



Between the Public and the Private: An Integrated Perspective on the Motivations and Sociocultural Determinants of Career Choice

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Abstract

This article examines the factors that influence individuals' decisions to enter public-sector employment and explores whether this choice is primarily driven by a sense of career orientation or by economic necessity. It argues that, in many societies, economic constraints and employment opportunities play a central role in shaping this decision. In some contexts, professional success is closely associated with securing stable employment after graduation, leading many individuals to pursue careers in the public sector because of the job security it offers. At the same time, the article emphasises that a genuine commitment to public service remains a fundamental requirement for public-sector work, highlighting the importance of serving society beyond economic or cultural motivations. Finally, it calls for a deeper academic examination of the differences between public- and private-sector employment and encourages reflection on their implications for personal fulfilment and contributions to the public interest.

Keywords

Culture; Work Vocation; Economic Need; Public Employment; Work Motivation.

Registration

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Entre lo público y lo privado: una mirada integral a las motivaciones y condicionantes socioculturales de la elección laboral

Resumen

El artículo analiza los factores que intervienen en la elección entre el empleo público y el privado, con el propósito de comprender cómo interactúan la motivación, la necesidad económica, la vocación y la cultura en las decisiones laborales. Se desarrolla desde un enfoque cualitativo, mediante una reflexión teórica sustentada en literatura científica reciente sobre motivación laboral, servicio público, comportamiento organizacional y cultura. Su alcance es analítico e interpretativo, al integrar perspectivas individuales, organizacionales, culturales y estructurales para superar las explicaciones que atribuyen la elección laboral a un único factor. Como aporte, propone una visión multidimensional que explica la decisión profesional como un proceso dinámico influido por las condiciones del contexto y las trayectorias personales. Asimismo, introduce el concepto de valor percibido del empleo y plantea un modelo integrador que incorpora dimensiones individuales, organizacionales, culturales, estructurales y temporales para orientar la gestión del talento humano y las políticas laborales.

Palabras clave

Cultura; vocación laboral; necesidad económica; empleo público; motivación laboral.

License



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Introduction

Choosing a career is a complex process involving multiple dimensions and factors that shape individuals' decisions to pursue one occupational field over another. At the center of this process is motivation, understood as the force that drives individuals to act in accordance with their interests, values, and personal aspirations ([Pedraza & González, 2021](#)). Motivation operates at different levels, ranging from economic considerations associated with financial security and stability to career motivations linked to a sense of identity, purpose, and professional fulfilment ([Duffy et al., 2018](#)). However, motivation is not exclusively an individual phenomenon; it is deeply influenced by the social and cultural environments in which individuals develop, shaping perceptions of what constitutes desirable, secure, or socially valued employment.

Contemporary research on occupational preferences suggests that personal values and job satisfaction are significantly associated with preferences for employment in the public or private sector. Studies indicate that factors such as job security, working conditions, and work–life balance influence preferences for public-sector employment, particularly in contexts characterised by economic uncertainty ([Gamero-Burón & García-Pérez, 2021](#)). Similarly, comparative studies among university students show that the importance attributed to stability, social responsibility, and institutional reputation influences decisions between public- and private-sector careers, highlighting the role of cultural and contextual factors in shaping career choices ([Nguyen, Nguyen, Ngo, and Nguyen, 2019](#)).

Previous research has also demonstrated that social motivation and commitment to public service influence career decisions, particularly in fields such as education, healthcare, and public administration ([Potipiroon, 2026](#)). These motivations are reinforced in contexts where public-sector employment is associated with ethical commitment, institutional stability, and contributing to society ([Ritz et al., 2016](#)). Nevertheless, although existing studies provide valuable explanations of the factors associated with choosing public-sector employment, they often examine motivation, economic considerations, aspirations, and culture as relatively separate dimensions, despite their dynamic nature.

Therefore, entering the public sector is unlikely to be driven by a single factor. Rather, it results from an ongoing process in which individuals negotiate their personal aspirations with available employment opportunities and the constraints imposed by economic and social conditions. From this perspective, the apparent distinction between economic necessity and vocation oversimplifies a more complex reality in which both dimensions coexist, interact, and acquire different levels of importance throughout individuals' professional trajectories.

