Future Business and Government Leaders of Asia: How Do They Differ and What Makes Them Tick?

Zeger van der Wal

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Zeger van der Wal[1]

Abstract How do work motivations and sector perceptions differ between graduate students at prestigious Business Schools and Public Policy in Asia? Where do Asia's future business and government leaders want to work, and why? To answer these questions, we compare Asian Master of Business Administration students ($n = 71$) with Master of Public Policy and Master of Public Administration students ($n = 91$) from three leading Schools based in Singapore through a survey study and a series of seven focus groups. Our findings indicate that work motivations, sector perceptions, and career preferences differ between both groups but slightly less so than between their Western counterparts. Moreover, future Asian leaders equally value being successful while many view government as bureaucratic and prone to cronyism regardless of degree program and employment preference. We discuss how our findings may advance a more robust management and leadership research agenda for Asia.

Keywords Future leaders · Private vs. public management · Work values · Career values · Asia

Introduction

A recurrent issue in studies comparing private and public managers is whether the "raw material" is different (Bozeman 2004) because both sectors *attract* different people types through self-selection even before they gradually *socialize* into a particular sectoral ethos. Indeed, studies have shown that Business school students are more motivated by financial rewards, whereas students in Public Affairs and Public Policy programs have high levels of Public Service Motivation (PSM); in turn, such motivations affect postgraduate employment preference for private sectors and public and non-profit sectors respectively (e.g., Redman-Simmons 2008; Rose 2013; Richards et al. 2002; Taylor 2010; Vandenabeele 2008; Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2013). In the same vein, studies suggest different people types are drawn to different degree programs in the first place because of pre-educational socialization processes (de Graaf and de Graaf 1996; Van Hooft 2004).

However, almost without exception, these studies have targeted students in the Western world, and we may wonder whether their findings are easily transferable to Asia. For instance, a rare comparative study between MPP and MPA students from China and the US shows the former are far less driven by intrinsic factors (Infeld et al. 2009). Moreover, it may be argued that in countries such as China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Singapore, where government jobs have more stature (Infeld et al. 2010; Norris 2003) and often provide better primary and secondary benefits than private sector jobs (Fan 2007; Taylor and Beh 2013; Xu 2006), future public and private managers may show different (and arguably less) contrasts than their Western counterparts. Elucidating how Asia's future business and government leaders view working life and how their views differ is highly relevant as they are the individuals who will bring the "Asian century" (Mahbubani 2008) to full fruition in the coming decades. On many occasions, they will have to closely collaborate in doing so.

✉ Zeger van der Wal
sppzvdw@nus.edu.sg;
http://www.zegervanderwal.com

[1] Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP), National University of Singapore (NUS), Singapore, Singapore

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To address these questions, we employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (surveys and focus groups) to compare MBA students with MPP and MPA students enrolled in elite Business schools and Public Policy schools in Singapore. Our study is guided by the following central research question:

How do work motivations, sector perceptions, and justifications for postgraduate employment sector differ between Business school and Public Policy school students in Asia?

In this paper, we deliberately compare individuals with some work experience who are actively preparing themselves for more senior roles—"future leaders"—rather than undergraduate students with unsullied views of working life. However, because we assess the "raw managerial material" rather than current managers we exclude Executive—often part-time—MBA and MPA students. About half of our respondents have less than 5 years of working experience; half carry more than five but less than 10 years. Over 80 % of our respondents in both groups are below 35 years of age. All of them are from Asian countries, with over 70 % of our respondents coming from China, India, Indonesia, and Singapore.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, we derive a set of basic research hypotheses from existing studies into public and private sector work motivations, sector perceptions, and socialization factors associated with public and private sector employment. Then, we explain our methodology and design, and our measures and respondent selection. After we report on our quantitative and qualitative findings, we conclude our paper with a discussion of our results and their implications for management and leadership scholarship in Asia.

Theory and Hypotheses

Until now, most studies into MBA students have shown they are without exception focused on private sector jobs, motivated by improved job opportunities, financial rewards, and professional development. Conversely, studies into students of Public Policy or Public Affairs programs which focused on identifying determinants of employment preference have consistently shown positive relations between dimensions of Public Service Motivation (PSM), such as compassion and selflessness, and preference for future employment in public and non-profit organizations (Gabris and Davis 2009; Infeld et al. 2009; Rose 2013; Redman-Simmons 2008; Vandenabeele 2008).

However, only two studies have directly compared both groups (Richards et al. 2002; Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2013). They show both groups differ quite substantially in their motivations, values, and moral judgment, and perceptions of both sectors, with sharply skewed work motivations and sector perceptions being major determinants of provisional employment preferences for either government or business. Put shortly, the abovementioned studies quantitatively investigated *which factors* are associated with employment preferences but they have not yet shown *why* future leaders chose their degree programs and *why* they prefer a particular sector of employment. In addition, we are curious to see if our respondents, over eighty percent of which qualify as "Gen Y" or the millennial generation—roughly speaking, everyone born after 1980—are very distinct or rather similar, or perhaps even ambiguous or mixed, in their views and sector preferences. After all, studies suggest millennials are motivated by doing good for society and making a difference, *regardless* of which sector ultimately employs them, and have different attitudes towards work in general (Holmes 2012; Twenge and Campbell 2012).

To address these issues, we formulate eight basic research hypotheses in the following sections based on current literature which emphasizes public–private differences, and test these with our survey and focus data.

