining partnerships with government agencies that would foster or enhance methods of ensuring the safety of the general public. Interestingly, while the motivations of full-time security personnel reflected tenets often associated with public service motivation, despite their maintaining little desire to work for government, part-time personnel often indicated a desire to pursue public sector careers despite the lack of what scholars would categorize as a public service motivation. Further insight into our findings illustrate this disconnect.

### **Motivation and Part-Time Employment**

The primary reason given by part-time employees for choosing to work at a private security firm was pay, either because they had been unable to find employment at a similar rate of compensation elsewhere, or because they were seeking additional income and this was the job that was available. One informant noted,

Motivations? Well honestly, I enjoy my job, but I'm just trying to put myself through college right now. I for sure get 24 hours every single weekend, and that helps me pay for rent and food. We don't get paid very much for what we do, but it's not minimum wage!

For those working to supplement their incomes from other jobs, providing security as a public service was a secondary priority. Others, for whom the need for supplemental income was less pressing, worked as security guards so that they could gain free access to events for which they would otherwise pay. According to one respondent,

I've always had another full-time job, and kind of done this [security] on the side or whatever...I looked into it originally because my friend worked here and he worked at concerts and all that stuff and I was like, 'well, that sounds awesome to be at that stuff for free and all that'.

The employees' desire for additional income (or, in the case of those who were attracted by the prospect of free events, monetary savings) was the original reason they took these jobs, and it remained a primary motivator due to their perception that the people they were charged with protecting had little respect for their public safety roles. Even though private security guards did not possess legal authority to execute arrests, for example, respondents generally felt that persons in their profession provided similar services to law enforcement officers. However, members of the public sometimes indicated a belief that private security guards should be considered subsidiary to government law enforcement despite the discharge of similar responsibilities. Moreover, some respondents felt that private security roles were misunderstood by the public at best and undervalued by the public at worst. According to one respondent who felt undervalued,

The security is always being looked down upon, especially at the site that we're at... When they see a random contracted employee that's coming out there, they kind of look at you as a little bit lesser like 'You're just a contract security guy.' [The site's] employees don't always want to comply with [us]. At least it comes off as though they feel like they don't really need to listen to us... When you're actually a government official and dealing with it in that respect, I think people notice that authority. I just don't think people quite realize just how much [we] do to ensure people's safety and security.

Although this employee recognized that the broader public did not necessarily share the views of the site employees he was charged with protecting, he implied that being undervalued at this job site affected his perceptions of the general public and, in turn, his work motivation.

Other employees who remained on the job primarily for the money indicated that their firms did not hire or retain a quality workforce, did not offer sufficient training to ensure that part-time employees became part of a quality workforce, and were not consistently committed to providing a high level of service through a quality workforce. Employees blamed these organizational deficiencies related to human resources management for the persistence of low

levels of trust in and dislike toward the organizations for which they were employed. Employees sharing those complaints reported that, as a result, they maintained their employment solely for a paycheck. One frustrated part-time employee, demonstrating what he considered inadequate human resources management with respect to hiring practices by his employer, commented,

I'm not saying they are all bad people, but they are hiring 86-year-old people that can hardly walk and stand guard at very dangerous sites. I'm not comfortable with that and I don't see how many of our clients are comfortable with that...Honestly, I do the job because I get my hours and I get paid. I feel very, very vulnerable working for them, because I don't feel they have my back...They throw me under the bus for a lot of stuff, like, 'Hey, you've got to work another 12 hours here or you're fired'...It's not the best company to work for in terms of quality. I would, personally, not recommend my company to anybody...I'm not necessarily proud of the company that I work for.