Research on public-sector career choice has primarily explained this decision through individual-level factors, including motivation, personal values, career orientation, and preferences for employment stability. However, this perspective presents an important limitation by underestimating the influence of structural inequalities and broader sociocultural transformations that shape individuals' actual opportunities. Factors such as socioeconomic background, access to education, social networks and previous work experience, and labour market conditions can expand or restrict opportunities within both the public and private sectors. Explaining career decisions solely through personal preferences may lead to limited interpretations, as many choices are also shaped by economic uncertainty, unemployment, and labour market insecurity. Culture is often treated as a stable set of values, overlooking how economic, social, and technological transformations reshape expectations about work and redefine individuals' priorities.

As a result, an important gap remains in understanding public-sector career choice, as existing explanations often separate dimensions that, in practice, operate simultaneously and interact with one another. Economic considerations and career motivations should not be viewed as mutually exclusive categories; rather, they intersect with structural conditions, individual experiences, and cultural frameworks throughout professional trajectories. This limitation highlights the need for a more comprehensive perspective capable of examining how motivation, economic considerations, professional fulfilment, and culture interact in decisions to pursue

public-sector employment, as well as how labour market transformations and social changes influence these motivations. Such an approach can provide a broader and more critical understanding of the factors shaping public-sector career choices.

This article aims to analyse the relationship between motivation, economic considerations, career orientation, and culture in public-sector career choice. Specifically, it examines whether decisions to pursue public employment are primarily driven by economic factors, career motivations, or sociocultural patterns that shape occupational decisions. It further acknowledges that these dimensions interact dynamically and are mediated by structural conditions and social transformations that influence individuals' professional choice.

Literature Review and Theoretical Reflection

Motivation is a driving force that influences human behaviour towards the achievement of goals. In recent years, Public Service Motivation (PSM) has become central to understanding why some individuals choose and remain in public sector employment. Evidence indicates that PSM is positively associated with job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and performance, particularly when work roles provide opportunities to contribute to societal well being ([Chung, Rhee, Liu, 2023](#)). However, recent reviews suggest that these effects are neither universal nor independent of context. Instead, they depend on interactions with organisational, cultural, and institutional factors, including person organisation value fit, leadership style, and workplace conditions ([Potipiroon, 2026](#)). This perspective challenges the assumption that public service motivation is a stable personal attribute or a sufficient explanation for public sector career choice. It highlights the importance of organisational environments that support the development and maintenance of such motivation. Understanding PSM therefore requires an approach that integrates individual motivations with institutional conditions and broader social transformations, contributing to the creation of human resource policies that promote both commitment to public service and employee well being.

Motivation can be classified as fundamental, when it arises from personal interest and satisfaction, or external, when it is influenced by external factors such as financial rewards or social recognition ([Deci & Ryan, 2000](#)). In the workplace, motivation plays a central role in shaping employee performance, commitment, and satisfaction. [Kuvaas, Buch, Dysvik, \(2020\)](#) argue that leaders and managers are responsible for fostering employee motivation by identifying the specific needs of their teams and implementing strategies that encourage intrinsic motivation while improving work performance. These processes can ultimately enhance organisational outcomes ([Canós-Darós, 2013](#)). From this perspective, [Pedraza and González \(2021\)](#) emphasise that in knowledge-based societies, managing intangible assets such as motivation is essential because it strengthens organisational processes and improves efficiency and performance.

Research has consistently identified a positive relationship between motivation and the organisational environment. [Castro et al. \(2018\)](#), [Bernardi \(2024\)](#), and [Ruiz, Salazar Gómez, Valdivia Rivera \(2023\)](#) highlight the importance of considering employees' motivational factors, as these influence job satisfaction, workplace environments, and human resource relationships. [Nguyen et al. \(2019\)](#) further argue that employee attitudes contribute to institutional image and shape external perceptions of organisations. This relationship between motivation and performance has also been supported by [Vargas et al. \(2018\)](#), [Hernández and Casanova \(2018\)](#), and [Cabanilla, Cando, Valencia, \(2022\)](#). Nevertheless, existing literature often assumes a direct relationship between motivation, organisational environment, and performance, while giving insufficient attention to contextual influences. Organisational culture, leadership, and employment conditions can modify these relationships, suggesting the need for a more comprehensive perspective that integrates individual, organisational, and contextual factors.