Religion and Parental Employment

To start with, studies have shown particular socialization factors such as religion, parental employment, or political affiliation affect important life choices, related to careers but also education (Blau and Duncan 1967; de Graaf and de Graaf 1996; Van Hooft 2004). However, a wide array of factors may influence the choice for a specific education, ranging from personal background and family traditions to geographical distance from available educational institutions, expected workload and financial abilities to join schools of choice (Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012). Some even suggest certain genes (Arvey et al. 1989, Brewer et al. 2000) influence educational and career choices. Clearly, identifying the interplay between such factors—if at all possible—lies beyond the scope of this study. However, our first two hypotheses aim to observe whether both groups differ on two common factors associated with self-selection in government work and degree programs aimed at government careers; religion and parental public sector employment (see also Perry 1996, 1997):

H1 MPP and MPA students more often perceive themselves as religious than MBA students

H2 MPP and MPA students more often have parents who are or have been employed in the public sector than MBA students

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Public and Private Sector Work Motivations

To measure public and private sector work motivation, three types of motivational factors are used: intrinsic motivators, extrinsic motivators, and one of the dimensions making up Perry's (1996) initial PSM construct: civic duty and commitment to public interest (cf. Kjeldsen 2012; Rose 2013). All these factors have been widely used and tested in empirical studies (Buelens and Van den Broeck 2007; Houston 2000; Karl and Sutton 1998; Khojasteh 1993; Perry and Hondeghem 2008). At this point, we would like to stress that many recent studies too easily assume that (prospective) public employees are more intrinsically motivated and (prospective) private employees are motivated more extrinsically (cf. Buelens and Van den Broeck 2007). In fact, studies of junior employees increasingly show they are driven by a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Buelens and Van den Broeck 2007; Lyons et al. 2005). Here, we will explore how our two groups of prospective leaders differ in this respect by testing the following two hypotheses:

H3 MPP and MPA students have stronger public sector work motivations than MBA students

H4 MBA students have stronger private sector work motivations than MPP and MPA students

Sector Perceptions

Rather than individual motivations and values to adhere to in a future career, sector perceptions concern broader views on working life in both sectors, and how they supposedly function. The public sector has a different bottom-line than the private sector, and is perceived to have higher levels of red tape, more personnel constraints, and a regulatory function vis-à-vis business (e.g., Allison 1979; Bozeman 2004). Moreover, previous studies have shown students (Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2013) and government and business employees (Feeney 2008; Van der Wal and De Graaf 2007) often have strong (negative) and cliché-type perceptions of the other sector, closely related to popular imagery of "risk-averse bureaucracy" versus "greedy capitalism." This brings us to hypotheses five and six:

H5 MPP and MPA students have more positive perceptions of the public sector and negative perceptions of the private sector than MBA students

H6 MBA students have more positive perceptions of the private sector and negative perceptions of the public sector than MPP and MPA students

Preference for Postgraduate Employment Sector

Lastly, graduate students who have reached the end of their studies face a difficult question: Where do I want to work? Following Person-Environment-Fit Theory (Cable and Parsons 2001; Kristof-Brown 1996), we can assume an impending employee looks for a suitable organization that matches her competences and personality, and employers are likely to respond to such sentiments. As said, identifying determinants of sector choice (cf. Rose 2013; Taylor 2010; Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2013) is not the primary objective of this study. However, we are interested in preference of employment sector of our respondents, most of whom have already spent a few years working in a particular sector after their undergraduate studies, as well as their motives and justifications for choosing their current degree program. Moreover, as our respondents base their sector perceptions on their initial years on the job market, they will be able to connect the likes and dislikes of their previous jobs and sectors to their postgraduate sector choice. To elucidate these issues, we will test our two final hypotheses with our quantitative data on employment sector of choice, and the qualitative data from our open question and focus groups:

H7 MPP and MPA students more often prefer employment in the public sector or the non-profit sector than MBA students

H8 MPP and MPA students and MBA students both explain their preference for employment through a fit with the respective sectors and by emphasizing good career opportunities, with the former emphasizing service to others and the latter financial rewards

Methodology

Mixed Methods Design

We employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies or "mixed methods" approach (e.g., Creswell 2003) because we want to show not only *whether* future public and private managers differ but also *why* they do so, and *how both groups word* their motives and preferences for degree programs and future employment (cf. Van der Wal 2013). So far, studies into motivations, values, and preferences of students—or managers, for that matter—are almost without exception quantitative in nature. Undoubtedly, these studies have provided us with valuable information on determinants of preferences and differences between both groups. Nevertheless, we lack more substantive insights into *the reasons* for choosing degree programs and sectors of

employment. To produce such insights, we include an open question in our questionnaire on the main reason for sector preference and we complement our survey data with data from a series of focus groups with survey respondents (cf. Van Steden et al. 2015; Van der Wal and Yang forthcoming).

Sample and Respondent Selection

Our respondents are the 2013/2014 cohorts of students entering MBA programs at two Business Schools and MPP and MPA programs at a School of Public Policy, all based in Singapore and ranked in the top-25 of any authoritative global ranking. Fulltime MBA programs are geared towards a student audience with less than 10 years working experience. The MPP program is aimed at more junior students with 0–5 years of working experience, whereas the MPA program is directed towards mid-level professionals with 5–8 years of working experience.