In addition to the importance of a paycheck to their work motivations, part-time workers saw their responsibilities narrowly. They understood their responsibilities as limited to defined segments of the public: clients, fellow employees, and their supervisors, rather than the general public. This perception often worked at cross-purposes with the public safety interests of those clients; for example, when a senior manager of a National Basketball Association (NBA) franchise hired a security firm to cover a sporting event, security personnel were more responsive to the senior manager than to the public safety needs of patrons. Describing her primary motivation, a part-time employee commented,

I [am motivated] to just [have] a safe event, mainly for the employees. Making sure that we're taken care of mainly is success. Every night we'll have something go wrong, but as long as our employees are taken care of, that's really the main goal.

Even though a security guard who is motivated to safeguard his/her fellow employees at events may exhibit public service motivation on some level (particularly with respect to commitment to the public interest), this narrowly constructed view of the "public" is inconsistent with broader

conceptualizations underscored in the PSM literature, specifically the public writ large (Perry, 1996; Vandenaabeele, 2007). For example, Vandenaabeele (2007) maintains that fundamental to PSM is the extent to which one's motivation *goes beyond organizational interest*.

Given the absence of public service motivation as scholarship has defined it, the most intriguing finding emerging from these interviews was the expressed desire of part-time security guards to leverage their experience into careers in government law enforcement. Many part-time security personnel justified their positions as a way to segue into the public sector. (A number of the part-time employees interviewed were younger than the age required to become a state or municipal police officer.). According to one respondent,

I would say a lot of [my motivation] stems from wanting to be in [government] law enforcement... A lot of people find security work to be a good starting point. Most of the time, if you come straight out of high school and go into the workforce or come, in my situation, from an associate's degree where you were only in college for two years, you're not old enough to get started in the law enforcement field, so you have to find something to bridge that gap. I feel that a lot of people fall back to security for that, as it kind of gets you the initial training you need to deal with people [and] interact with people on a daily basis.

Overall, results do not suggest that part-time security guards were wholly devoid of motivations consistent with PSM. Rather, the narrow conception of the "public" and levels of PSM often held by security guards of this employment status appear inconsistent with "the beliefs, values, and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organizational interest, that concern the interest of a large political entity" (Vandenaabeele, 2007, p. 547)

### **Motivation and Full-Time Employment**

Full-time employees were almost exclusively committed to advancing public safety for members of the general public. Their framing of the "public" was not confined to clients, co-workers, or supervisors; it encompassed all persons within the scope of their security responsibilities. This

was in stark contrast to part-time security guards who by and large narrowly framed the public as their clients, fellow employees, and their supervisors. What is more, analysis of the qualitative data revealed that the presence of public service motivation, particularly commitment to the public interest, translated to practices by full-time security guards that benefited the public.

According to one full-time employee,

[We provide services to] an extremely wide range of recipients. The recipients could be day-to-day patrons, anyone entering a facility who could be entirely unaware of what we're doing to help keep them safe, all the way up to the managers where we provide contract security... [The job] is an opportunity to just help people, keep people safe, but on the other side of the coin, I have an opportunity as management to help influence the lives of some people.

Citing a similar commitment to the public interest through public safety, another full-time employee remarked,

I like being able to interact with people. I also like helping people, so even if it's behind the scenes, I feel like it's a good way to give back to the community.

Despite these expressed motivations, and in contrast to their part-time co-workers, not a single full-time employee from our sample reported an interest in being employed by government. Rather, respondents maintained that private sector employment best enabled them to advance public safety. Full-time security guards were, however, motivated by the prospect of building partnerships with government organizations to advance public safety. Full-time actors found value in collaborating with government law enforcement officers and were intent upon preserving such partnerships over the long term, believing that without collaboration with government, they would not be as effective in advancing public safety. In essence, their attraction to public affairs was not based on their employment in the public sector, but rather

being part of a network of actors who played essential roles in advancing the public good, specifically public safety. One informant noted,

[We] supplement local police, and sometimes the FBI and state police. It just depends on what the event has to be. For example, not too long ago, they had the ex-Prime Minister of England here. And security was unbelievable...All those situations are usually in conjunction with regular full-time [government] policeman. If there are any situations, if [people] give you any problems, or [you] see something really going on, the first thing you do is motion for a [government] police officer to come over. We are mainly observers in situations like that, not heavy enforcers. I've always had a high respect for law enforcement.