[Peña and Villón \(2018\)](#) argue that motivated employees tend to demonstrate stronger performance and develop values such as loyalty and organisational belonging, generating benefits beyond the individual level. [Rivera et al. \(2018\)](#), in contrast, emphasise that motivation is primarily associated with the fulfilment of personal desires, needs, and aspirations. [Pascual and Luna \(2014\)](#) examine financial rewards as a

motivational factor, highlighting the gap between the perceived and actual value employees assign to monetary incentives. These perspectives demonstrate that motivation cannot be explained by a single factor or expected to produce identical outcomes across all employees. Instead, motivation should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by both individual characteristics and organisational contexts, rather than being attributed exclusively to financial incentives or personal dispositions.

Within this framework, [Tobar and Canós \(2025\)](#) conceptualise career orientation as an expression of intrinsic motivation rooted in personal interests, values, and abilities, and closely related to self-fulfillment, professional development, and job satisfaction. From this perspective, work acquires a meaning that extends beyond income generation and can strengthen commitment to professional activities. However, this interpretation contrasts with [Maslow's \(1943\)](#) argument that work-related decisions are also influenced by the need to satisfy basic requirements related to survival and security before reaching needs such as personal fulfillment. This contrast suggests that career decisions cannot be explained through a single perspective. Career orientation and economic considerations are not opposing dimensions; rather, they interact according to individuals' living conditions and available opportunities. Viewing occupational decisions solely as expressions of vocation overlooks the economic and social constraints that shape individuals' choices, while reducing them exclusively to financial needs disregards the importance of interests, values, and the meaning individuals attach to their work.

The relationship between motivation and work performance remains one of the most studied topics in organisational research; however, available evidence suggests that this association is more complex than traditionally assumed. [Hernández et al. \(2009\)](#) argue that motivated and fulfilled employees are more likely to provide high-quality services, while also noting that high motivation alone does not guarantee improved quality, leadership, or job satisfaction outcomes. This perspective challenges interpretations that establish a direct causal link between motivation and performance, as its effects depend on interactions with other personal and organisational factors. [Deci and Ryan \(1985\)](#) further suggest that greater well-being emerges when career orientation, motivation, and the satisfaction of material needs are aligned. However, such balance is not always achievable, as employment conditions and available opportunities influence whether individuals can pursue careers that simultaneously fulfil personal aspirations and material requirements. Understanding performance quality therefore requires moving beyond reductionist approaches and recognising motivation as part of a multidimensional process involving individual, organisational, and contextual factors.

Career decisions are shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the cultural contexts in which people develop their expectations and work-related priorities. [Hofstede \(2001\)](#) argues that cultural values influence how individuals evaluate factors such as stability, status, and professional achievement. [Ryan and Deci \(2017\)](#) similarly highlight that preferences regarding income, career development, and work-life balance reflect both psychological needs and environmental conditions. Considering these factors separately, however, provides an incomplete explanation of career decision-making, as motivation, career orientation, economic circumstances, and culture interact simultaneously and acquire different levels of importance depending on individual circumstances. Understanding contemporary labour markets therefore requires moving beyond limited explanations and recognising career choices as socially constructed processes shaped by personal aspirations, structural constraints, and cultural frameworks, with direct implications for individual well-being and organisational performance.

Career Orientation

Career orientation has been interpreted from multiple perspectives, demonstrating that its meaning extends beyond the simple choice of an occupation. From an etymological perspective, [Jiménez and Hurtado \(2022\)](#) note that the term vocation derives from the Latin *vocatio* and has historically been associated with a calling towards religious life. [Llano-Torres \(2021\)](#) expands this interpretation by describing vocation from a career orientation point of view as an inner calling that encourages individuals to pursue a meaningful

purpose in response to a particular need, while [Perilla \(2022\)](#) associates it with dedication to an activity that generates interest, enthusiasm, and aligns with personal abilities. Although these approaches emphasise the personal and meaningful dimensions of career orientation, they largely focus on individual factors and provide limited consideration of how social, economic, and cultural conditions influence professional decisions. Viewing career orientation solely as an internal inclination overlooks the fact that opportunities to develop and pursue it are also shaped by the contexts in which individuals construct their life projects.