We conducted our surveys and focus groups right at the start of their degree programs, in the first few weeks after their enrollment in August 2013. We conducted the survey in person in the classroom, and we approached missing respondents online immediately afterwards. After a collection period of 2 weeks, we recorded a total of 162 responses with 71 valid questionnaires from MBA students and 91 from MPP and MPA students. Because we approached our respondents face-to-face, we managed to get high response rates (92 percent for our MBA sample and 91 percent for our MPP and MPA sample). Our sample includes respondents from 15 different Asian countries. China, India, Indonesia, and Singapore make up the vast majority: 80 percent of MBA students and 65 percent of our MPP/MPA students. We want to make clear it is not our aim to compare countries and our sample size does not allow us to do so at this stage. We feel confident, however, in providing baseline data on future Asian private sector and public sector leaders.

Questionnaire and Measures

Our questionnaire included 11 questions on background characteristics, socialization factors, and preferred sector of employment (see Table 1); 13 items on public and private sector work motivations; and 10 items on sector perceptions. We describe the items we used below.

Private and Public Sector Work Motivations

Most literature clearly distinguishes *public sector work motivation* from *private sector work motivation*. Perry (1996, 6–7) provides six motivational dimensions in his concept of Public Service Motivation (PSM), which he later reduces to four: compassion, selflessness, commitment to

Table 1 Respondent characteristics in percentages

Characteristics	MPP and MPA students ($n = 91$)	MBA students ($n = 71$)
Age		
20–24	19.7	1.4
25–29	37.4	49.4
30–34	24.2	39.4
35–39	15.4	7
40 and older	3.3	2.8
Gender		
M	51.6	71.8
F	48.4	28.2
Years of work experience		
<2	19.9	1.4
2–5	26.4	42.3
>5	53.7	56.3
Sector of work experience		
Private sector	14.1	88.7
Public sector	43.6	0.0
Non-profit sector	15.4	0.0
Combination of sectors	26.9	11.3
Religious		
Yes	52.8	36.6
No	47.2	63.4
Parental employment[a]		
Private sector/own business	51	52
Public sector	27.5	27.5
Non-profit sector	1.5	1.5
Other/not working	20	19
Preferred sector of postgraduate employment		
Private sector	17.7	94.4
Public sector	63.3	4.2
Non-profit sector	19.0	1.4

[a] Our questionnaire included separate questions on the employment of the respondent's father and mother. In this Table, we averaged the results of both questions

public interest and civic duty, and attraction to public policy making. Comparable dimensions are found in studies by Vandenabeele (2008) and Redman-Simmons (2008). Private sector work motivation is clearly distinguished from these characteristics. An important related theme in the literature is the contrast between intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Buelens and van den Broeck 2007: 66; Van der Wal 2013). Here, we decided to include not just PSM items (e.g., "meaningful public service is very important to me") but also extrinsic motivations classically associated with public sector work (cf. Perry and Hondeghem 2008), such as "balancing work and family obligations," and internalized positive views directed towards both sectors, being different from more general sector perceptions.

The private characteristics are made operational as "being successful," "total commitment to my employer," "having a good salary," and "a company car." The theses concerning private sector motivation are: "In the years after I graduate, my career will be more important to me than family and friends," "I like to be successful in creating innovative products and services," and "It is best for society when the market is given maximum freedom." The characteristics concerning public sector work motivation are: "contributing to society," "being of service to others," "balancing work and family obligations," and "an intellectually stimulating work environment." In addition, we included the following theses: "Meaningful public service is very important to me," "Considering the welfare of others is important to me," and "It is best for society when the public sector is responsible for the provision of crucial collective goods, such as energy, public transport and safety.''

We asked respondents to indicate on a five-point Likert scale whether they considered the characteristics important, with answer categories ranging from "very important" to not important at all." As for the theses, we asked respondents whether they agreed; again on a 5-point Likert scale, but this time with answer categories from "totally agree" to "totally disagree."

Sector Perceptions

We measured negative and positive perceptions of business by having respondents agree or disagree using a Likert scale with the following theses (Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2010): "In the business sector, there is a lot of competitiveness between colleagues," "In the business sector, people often play 'dirty games' to maximize profit," and "When you are working in the business sector, you are only concerned with your own benefits and that of your company." These theses originate in the sentiment of the private sector being more competitive than the public sector with a less collegial working climate as a consequence (Van der Wal and De Graaf 2007). The positive perceptions of the private sector are reflected in the statements: "In general, business works much more efficiently and effectively than government," and "In the business sector it is easier to get promoted to a better position."

In the same vein, we measured negative perceptions of government by including: "In general, government is very bureaucratic," "Those choosing a career in government are often less ambitious than those choosing a career in business," and "When you work for government, you are often caught in a web of political interests"; and positive with "When you work for government, you can contribute positively to society," and "Government is a much friendlier working environment than business".

Preference of Employment Sector

Here, besides simply mandating respondents to choose a preferred sector (public, private, or non-profit), we asked them in an open question to state in one sentence why their preference lies with that sector. This allows us to contextualize their preferences and code, cluster, and rank their justifications, and respondents to express potential doubts or ambiguities.