Finally, while employment status is not necessarily causally associated with public service motivation, an employee who currently works as a full-time security guard and initially entered the organization as a part-time employee shared the transformation in his motivation; these changes aligned with this study's broader distinctions in motivation associated with employment status. Upon his entry into the firm as a part-time security guard, he considered his work "just a job" that would suffice until he found a more financially lucrative employment opportunity. Now, as a full-time employee, this respondent displayed greater awareness of the importance of and motivation for public service, demonstrating characteristics associated with commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice. In addition, and similar to other full-time personnel, analysis of the experiences shared by this security guard demonstrated that public service motivation, even within Perry's traditional dimensions, may manifest itself differently across circumstances. The characteristics that captured self-sacrifice, for instance, varied in different contexts depending on the realities or conditions of a given environment. Despite the variability among the day-to-day circumstances associated with security work, the part-time turned full-time employee submitted that the "bottom line" centers on facilitating safety for the public. He commented,



I've put myself in harm's way before... [What constitutes] success changes at every event; everything is different, but at the end of the day it would be that everyone goes home safe.

Overall, analysis of full-time employee motivations demonstrated that these personnel viewed their work as an opportunity to serve the public, rather than an obligation or mainly an opportunity for personal benefit (e.g., financial gain, access to special events) like their part-time counterparts. The discrepancies that did exist among full-time employees centered less on the presence or absence (or their level of) public service motivation, and more on how these employees used their autonomy to apply their public service motivation. For example, some employees primarily displayed their commitment to the public interest by the manner in which they aimed to directly interact with the public when providing public safety; other full-time employees most consistently demonstrated their commitment to the public interest by fully committing to the directives of local governments (under whom they were contracted) to strategically and effectively administer public safety. Finally, full-time employees in this study generally recognized that their motivations were essential, albeit not independently sufficient, to generate effective public safety in the venues they serviced. Effective training, for example, was viewed by these employees as integral to their motivation, performance, and overall effectiveness in advancing public safety.

## **DISCUSSION**

The practice of outsourcing implicates a wide variety of government responsibilities and, as the literature previously cited reflects, takes a number of different forms. Several of the issues raised by contracting with nonprofit organizations are different from those encountered in the purchase of services from for-profit entities, and with respect to the latter, the line between traditional

procurement and outsourcing is not always clear. An overriding issue is the nature of public service, and the important distinction between “doing business” and “doing the *public’s* business.”

We found substantial differences between the public service motivations of part-time and full-time security guards. Such distinctions between part- and full-time workers are an understudied and under-appreciated phenomenon, and for that reason, our research study should be viewed as suggestive of a need for additional investigation. Unanswered questions include whether these distinctions are unique to security work, and whether they can be replicated even in that domain. Given the likelihood of continued growth in the “gig economy,” and the increasing management incentives to hire part-time rather than full-time workers—notably cost efficiency—differences in motivation characteristics of part- and full-time employees will become even more relevant to both governments hiring private security guards and private sector employers in this industry.

It bears emphasizing that the PSM of part- and full-time security guards (or lack thereof) is not necessarily dichotomous. That is, even though the motivations of part-time security guards were largely inconsistent with attributes of PSM and full-time personnel appeared to maintain high levels of PSM, there was variation in motivation within these employment status categories. For example, while the majority of part-time employees desired to someday work for the government sector—despite the lack of public service motivation as Vandenberg (2007) would define it—other part-time actors maintained little interest in government work. This distinction among part-time employees indicates variation in what Perry (1996) identifies as attraction to policymaking (or public affairs), a dimension in the original PSM framework. In light of the wide variation of PSM across this study’s private security professionals working under

government contract, and particularly given the growing proportion of part-time employees therein, future research should focus upon exploring whether there is a minimum threshold of PSM required to advance public safety and whether this threshold is similar or distinct across employment statuses. Additionally, insight into whether one's public service motivation can co-exist with motivations opposite PSM merits consideration in this public safety context.