From a work-related perspective, [Hernández and Casanova \(2018\)](#) argue that vocation enhances enjoyment of work by generating satisfaction and fulfilment through professional activities. [Dubet \(2007\)](#) links career orientation to dispositions such as dedication and commitment, particularly in service-oriented professions. Similarly, [Fasabi \(2023\)](#) suggests that professional orientation incorporates elements such as willingness, occupational choice, aptitude, and personal satisfaction, which contribute to well-being and commitment at work. However, these approaches also raise an important analytical challenge, as they may portray career orientation as a sufficient condition for achieving professional fulfilment and high performance. Such interpretations risk underestimating the influence of factors including employment conditions, compensation, career development opportunities, and institutional recognition. Understanding vocation therefore requires recognising that it is not a fixed personal attribute independent of context, but rather a dynamic construction that can develop, transform, or weaken according to individuals' professional experiences and the conditions under which they perform their work.

The Role of Economic Factors in Career Choice

Employment needs refer to the conditions associated with obtaining the resources required for individuals' livelihood and well-being. Maslow's hierarchy of needs remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding human motivation, distinguishing five levels of needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self actualisation needs ([Osorio et al., 2024](#)). However, although this model provides a widely recognised conceptual foundation, its application to employment contexts presents important limitations. It assumes a relatively uniform progression of needs and does not sufficiently account for the economic, social, and cultural conditions that shape individuals' priorities. The need to work is therefore not limited to fulfilling basic requirements; it is also influenced by the opportunities and constraints within the environments where individuals develop their professional trajectories.

From an organisational perspective, [Chiavenato \(2004\)](#) defines employment needs as the requirements for qualified personnel that enable organisations to operate effectively. [Tobar and Canós \(2025\)](#) similarly argue that these needs reflect the skills and qualifications organisations require to fill available positions, while [Robbins and Judge \(2013\)](#) relate them to the demand for talent capable of contributing to strategic objectives. Although these approaches emphasise the importance of aligning employees' capabilities with organisational requirements, they primarily focus on the institutional perspective. This emphasis limits consideration of workers' expectations, aspirations, and personal circumstances, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the relationship between employment and human development. Analysing employment needs therefore requires an approach that integrates organisational demands with individuals' conditions, motivations, and actual opportunities, recognising employment not only as a productive resource but also as a space for personal and social development.

Cultural Influences

Culture plays an important role in shaping employment choices by influencing the beliefs, values, and norms that guide individuals' work-related expectations and priorities ([Osorio et al., 2024](#)). [Tobar and Canós \(2025\)](#) argue that contexts characterised by collectivist values tend to encourage preferences for stability and social recognition, whereas environments that emphasise autonomy may promote decisions oriented towards professional growth and innovation. However, explaining differences between public- and private-sector employment solely through cultural factors provides an incomplete perspective, as career decisions

are also shaped by economic conditions, labour market opportunities, and individual experiences. Culture influences preferences, but it does not determine professional decisions independently.

Within the context of public-sector employment, [Canales et al. \(2018\)](#) highlight that values provide the foundation for ethical public administration, while [Ruiz et al. \(2023\)](#) identify factors such as employment instability, technological change, and declining institutional authority as elements that reshape relationships between individuals and organisations. [Chiavenato \(2009\)](#) further argues that organisations strengthen their human capital by developing work environments that encourage motivation and commitment. These perspectives suggest that organisational culture is not defined exclusively by institutional values; it also depends on organisations' ability to respond to changing environmental conditions and employees' evolving expectations.