Focus Groups

To add to our survey, and to gain in-depth understanding of students' views and choices, we conducted a total of four focus groups for the MPP/MPA cohorts and three for the MBA cohorts, with a combined total of 38 participants and between four and seven participants in each focus group session, using the "Delphi Method" (Rowe and Wright 1999). Sessions lasted between 50 and 70 min. We conducted these focus groups within a month after respondents took our survey. The format aimed to produce interactive, deliberative, and respectful (though not necessarily consensual) exchanges of views guided by three engagement questions and four exploration questions (e.g., Creswell 2003; Morgan 1998).

We discussed four key topics—views of working life in the public, private, and non-profit sectors based on participants' experiences, likes and dislikes of their former or current job, motives for applying for the degree program, and parental influence on their choices related to education and work.

Finally, we should note that scales used previously to group items in a study of Dutch (Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2010, 2013)—public sector work motivation, private sector work motivation, private sector perceptions (positive and negative), and public sector perceptions (positive and negative)—did not meet reliability standards here. We ran a principal component analysis (varimax with Kaiser normalization) and all alphas were below .4. Subsequently, we ran factor analyses for motivations and sector perceptions, which produced only two substantive factors for motivations and sector perceptions. For these reasons, we do not rely on regression analyses to provide observations about determinants of sector preference. Rather, we explore our qualitative data to map justifications for postgraduate employment sector preference.

In the end, we decided to report the means and significance of differences separately for each of the items as it is clear that we cannot combine individual items to compute scales which proved reliable in similar studies in Western contexts. Clearly, this observation is a research finding as such which merits further discussion and study. We will come back to the implications of this finding in the final section of our paper.

Results: Survey

Background Characteristics, Socialization Factors, and Preferred Sector of Employment

Table 1 presents all relevant respondent characteristics and results for socialization factors and preferred sector of employment. It shows that the vast majority of both groups consist of individuals in their twenties and thirties; about half have less than 5 years of work experience and half have more than five (but in all cases, less than 10). Furthermore, it shows that MPP and MPA students indeed perceive themselves more often as religious than MBA students. In terms of parental employment, the results are not only a mixed bag but also nearly identical in their distribution among different sectors and types of employment. Based on these results, we can accept hypothesis 1 but we have to reject hypothesis 2. The results for preferred sector of employment are more mixed than expected based on previous studies, particularly for the MPP and MPA students (see Infeld et al. 2009; Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2013), with less than two thirds stating their ideal sector of employment is the public sector. Still, based on these results, we are confident in accepting hypothesis 7. In the discussion of our findings, we will complement these results with open question and focus group data.

Work Motivations

Table 2 reports the means and *T* test results for all 14 work motivation items we included in our survey. Our independent samples *T* test results analyzing values which traditionally make up private and public sector work motivations indicate only few significant differences.[1] Moreover, items such as "an intellectually stimulating work environment," and "total commitment to employer," considered to be typical stalwarts of the public and private sector respectively in previous studies, show opposite results here.

Intriguingly, Public Policy graduate students and Business School graduate students both value being successful to nearly equal degrees, which was not the case in previous studies (Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2010, 2013). Both groups also do not view a company car as an important driver for a future ideal job; in fact, this item receives the lowest scores from both groups of students, confirming sentiments of millennials not being motivated by static material rewards regardless of their preferred sector of

employment (Tulgan 2009; Holmes 2012). Only one PSM item—"Meaningful public service is very important to me"—shows significant differences between both groups. All in all, however, our results lend support to hypotheses 3 and 4 as for 12 out of 14 items the mean differences are in line with what we expected.

Sector Perceptions

The results become more divergent from previous studies in Western contexts when examining sector perceptions, as shown below in Table 3. Even though our groups differ more clearly here, with MBA students being fairly negative and biased towards government and public sector work, we find that both groups view government as bureaucratic and prone to a web of political games to a nearly equal degree.

Moreover, a closer look at the data shows that even a majority of students who prefer a career in government score 4 or higher on these two aspects. These results support evidence on person-organization-fit (Vandenabeele 2008) and person-environment-fit (cf. Cable and Parsons 2001; Steijn 2008) and the importance of job security as a driver for public sector employment (cf. Khojasteh 1993). In short, once you are in for a number of years, it is not only harder to get out but also easier to accept a sector's shortcoming and negative dimensions, confirming the strong effect of socialization (cf. Bozeman 2004; Jackall 1988). Indeed, the nearly identical and above average mean between-group scores for "there's a lot of competitiveness between colleagues in business," and "people play dirty games to maximize profits in business" point to the same phenomenon. Based on the mean scores and differences, however, our results still support hypotheses 5 and 6.

Preferred Sector of Employment: Business School Students Speaking Out

We categorized and coded 71 responses from Business School respondents to our open survey question, resulting in five main categories which we juxtapose with the preference for employment sector as indicated by the respondents in Table 4. Three out of five codes are similar to those we distinguished for MPP and MPA students. The numbers between brackets indicate the number of statements corresponding with the particular code. Also here, we provide at least one illustrative quote reflecting the overall category.

Remarkable here is the rather sizeable "cannot imagine working in alternative sectors" category which displays a strong anti-government sentiment among the future business leaders surveyed, evidenced by statements like "*Taxation is theft. Would have a different answer under a competitive market for governance rather than territorial monopolies on jurisdiction*" whose corollaries cannot be

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[1] We have to factor in here that our total number of respondents is relatively low with 162. However, previous studies with only 131 students showed more statistically significant results between work motivations of comparable groups of graduate students (Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2010, 2013).