Regardless of the minimum level of PSM required to advance public safety or whether PSM can co-exist with extrinsic motivations (e.g., monetary gain) among security guards, what emerges from our analysis across both part- and full-time personnel is the important roles private organizations play in fostering PSM (Moynihan and Pandey 2007). In particular, regardless of employment status, security guards identified training and development as not only fundamental to gaining field-specific competencies, but also essential to their motivations.

This study also begs the question whether a private security guard's pre-existing motivations lead to the choice (if such a choice exists) of part- or full-time employment, or whether employment experience, either part-time or full-time, shapes subsequent motivations. These and related questions pertaining to endogeneity were beyond the scope of this exploratory study, but they warrant further exploration by human resources personnel, especially in the areas of training and workforce development. In addition to differences in motivation between part- and full-time workers, the demographics of the part-time workforce in this study warrant attention: part-timers were often under the age of 40, with educational levels at or below "some college", and with employment histories that suggested neither interest nor expertise in public safety work (e.g., real estate broker, sales manager at a car dealership, supervisor at a food production firm). Better insight into the backgrounds of these part-time employees may lead to improved design of recruitment, training, and development programs. Such programs might even

elevate levels of public service motivation (see Camilleri & Van Der Heijden, 2007; Getha-Taylor, Fowles, Silvia, & Merritt, 2015), although whether training regimens can be devised to actually elevate public service motivation, particularly among part-time employees, is unclear.

With respect to the distinctions between part- and full-time employees, Lewis (1998) reminds us that “part-time workers are unlikely to develop skills as rapidly as full-timers, both because it takes more months to get the same number of hours of experience and because part-time jobs typically have smaller training components” (p. 72). Although Lewis was addressing skill levels, and not motivations, the time lag and reduced training to which he refers may also factor into the development of an appreciation for the public service rewards of private security. More specifically, because organizational identity—formed, in part, by employment status (Wegge, Van Dick, Fisher, Wecking, & Moltzen, 2006; Giannikis & Mihail, 2011; Kallenberg, 1995)—is fundamental to one’s work motivation (Wegge et al., 2006), managers of private security firms must precisely design recruitment, training, and retention practices so that these and other mechanisms of development and socialization, even if distinct across employment status lines, similarly foster public service motivation. To the extent that private security firms are unable, unwilling, or incapable of developing their employees in this respect, a likely outcome given the private sector’s emphasis on market-related goals and values (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2012), government policing agencies must assume this responsibility. As Brewer (2008) notes, “In all likelihood, organizational socialization is an important mechanism for transmitting a ‘public institutional logic’ and seeding public service in the individual. Organizational socialization may quicken an individual’s sense of public service and inculcate public service-related virtues and norms” (p. 149). This kind of socialization across employee status categories is especially important because, despite the distinctions in hours worked, the

specific public safety responsibilities of security guards were generally indistinguishable and thus similarly indispensable.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Findings of this study revealed that the presence or absence of motivations consistent with PSM was not attributable to private sector employment, but to whether informants were part-time or full-time employees. Assuming that subsequent research confirms the existence of differences in public service motivations between part- and full-time security guards, government organizations contracting out services to, or otherwise collaborating with private security firms should take the composition of a prospective contractor's workforce into account when evaluating competitive bids.

Public administrators should not only inquire into the prior training and skill development of both part- and full-time security, but, insofar as is feasible, seek to encourage the private firms with which they contract to train and socialize their employees in a manner that emphasizes the public service aspects of their job descriptions. While results from the current study are not necessarily transferable beyond contracted private security organizations, if further research confirms our finding that part-time employees are less likely than their full-time counterparts to possess a public service ethos, the relative percentages of part- and full-time workers become a highly relevant consideration in other public service domains, including organizations in the nonprofit sector that frequently serve as agents for public services delivery (Mirabella 2001). Public administrators charged with contracting responsibilities may need to take those percentages into account when assessing the *bona fides* and performance capacities of potential contractors which are increasingly indispensable to the public good.