Work motivation emerges from the interaction between cultural values, social expectations, and organisational environments. [Hofstede \(2001\)](#) argues that collectivist societies tend to place greater emphasis on stability and employment security, whereas individualistic societies often prioritise self-fulfilment and professional advancement. [Woo and Kim \(2024\)](#) further demonstrate that cultural differences influence employee retention, career mobility, and innovation. However, these cultural classifications alone cannot fully explain the diversity of career decisions, as employment preferences also vary according to economic circumstances and individual experiences. Understanding work motivation therefore requires an integrated perspective that considers cultural, personal, organisational, and contextual factors rather than attributing career decisions to any single influence.

Key Differences Between Public- and Private-Sector Employment

Employment in both the public and private sectors serves the fundamental purposes of providing income, supporting well-being, and improving quality of life. It also represents an important factor in individuals' health and social integration ([Baigorri, 2015](#)). In the case of public-sector employment, [Rivera et al. \(2018\)](#) argue that career decisions are shaped by a combination of economic, social, and personal factors, including job security, employee benefits, interest in public service, and working conditions. However, reducing the appeal of public-sector employment solely to the pursuit of security provides an incomplete explanation, as it overlooks other motivations related to career orientation, personal values, and professional development opportunities.

Research consistently identifies job security as one of the main attractions of public-sector employment. [Gagné and Deci \(2018\)](#) highlight the stability offered by this sector in contrast to labour market uncertainty, while [Perilla \(2022\)](#) emphasises the importance of social benefits and additional employment protections. [Jiménez and Hurtado \(2022\)](#) further suggest that principles such as continuity, social justice, and employment protection strengthen the attractiveness of public administration, while [Ruiz et al. \(2023\)](#) identify working conditions, including predictable schedules and lower staff turnover, as relevant factors influencing employment preferences. However, these explanations tend to emphasise institutional benefits while giving less attention to the diversity of individual motivations, limiting understanding of why people choose public-sector careers.

Financial rewards, career development opportunities, and commitment to societal well-being also contribute to motivations for entering public-sector employment. [Manzoor, Wei, Siraj \(2025\)](#) highlight the importance of financial security and opportunities for internal advancement, while [Park and Lee \(2023\)](#) emphasise that public service is also associated with ethical values and the desire to contribute to society. Although these factors explain the reasons for why public-sector employment is desired, none is sufficient on its own to account fully for career decisions. Choosing public-sector employment results from the interaction between economic considerations, professional aspirations, personal values, and institutional conditions. Understanding this choice therefore requires an integrated approach that moves beyond explanations focused exclusively on job security or public service motivation.

Professional and Personal Development

Professional development opportunities represent an important factor influencing the attractiveness of public-sector employment, as this sector often provides training programmes, continuous learning opportunities, and possibilities for internal promotion. However, advancement processes may be constrained by administrative structures that limit professional mobility. [Woo and Kim \(2024\)](#) argue that entry into public-sector employment reflects a combination of motivations, including job security, institutional benefits, and commitment to public service. This diversity of motivations demonstrates that public-sector career choice cannot be explained by a single factor; rather, it results from the interaction between individual aspirations, socioeconomic conditions, and the opportunities provided by organisational contexts.

Organisational culture is also an important element in career choice because it influences individuals' sense of belonging and identification with institutional values. [Kotter \(1996\)](#) argues that organisations characterised by competitiveness, meritocracy, innovation, and collaboration tend to attract individuals seeking dynamic environments and professional development opportunities. However, the distinction between public- and private-sector organisational cultures has become increasingly less clear. In Colombia, reforms promoted by the [Departamento Administrativo de la Función Pública, through Decree 648 of 2017](#) and [External Circular 007 of 2023](#) introduced strategies such as flexible working arrangements, remote work, and gender-responsive measures to modernise human resource management. These transformations challenge the perception that public-sector employment is associated with rigid organisational models and demonstrate that institutions' ability to adapt to changing workplace expectations also influences talent attraction and retention. Therefore, career choice between public and private employment depends not only on organisational values but also on how each sector responds to contemporary expectations regarding well-being, flexibility, and professional development.