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Table 2 Differences in work motivations between MPP/MPA and MBA students

Work motivations	MPP/MPA (n = 91)		MBA (n = 71)		T test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	P values
Being successful	4.41	0.685	4.51	0.531	0.984
Contributing to society	4.58	0.560	4.17	0.676	0.030*
A high salary	3.86	0.680	4.23	0.674	0.263
Being service oriented to others	3.97	0.827	3.65	0.812	0.650
A company car	2.28	1.060	2.30	0.947	0.203
Intellectually stimulating work environment	3.73	0.601	4.49	0.582	0.443
Total commitment to my employer	3.94	0.793	3.63	0.815	0.163
Balancing work and family obligations	4.57	0.583	4.34	0.676	0.331
Meaningful public service is very important to me	4.58	0.060	3.85	0.107	0.023*
My career will be more important after graduation	2.55	0.981	2.68	1.003	0.731
Welfare of others is important to me	4.19	0.731	3.87	0.695	0.025
I like to create innovative products and services	4.09	0.793	4.21	0.735	0.950
It is best when the public sector is responsible for public goods	4.12	0.914	3.38	1.136	0.048*
It is best when the market is given maximum freedom	2.92	0.866	3.44	0.857	0.439

* $P < .05$, ** $P < .01$, *** $P < .001$

Table 3 Differences between sector perceptions of MPP/MPA and MBA students

Sector perceptions	MPP/MPA (n = 91)		MBA (n = 71)		T test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	P values
Government is very bureaucratic	4.07	0.731	4.25	0.691	0.379
Business is more efficient and effective than government	3.65	0.906	4.27	0.679	0.009**
Business is only concerned with your own benefits and that of your company	3.29	1.090	2.94	0.944	0.461
Government workers are less ambitious	2.32	0.910	2.67	1.100	0.033*
It is easier to get promoted in business	3.13	0.927	3.50	1.139	0.008**
There is a lot of competitiveness between colleagues in business	4.07	0.684	4.00	0.948	0.160
There is a web of politics in government	4.03	0.827	4.14	0.708	0.821
You can contribute to society when you work in government	3.93	0.922	3.71	0.801	0.206
Government is friendlier to work in than business	2.89	0.827	2.80	0.894	0.310
People play dirty games to maximize profit in business	3.42	0.834	3.44	0.958	0.195

* $P < .05$, ** $P < .01$, *** $P < .001$

found among MPP and MPA students. This sentiment corroborates the key results from our earlier comparison of sector perceptions. A category of similar size that is unique to this group considers "financial rewards." We should note that this category contains statements exclusively emphasizing pay; in addition, some of the statements making up the "job content" category also make reference to financial career progress. To resume, for MBA students, we can also confirm hypothesis 8.

Preferred Sector of Employment: Public Policy School Students Speaking Out

We also categorized and coded 84 responses from Public Policy School respondents to our open survey question

"Please describe the reason for this sector preference in one sentence," resulting in five main categories which we juxtapose with the preference for employment sector as indicated by the respondents, in Table 5. The numbers between brackets indicate the number of statements corresponding with the particular code. For each of the five main codes in relation to the sector preference, we provide at least one illustrative quote reflecting the overall category (depending on the number of statements for that combination).

In many ways, the qualitative survey data corroborate our quantitative data in characterizing the drives of these cohorts of future public managers and their views of working life in the respective sectors. However, this applies equally to all preferred sectors of employment and

Table 4 Sector of employment preference explained by MBA students

Specific reason for employment preference in sector	Fit with sector (22)	Job content, career opportunities, intellectual growth (21)	Cannot imagine working in alternative sectors (13)	Financial reward (13)	Making greater impact (2)
Private sector (68)	"It's Smaller in size, easier to manage, and things actually get done faster with less bureaucracy" "I believe in less government and power of private enterprise" "My experience is that private sector organizations are generally more efficient, creative and demanding"	"Brighter chances of faster career growth, freedom to exercise ideas, and more challenging" "Motivated by challenge, impacts and financial rewards of working in private sector" "Gain experience in management side of private sector before considering other options"	"I've considered policy, it's not my cup of tea and I do not have patience anymore for social or public issues" "Avoid the bureaucracy of government organizations and get decent monetary rewards and benefits" "Taxation is theft. Would have a different answer under a competitive market for governance rather than territorial monopolies on jurisdiction"	"I have already worked in the NGO sector and I am looking to work in a sector that is financially rewarding" "Money, less bureaucracy and can travel" "Higher pay, less politics (hopefully)"	"The public sector provides opportunities to contribute significantly for socially uplifting community development"
Public sector (1)	"Personal interest"				"My country needs a lot of transformative reforms & well trained professionals that can make this change"
Non-profit (2)		"After having consulted for pharmaceutical companies for 5 years, I would like to do more meaningful work"			

not just to the public sector. As said, MPP and MPA graduate students vary in where they want to work. Particularly, those who justify and explain their preferred employment sector by "wanting to work in service of others" and "making great impact" often see themselves working in the non-profit sector, next to the public sector. In the end, job content, career opportunities and related self-development, and fit with the sector—or sometimes, lack of fit resulting in a desired "sector switch" (De Graaf and Van der Wal 2008)—and serving others or "society" are the most dominant categories. This supports hypothesis 8 for MPP and MPA students.