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**Table 1****Security Guard Personnel Characteristics**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Education (highest level attained)</b>	<b>Years employed in current position</b>	<b>Years employed by organization</b>	<b>Number of employees supervising</b>	<b>Employment history prior to security guard role</b>
1	Part time	Male	21-30	White	Bachelor's	3	7	5 to 15	Real estate broker, sales manager at car dealership
2	Part time	Male	41-50	Nonwhite	HS Diploma	2.5	2.5	0	Private security
3	Part time	Male	41-50	White	Some College	0.5	0.5	0	Military, police officer
4	Part time	Male	21-30	Nonwhite	Bachelor's, pursuing Master's	0.5	0.5	12	Side jobs
5	Part time	Male	31-40	Nonwhite	Master's	2	5	15-110 (varies per event)	Case management work with youth
6	Part time	Male	21-30	White	HS Diploma	0.3	0.3	0	Construction
7	Part time	Male	20 or younger	Nonwhite	Pursuing HS Diploma	0.1	0.1	0	None (currently in first job)
8	Part time	Male	21-30	White	Associate's	2	7	0	Supervisor at food production firm
9	Part time	Male	51 or older	White	Bachelor's	2	2	3 to 4	Military, school teacher
10	Part time	Female	31-40	Nonwhite	Associate's	1	1	0	Account manager for security firm
11	Full time	Male	21-30	White	HS Diploma	0.25	11	800	Security guard
12	Full time	Female	21-30	White	Bachelor's	1	1.5	150	Retail management, animal control
13	Full time	Male	21-30	White	Bachelor's, pursuing Master's	0.5	1	200	Sales, large contract management, logistics auditing
14	Full time	Male	41-50	White	Some College	0.3	0.5	20-150 (varies per event)	Government law enforcement

15	Full time	Male	21-30	Nonwhite	HS Diploma	1.5	1.5	0	Construction, restaurant manager, karate dojo
16	Full time	Female	21-30	White	Some College	0.3	0.3	0	Industrial worker, customer/guest services
17	Full time	Male	21-30	White	Some college	3.5	3.5	4 to 5	Sales representative, employee at ski resort, lift manager

## Appendix

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

#### Part A

1. What is your name?
2. What is the name of the organization for which you work?
3. Are you a part-time or full-time employee?
4. Why did you seek employment at this organization?
5. Is your organization a government or private organization?
6. Describe the mission of the organization for which you work.
7. What is your organizational title/position?
8. Describe your job responsibilities.
9. Would you consider yourself a front-line employee, middle manager, or senior manager? Explain why.
10. How many employees do you supervise?
11. How many years have you worked in your current position?
12. How many years have you worked for this organization altogether?
13. Describe your employment history prior to your current position.
14. Describe your educational background.

#### Part B

15. Who do you serve when performing your day-to-day responsibilities?
16. Describe the recipients of the services you provide.
17. How would you describe your motivations for doing this job?
18. How do your current motivations compare to your motivations on the first day on this job?
19. What are the problems you experience in doing your job as a security guard?
20. When you are met with a complex situation requiring your individual judgement, how do you determine the best course of action?
21. Who or what holds you accountable for your performance on the job?
22. Why did you decide to work for a private organization instead of a government organization?
23. How do you think your job is different from a government police officer?
24. How do you personally define success in your current job?
25. How does your organization define success?
26. Are your day-to-day actions shaped more by your definition of success or your organization's definition of success? Explain.
27. What allows you to pursue your own definition of success? [if applicable]
28. What limits your ability to pursue your own definition of success? [if applicable]
29. Is there anything else about you or your organization that you think I should know?