Choosing a career in public service reflects the interaction between cultural, social, and institutional factors that shape perceptions of this type of employment. The [OECD \(2020\)](#) highlights that in societies with collectivist orientations, public service is often associated with contributing to the common good, while [Park and Lee \(2023\)](#) identify job stability as an important factor influencing attraction to this sector. [Woo and Kim \(2024\)](#) further identify social prestige and family influence as elements that shape this decision, while [Peña and Sánchez \(2024\)](#) emphasise the role of organisational culture in strengthening employees' identification with public institutions. However, explaining public-sector career choice solely through these factors provides an incomplete understanding, as motivations are also influenced by social change, the expectations of younger generations, and labour market conditions. The analysis of public service careers therefore requires an approach that integrates cultural influences with economic, organisational, and individual factors to provide a broader understanding of professional decision-making.

Private-sector career choice reflects a combination of economic, professional, and organisational factors that extend beyond the pursuit of higher income. Although job stability in this sector depends largely on organisational financial strength and labour market dynamics ([Osorio et al., 2024](#)), this characteristic should not be interpreted solely as a disadvantage compared with public-sector employment. In many cases, organisational flexibility creates opportunities for innovation, development, and adaptation that are also valuable to employees. Analysing private-sector career choice exclusively through lower employment stability therefore provides only a partial explanation of a phenomenon shaped by multiple individual and contextual factors.

From a motivational perspective, remuneration, incentives, and recognition opportunities are important factors in attracting and retaining talent within private organisations ([Fasabi, 2023](#)). [Gagné and Deci \(2020\)](#) highlight that performance-based rewards strengthen commitment when combined with recognition and professional development processes, while [Woo and Kim \(2024\)](#) note that competitive salaries and additional benefits represent significant incentives, particularly in high-demand sectors. However, reducing private-sector preferences solely to the possibility of obtaining higher income overlooks other factors

that influence professional decisions, including learning opportunities, autonomy, career growth, and the meaning individuals attach to their work.

The choice between public and private employment cannot therefore be explained as a simple opposition between stability and remuneration. Both sectors offer advantages and limitations that become more or less important depending on individuals' needs, expectations, and life goals. This reality highlights the need for broader approaches that examine how economic incentives, development opportunities, organisational conditions, and personal values interact in shaping career trajectories, moving beyond explanations centred on a single factor.

Access to more competitive salaries represents one of the main factors encouraging individuals to pursue private-sector employment, particularly in high-demand fields such as technology, engineering, and finance. [Woo and Kim \(2024\)](#) note that private organisations often complement salaries with bonuses, commissions, and other incentives designed to attract and retain skilled employees. However, interpreting this choice exclusively from an economic perspective is insufficient, as higher compensation alone does not guarantee employee commitment, satisfaction, or long-term retention. Organisations therefore face the challenge of combining competitive compensation policies with strategies that promote professional development, employee well-being, and recognition, ensuring that workplace motivation is supported by both financial rewards and sustainable employment conditions.

Professional development opportunities represent one of the main attractions of private-sector employment, as many organisations provide training programmes, continuous learning initiatives, and internal promotion opportunities that support employee growth ([Azeem et al., 2021](#)). These opportunities are often accompanied by work environments characterised by innovation, problem-solving, and adaptability, particularly in sectors such as technology and consulting, where continuous learning is central to professional practice ([Baigorri, 2015](#)). In addition, autonomy and flexibility, expressed through arrangements such as remote work and flexible schedules, have become increasingly valued by individuals seeking to balance professional and personal responsibilities ([Da Silva & Castelló, 2022](#)). However, these conditions do not automatically ensure employee development or well-being, as their effectiveness depends on organisational policies that provide genuine opportunities for advancement, recognition, and work–life balance. Organisations therefore face the challenge of transforming flexibility and professional development into sustainable strategies that strengthen employee commitment and respond to changing expectations within the labour market.

Flexible working arrangements, remote work, and inclusive environments have become increasingly valued by those choosing private-sector employment because they respond to changing expectations regarding well-being and work–life balance ([Azeem et al., 2021](#)). [Osorio et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that culture influences both individuals' decisions to join private organisations and the way companies manage employment relationships. Within this context, [Azeem et al. \(2021\)](#) identify competitiveness as a defining feature of private-sector organisational culture, while [Peña and Sánchez \(2024\)](#) associate it with the continuous pursuit of productivity and efficiency. However, organisational cultures focused exclusively on competitiveness may create highly demanding environments that negatively affect employee well-being. The challenge is therefore to balance organisational performance with practices that promote human development and quality of working life.