Results: Focus Group Discussions

This section presents the results of our focus group discussions. We conducted these seven focus groups with 38 survey respondents to tease out more in-depth key survey topics in a safe and collaborative environment that is characteristic of focus groups. We coded student responses on four main

issues we addressed in our discussions: (1) likes and dislikes of the last job before enrollment, (2) views on the public and private sector, (3) reasons for choosing their degree, and (4) parental influence on their perceptions of (work in) both sectors. Table 6 shows the results for MBA students and Table 7 shows the results for MPP/MPA students. The numbers between brackets indicate the number of statements corresponding with the particular code.

MBA Students Reflect on Sectors, and Educational and Professional Drivers

The statements from three focus group sessions with MBA students corroborate as well as add to their survey outcomes. To start with, the focus group results show once and for all a vast majority of the MBA students studied have a very positive view of the business sector and see themselves working in a private sector capacity for most of their lives. As such, they differ substantively from their Public Policy School counterparts as they are much clearer and more consistent about their career prospects and sector

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Table 5 Sector of employment preference explained by MPP and MPA students

Specific Reason for Employment Preference in Sector	Job content, career opportunities, intellectual growth (32)	(Decline of) Fit with sector (21)	I am motivated to serve the nation (13)	I like to work in service of others (12)	Making greater impact (6)
Public sector (53)	"I want to apply skills and policy making process learned from school" "I want to make a difference in my work scope"	"I am more interested in the civil/public service" "I am already in the government sector and I have been working for many years"	"I want to help the government in coming up with sound public policies" "In my country, the bright people get absorbed by the government"	"I like to work for people" "I have a sense of public service"	"When working in the public sector, you can make meaningful impact" "The more authority you have in the public sector, the greater the impact"
Non-profit (15)	"I want to influence policy" "I am interested in the space of intersection between NGOs and the private sector"	"Because I already have 7 years working experience within this sector" "I've been in the private and the public sector, and I want to try another sector"	"I want to do jobs related to foreign aid in Africa for my country"	"In a non-profit environment, I can contribute directly to the society" "This is more fulfilling, it changes people's lives for the better"	"Makes the maximum impact" "I want to contribute more to the social space to see the change become more tangible"
Private sector (16)	"Private sector is more efficient, profitable and competitive" "My skillsets are a match"	"Private sector dynamics match more closely with my personality" "I believe businesses are equally important in influencing policy decisions of government and trained professionals have a major role to play there"			

perceptions.[2] In addition, they view government primarily in negative and sometimes right out cynical and disrespectful terms, emphasizing nepotism, corruption, and lack of ambition and skill of their public sector counterparts, few positive exceptions aside.

Also here, the focus group results add more texture to the quantitative data. First, MBA students seem more pragmatic and even opportunistic in their reasons for getting the degree than their MPP and MPA counterparts; they do not really mention intrinsic drives to upgrade their skills or enhance self-development. Second, perhaps somewhat ambiguously, several respondents shared passionately how their personal upbringing or family backgrounds had affected their drive to study vigorously and work hard in order to be financially independent and being able to

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[2] One respondent suggested, however, that the high fees for prestigious MBAs may be an explanatory factor in itself as students and their (prospective) employers are keen to "earn back" their investment, which necessitates private sector employment. In 2013, tuition was between 48,000 USD and 76,000 USD for the MBA programs under study, compared to less than 10,000 USD for the MPP and MPA programs.

provide for family at a fairly young age, more so in relative terms than Public Policy School students.

MPP and MPA Students Reflect on Sectors, and Educational and Professional Drivers

In turn, the results of four focus groups sessions with MPP and MPA students also complement the survey results in corroborating three key findings in particular. First, they are at least as critical of and negative towards the public sector as they are towards the private sector when describing their likes and dislikes of their former workplace as well as their general views of sectors (here, the number of negative public sector views even exceeds the number for the private sector). Second, however, a majority of them consider working in the public sector a meaningful enterprise that provides the opportunity to better people's life and impact society. Third, parental influence again is a mixed bag, with some students elaborating their (grand)-parents did influence their educational choices and attitudes

Table 6 Focus Group Responses Coded for MBA students

Former work place likes (all private)	Former work place dislikes (all private)	Views on private sector	Views on public sector	Why choose MBA?	Parental influence
"Pay is higher in the private sector, with a clear promotion track" (5)	"There was not much of a work life balance" (3)	[Positives Private (2)]: "The smartest people go to the private sector"	[Positives Public (2)]: "Salary and post retirement salary is higher in the public sector"	"I wanted the Asian flavor by coming to Singapore" (4)	"Mother was open to charity and was religious, so I am too" (1)
"My work suits my personality and I like that I get to use my training" (4)	"Co-workers were lazy" (2)	[Positives Private (1)]: "The pay in the private sector is higher than the public sector"	[Positives Public (2)]: "Civil servants and the public sector are well positioned to make impact"	"To make a bigger impact and receive a promotion, I need an MBA" (3)	"Grandparents were always unstable in terms of bringing income, encouraged me to study" (1)
"Relationship with boss was very positive" (2)	"Work was mundane and it was hard to avoid work that wasn't part of my job" (2)		[Positives Public (1)]: "Public sector workers are fairly intelligent"	"NUS is the most well ranked, recognized and inexpensive MBA outside of Europe and USA" (2)	"My parents influenced me to do something good so good things will come back to you" (1)
"I had complete freedom to carry out my job" (1)			[Negatives Public (8)]: "Getting into the public sector is 50 % about relationships"		
			[Negatives Public (2)]: "Government workers lack vision and creativity, they work for job stability"		
			[Negatives Public (2)]: "Public sector pays lower"		
			[Negatives Public (2)]: There is a lot of "grey" income in the public sector		

towards work, while others emphasize friends or indicate no such influence exists at all.