[Arabeche \(2022\)](#) argues that results-oriented cultures and merit-based systems contribute to professional growth by recognising employee performance, initiative, and autonomy. Similarly, [Bogale \(2024\)](#) highlights that innovation-oriented cultures enable organisations to adapt to technological and social changes through continuous generation of new ideas. Nevertheless, these elements only produce sustainable benefits when combined with inclusive policies, continuous learning opportunities, and effective recognition of talent. Private-sector organisations therefore face the challenge of developing cultures that encourage competitiveness and innovation while promoting equitable, flexible, and development-oriented workplaces. The private sector is characterised by a greater capacity to adapt to environmental changes, which

supports innovation and timely responses to market demands. [Madero and Barboza \(2015\)](#) argue that organisational flexibility strengthens strategic alignment and contributes to business competitiveness, while [Azeem et al. \(2021\)](#) associate this capacity with cultures that encourage initiative, entrepreneurship, and the identification of opportunities. However, an exclusive focus on efficiency and performance can undermine employee well-being. Organisations must therefore balance flexibility and innovation with practices that support human development, job security, and organisational commitment. [Manzoor \(2025\)](#) further argues that incorporating social responsibility strengthens organisational culture and employee well-being, while [Bekata and Kero \(2025\)](#) highlight customer orientation and innovation as strategic factors for business sustainability. These contributions suggest that contemporary competitiveness depends not only on economic performance but also on organisations' ability to create social value and respond to the expectations of their stakeholders.

Career choice is a multidimensional process in which economic considerations, career orientation, and culture interact. [Florio \(2014\)](#) argues that career orientation is particularly relevant in the public sector, where contributing to society provides meaning and purpose to professional activity, while [Hofstede \(2001\)](#) demonstrates that culture influences how individuals evaluate work, achievement, and employment stability. In a similar way, [Tobar and Canós \(2025\)](#) suggest that collectivist contexts encourage preferences for employment associated with security and collective well-being. However, explaining career choice exclusively through these dimensions provides an incomplete account, as employment decisions are also shaped by labour market transformations, changing expectations among younger generations, and socioeconomic conditions. Understanding the choice between public and private employment therefore requires an integrative perspective that recognises the interaction between personal, cultural, organisational, and structural factors, with the aim of informing employment policies and workplace practices that address both organisational needs and individual development.

Recent evidence indicates that public service motivation strengthens job satisfaction and organisational commitment, particularly among employees working in public institutions ([Park & Lee, 2023](#)). [Woo and Kim \(2024\)](#) further demonstrate that individuals with higher levels of public service motivation are more likely to prefer public-sector employment and maintain this commitment throughout their careers, while [Ding and Wang \(2023\)](#) show that this relationship is also influenced by cultural factors, including collectivism and power distance. However, these findings suggest that public-sector career choice cannot be attributed exclusively to a desire to serve society, as individual motivations are strengthened or weakened depending on social and organisational contexts. Understanding these decisions therefore requires recognition of the ongoing interaction between personal motivations and structural conditions.

Career choice is ultimately shaped by the interaction between culture, career orientation, and economic considerations. [Hofstede \(2001\)](#) argues that culture influences values and expectations regarding work, while [Tobar and Canós \(2025\)](#) describe career orientation as an inclination towards activities that provide meaning and purpose. [Maslow \(1943\)](#) and [Manzoor et al. \(2025\)](#) emphasise that economic needs and development opportunities influence individuals' real possibilities for choice. However, examining these dimensions separately limits understanding of the phenomenon. A more integrated approach is therefore required to analyse how cultural, personal, and socioeconomic factors interact in employment decisions, with the aim of informing employment policies and organisational strategies that respond both to individuals' needs and to the demands of a constantly changing labour market.

Conclusion

Multiple factors influence employment choice and access to work opportunities. Among the most relevant are commitment to public service, economic considerations, and cultural influences, whose interaction shapes professional decisions differently depending on individual characteristics and the contexts in which people develop. Many individuals choose public-sector employment because of a desire to contribute to collective well-being and a genuine commitment to public service, while others view this sector as a pathway to

achieving financial stability and employment security, particularly in contexts of uncertainty and increasing labour market competition. Therefore, entering public service reflects both ethical motivations and material needs, which interact with cultural values and the actual opportunities available for employment access.

From this perspective, the traditional view that public-sector career choice results from a single motivation or from a dichotomy between career orientation and economic necessity is challenged. Instead, this decision should be understood as a dynamic and multidimensional process in which motivation, career orientation, economic considerations, and culture continuously interact with organisational conditions and structural limitations within the labour market. This approach expands existing knowledge by incorporating the relationship between individual and contextual factors, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of career trajectories and recognising that motivations evolve throughout professional life. Public-sector employment should therefore not be interpreted solely as a choice driven by public service values or job security, but rather as the outcome of a complex process of professional development that contributes to individual growth, institutional strengthening, and collective well-being.

Career orientation is closely related to personal talents, interests, and values, providing individuals with a sense of purpose that guides their commitment to work and to the well-being of others. However, this reflection demonstrates that career orientation alone does not explain public-sector employee performance. Factors such as recognition, interpersonal relationships, development opportunities, healthy competition, and participation in decision-making processes also contribute to strengthening organisational climate and institutional effectiveness. Public-sector performance therefore emerges from the interaction between internal motivations and organisational conditions that either support or constrain employee commitment.

Similarly, fostering a genuine commitment to public service can improve user satisfaction while strengthening productivity, cooperation, and organisational performance. However, such commitment does not depend exclusively on employees' personal willingness to serve; it also requires institutions capable of creating work environments that recognise merit, well-being, and professional development. This perspective broadens the understanding of work motivation by viewing it as a dynamic process shaped by the interaction between career orientation, personal needs, and organisational and institutional conditions. It challenges explanations that attribute performance solely to individual commitment or financial incentives and suggests that the quality of public services depends on organisations' ability to create environments that transform individual motivations into sustained commitment to collective well-being. From this perspective, public-sector talent management should focus on comprehensive strategies that simultaneously strengthen public purpose, professional development, and working conditions as essential elements for building more effective, human-centred, and socially responsible institutions.

The analysis developed in this study demonstrates that the decision to enter public service does not result from a single motivation, but from the interaction between economic considerations, public service orientation, and cultural factors, whose importance varies according to personal trajectories and contextual conditions. In some circumstances, employment stability, financial security, and social benefits make public-sector employment a rational alternative in response to labour market uncertainty. In others, the primary motivation is the desire to contribute to collective well-being and participate in activities that generate social impact in areas such as education, healthcare, or justice. Culture also influences how these motivations are evaluated by shaping perceptions of prestige, the meaning of public service, and professional expectations.

These three factors should not be analysed as independent factors or as competing explanations for public-sector career choice. Instead, this study proposes an integrative perspective in which economic considerations, career orientation, and culture form an interdependent system of motivations that evolves throughout professional trajectories and in response to organisational and structural conditions. This perspective extends existing knowledge by challenging linear explanations that prioritise a single cause of career decisions and by conceptualising entry into public service as a dynamic, contextual, and multidimensional process. Consequently, this approach supports the development of human resource

management policies aimed not only at ensuring employment stability but also at strengthening public service orientation, professional development, and organisational cultures committed to collective well-being.

The main conceptual contribution of this model is the shift from analysing employment choice towards understanding organisational value creation as a dynamic and relational process. Rather than assuming that individuals' motivations remain stable, this approach proposes that they can be strengthened, transformed, or weakened depending on the value proposition offered by organisations and the conditions of the surrounding environment. Consequently, talent attraction, commitment, and retention do not depend solely on public service orientation, employment stability, or economic incentives, but on the degree of alignment between employee expectations and organisations' ability to provide opportunities for development, recognition, well-being, learning, purpose, and professional growth. This perspective expands traditional approaches by proposing a multidimensional framework that integrates individual, organisational, cultural, structural factors, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of employment decisions in both public and private sectors.

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Data Availability

The article provides the relevant data sources and links.

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