In addition, our focus group data add three intriguing flavors to the survey results. First of all, it now becomes clear that many MPP and MPA students are passionate about public goals and public values but *they do not necessarily view public sector employment as the proper or even most effective vehicle to pursue those goals and values*. Second, a related sentiment displays private sector organizations as more capable of facilitating such pursuits as they value initiative and assess performance based on merit rather than relationships or even unethical conduct. Third, however, they feel that MPP and MPA degrees provide them with the skills and ethos they would like to acquire to enact their ambitions and prepare them for exciting careers, more so than an MBA degree (although some admit such degrees would either be too expensive or simply beyond their reach).

Discussion

Our findings bear relevance for the study of work motivations and differences between public and private management and add to current literature in at least three ways. First of all, our data provide support for recent claims which suggest *it is problematic to project "Western" assumptions, concepts, and instruments on public and private sector characteristics and their differences to Asia* (cf. Infeld et al. 2009; Van der Wal forthcoming). Indeed, although it is clear the future public and private sector leaders studied here differ in many aspects, and our results provide support nearly all our initial hypotheses, they seem less antithetical than Western counterparts in similar studies (cf. Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2013) and also more ambiguous, resulting in methodological issues as well. Thus, scholars aiming to meaningfully measure their motivations and drivers have to include other dimensions

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Table 7 Focus group responses coded for MPP and MPA students

Former work place likes	Former work place dislikes	Views on private sector	Views on public sector	Why choose MPP/MPA?	Parental influence
"Work in the public sector is meaningful, impactful and changes people's lives" *[public sector (17)]*	"Public sector work is corrupt and bureaucratic" *[public sector (5)]*	*[Positive Private (9)]*: "Meritocracy general prevails in the private sector and are rewarded accordingly"	*[Positive Public (3)]*: "Social enterprise is the new vehicle for advancing public agendas"	"Looking for skills upgrade and problem solving capabilities" *(14)*	"Parent's discussion influenced me to think about public affairs" *(9)*
"General personal development and personal interest" *[public and private sector (9)]*	"How happy you are depends on how nice your boss is which often means you can't go against your boss" *[public sector (4)]*	*[Positive Private (2)]*: "There is generally more prestige working for the private sector"	*[Positive Public (1)]*: Public impact can be achieved in the public sector	"To seek new opportunities by expanding job options" *(10)*	"Parents made no impact on me" *(7)*
"Upgrading concrete quantitative and qualitative skills" *[public and private sector (4)]*	"Decisions in the public sector are influenced by politics" *[public sector (3)]*	*[Negative Private (4)]*: "Competition can lead to overwork and burnout in the private sector"	*[Negative Public (7)]*: Public sector employment affected by relationships more than private sector	"To elevate standing and gain promotion within current job" *(8)*	"Friends had big impact on my career choice" *(3)*
	"Work became uninspiring after sometime" *[public and private sector (3)]*	*[Negative Private (2)]*: "Work is much more difficult in the private sector"	*[Negative Public (4)]*: Public sector is ineffective, inefficient, corrupt and not accountable	"Did not have the background to seek an MBA" *(1)*	"Grandparents shaped my interest in public issues" *(2)*
		[Negative Private (2)]: "CSR's true intentions are questionable"		"MBA was too expensive, MPA was more justifiable cost wise" *(1)*	

than just, for instance, public service motivation (PSM), and be mindful of the importance of extrinsic drivers in Asian contexts (cf. Chen and Hsieh 2014; Liu and Tang 2011). Moreover, even though many of our respondents are fairly sober and sometimes negative about public sector jobs and governmental capacity in general, they still portray a desire to work in public agencies and seem to be able to disassociate their own sentiments from the external, societal high standing of government employment (cf. Infeld et al. 2010; Liu et al. 2011; Pandey and Jain 2014). One MPP student perfectly illustrated this seemingly ambiguous stance in one of our focus group discussions:

> "We are mindful of the many shortcomings of public sectors in Asia but I would not call that cynical. Rather, we are realistic about what can be achieved in such an environment, and personally I would still be honored to work as a public servant because I can at least try to better the lives of citizens, and it would make my family proud."

Second, in addition to regional particularities shown in our data, some of the key similarities between both groups—the importance of meaningful and challenging work, and

work-life balance, and the unimportance of outdated perks like a company car—lend support to characteristics identified as unique to millennials or the so-called Gen Y (Holmes 2012; Twenge and Campbell 2012). Indeed, both our quantitative and qualitative data show that feeling "in place" through person-environment fit (Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012) and achieving self-development through intellectually challenging work (cf. Van der Wal 2013) are key justifications for both groups in preferring a sector of employment. As a consequence, *we may expect the values and motivations of the "raw material" that is about to enter public and private sector managerial jobs to differ less compared to two or three decades ago, regardless of country background.* However, the importance of financial rewards still is a key differentiating factor between Business School students and their Public Policy counterparts.

Nevertheless, we may take this argument further in hypothesizing that another origin for the ambiguous and "sector-promiscuous mindset" of MPP and MPA students may lie in their course materials itself. After all, our field has put increasing emphasis on sector blurring, networked governance, social enterprise and public–private partnerships (PPPs), and NPM-inspired businesslike government

reforms, all of which suggest strict sectoral demarcations have become less and less relevant (Bozeman 2004; Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2013). Conversely, however, the fact that much of the scholarly publications in business nowadays stress corporate social responsibility (CSR), and increasing public accountability obligations for the business sector (Fortanier and Kolk 2007) does not seem to have fundamentally altered MBA students' mindset (cf. Richards et al. 2002). Also, the MBA students studied here are not required to take an "ethics pledge" like their American peers are required to take since 2009 as a response to the global financial crisis and its aftermath. Still, one may ponder whether the content and context of Business School and Public Policy curricula are not only constantly *changing*, but to a certain extent *converging*.

Third and final, an intriguing question is if and how these developments have affected degree programs that are traditionally expected to produce students with distinctive value orientations, motivational profiles and preferences aimed at either government or business as sector of employment (cf. Kjeldsen 2012). These programs have always had an institutional and financial interest in keeping alive strong demarcations between both sectors. This may also explain why "all over the world Public Administration and Business Administration research and education are institutionally separated" (Kickert 1993, 25), except for the UK and parts of the US where Public Administration and Public Policy are sometimes taught within Business Schools. Thus, *even though both degrees may still market for different types of students preferring different careers, the real-world convergence and blurring of sectors undoubtedly have affected their curricula*, and gives rise to many pressing questions regarding public management research and education, as well as strategic HR and recruitment strategies, particularly for future public sector leaders (Andersen et al. 2012; Waldner 2012).

Limitations and Future Research

Here, we shortly discuss three key limitations and their implications for future research. First of all, given the small size of our sample, it is obvious we cannot simply generalize our results to the 22 countries making up the continent Asia, with their widely different political histories and cultures, religions, and demographics. If only, our results may speak for China, India, and South-East Asia, in particular Singapore and Indonesia. Second, a related concern is that the public sectors of many Asian countries are notoriously ineffective and corrupt, and prone to cronyism, while Singapore is in many ways the exact opposite. However, our sample size and research aims do not allow for a rigorous between-country comparison at this stage.

Follow-up studies with much larger samples from more countries in the region will allow us to make such comparisons. Third and final, the fact that many items could not be put together to construct reliable scales as in previous studies in Western countries is, however unsatisfying, an outcome as such. Much of this had to do with the rather ambiguous and differentiated survey responses from our MPP and MPA respondents, which were again reflected in the open question data and focus groups outcomes. Future studies should use with caution research concepts and instruments devised in Western contexts to study Asian contexts, and further add to the blossoming body of literature on Asian public management by constructing new variables, scales, and measures to study phenomena in this region.

Conclusion

We commenced our research with the following research question: How do work motivations, sector perceptions, and justifications for postgraduate employment sector differ between Public Policy school and Business school students in Asia? Our data show that both groups of future leaders clearly differ in their key work motivations and justifications for sector preference, and even more so in how they view working life in the public and private sector. However, it is also clear Public Policy School students are more ambiguous about their preferred sector of employment than their Business School counterparts, making it hard to even label them "future government leaders."[3] Intriguingly, both groups are fairly critical of government's capacity to tackle social issues and pursue public values, and its ability to enact meritocracy and incorruptibility. This finding in particular differentiates future Asian leaders of their Western peers and points at a somewhat cynical or perhaps merely realistic view of public sector's organizational capabilities in many Asian countries.

We conclude this paper with six key take-aways on how future government and business leaders of Asia differ, and what makes them tick:

1. Future government leaders want to deliver meaningful public service and contribute to society more than anything else, whereas future business leaders value being successful and operating in intellectually challenging work environments most of all;

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[3] More in general, a one-on-one relationship between study and career choice (and the expected preferences of the (future) employer) is increasingly and repeatedly questioned by former students; see for instance the online forum "MPA versus. MBA" at: http://forums.degreeinfo.com/archive/index.php/t-11244.html).

2. At the same time, both groups of future Asian leaders share a desire to be successful, create innovative products and services, and contribute to societal progress through their work in respective sectors, while balancing family and work obligations;

3. Future business leaders often portray "government" and working life in public agencies in negative terms and suggest public sector employees are less ambitious and subject to meritocratic assessment than their private sector counterparts; surprisingly, many future government leaders share the former sentiment (even those that aspire public sector employment) while disagreeing with the latter;

4. However, both groups seem fairly realistic in accepting their sector's shortcomings or downsides—"bureaucracy and lack of efficiency" in the public sector and "competitiveness and profitability over collegiality" in the private sector—as agreement with these traits does not hamper a preference for postgraduate employment in the respective sectors;

5. Asian Public Policy School students are rather mixed in their preferred postgraduate sector of employment with less than two thirds aspiring a public sector career, whereas Asian Business School students are much more single-minded with close to ninety-five percent desiring private sector employment; this implies that recruitment of future Asian business leaders should transpire beyond Business Schools, while recruitment of future government leaders in many Asian countries may benefit from a substantial charm offensive and image-building campaign;

6. Future government and business leaders of Asia differ from each other on key motivational dimensions and they hold different, sometimes sharply contrasting, views of working life in the public, private, and non-profit sectors; however, based on our study, they seem to have more in common than their Western counterparts, and their somewhat sober yet realistic view of how sectors work is an intriguing regional characteristic.

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