

Pervasive, Powerful, not Attractive: Public Career Choice Motivation in Vietnam¹

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Abstract

This paper intends to explain why Vietnamese younger generation prodigiously choose private sector jobs over public sector one, while the government has actively carried out public sector reform for making efficient and uncorrupted bureaucracy. Earlier works on public service motivation heavily focused on Western democracies, but studies on non-Western countries have drawn a lot of attention lately. After witnessing the great success of Japan and East Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan) where the relatively small but competent bureaucracy played a crucial role in the process of modernization and national development, many assume that ‘pervasive and powerful bureaucracy’ in rapidly growing Vietnam also occupy similar social position. Yet, for the past decade, a number of evidences such as general employment rate (decreased by 15%) and highly-educated employee rate (decreased by 10.7%) in the public sector indicate that good quality workers are leaving or not choosing public sector jobs. Then, what job motivators and perception on the government jobs affect the younger generation’s career choice in Vietnam? Based on the motivation theories and public service motivation (PSM) framework, we attempted to answer these questions using survey data collected from 433 fresh university graduates and final year undergraduate students in Vietnam. We confirm that there was positive relationship between public career choice and motivation to serve the public as PSM theory expected, but traditional job motivators such as materialistic benefits, job security and stability were more important in Vietnamese context. From a comparative perspective, we suggest that Vietnamese bureaucracy, regardless its power and pervasiveness, needs substantial improvement by meeting public workers’ basic sanitation needs and working environment to recruit quality manpower for continuous economic success.

Keywords: Public Service Motivation, Public Sector, Career Choice, Public Bureaucracy, Vietnam

Introduction

This paper examines why Vietnamese young generation – i.e. undergraduate students or job seekers as fresh graduates in this study – prodigiously choose jobs in private sector over public sector one. Since James Perry’s seminal work on Public Service Motivation (PSM), studies on job motivation in public sector have been explosive in both Western and non-Western settings, but PSM research has still paid much attention to incumbent civil servants’ job motivation in

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governments. Since governments across the globe have difficulty in acquiring talents to the public sector, understanding projective job seekers' career motives, in addition to incumbent public sector workers, may inform government strategies to recruit and retain prospective talents and manage personnel administration more effectively (Christensen and Wright, 2011; Ko and Jun, 2015; Taylor, 2008; Vandenabeele, 2008). In this study, we attempt to answer the question by analyzing career motivation and perception of young Vietnamese on public sector jobs from a comparative perspective.

While the state apparatus – in particular, public bureaucracy – has always been one of the most important elements in building of 'effective state' (Fukuyama, 2004), countries in the West and the East commonly have had trouble in recruiting good quality public sector workers lately (Delfgaauw and Dur, 2010; Selden and Moynihan, 2000). In case of the United States, in addition to the fact that demographic changes threatened industrialized countries in general, preference to work at the federal agencies and institutions have remained relatively low, and in terms of prestige, reputation, compensation, etc., the government has had little flexibility to keep high achievers in its organizations (Alonso and Lewis, 2000). Even many of East Asian countries are not exception to this trend. Countries in the region including Japan, Singapore, South Korea and China, which used to have a 'cultural phenomenon' – i.e. Confucian tradition – that being a civil servant was regarded as family honor, have also trouble in attracting talents to the public sector (Elman, 2013; Chen et al., 2018; Ko and Jun, 2015). Besides, it is also a new stumbling block that younger generation has somewhat different values and expectations about jobs, as reported in the literature (Ng and Gossett, 2013; Twenge and Campbell, 2008).

In this context, the Vietnamese younger generation's career preference and choice poses somewhat interesting questions. Not to mention that human resource management and recruitment of the public workforce in developing countries is critical for political, economic and social development, many governments like Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam have carried out various management programs to retain the quality civil servants (Poocharoen and Lee, 2013). Vietnam,

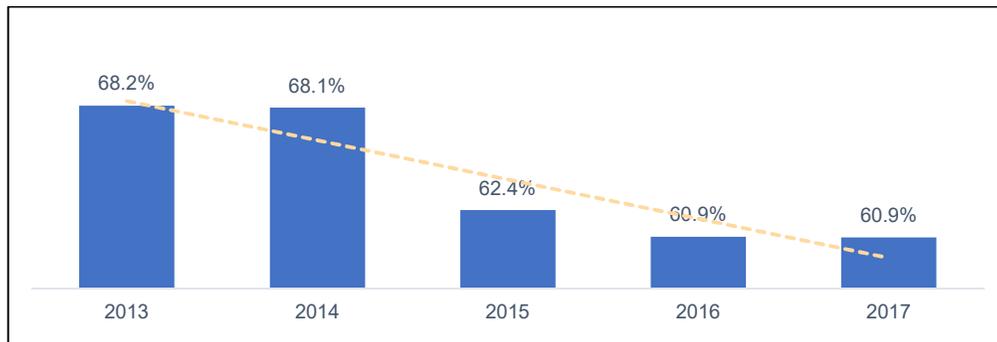
after decades of war and economic hardship, has become home to one of the fastest-growing middle-income classes in the world and has been named as the next ‘tiger economy’ in the region (Forbes, 2016). It has been also reported that Vietnam’s workforce between the ages of 15 to 39 years accounts for nearly half of the total labor force, which translates to an immense potential in further economic growth (Das, 2018).² As the country enters critical phase of economic development and desires to continue its economic prosperity, Vietnam, with advice and pressure from international organizations, aid donors and foreign investors, has paid a lot of attention to improving public service quality and recruiting talents to the public sector (Painter, 2003). For example, the government promulgated and implemented master public administration plans such as Public Administration (PAR) program (2001 – 2010) and Resolution 30c/2011/NQ-CP (November 2011) on reforming human resource policies and salary adjustment for civil servants. Even some local governments like Danang City, which is one of the most prosperous cities in Vietnam, adopted ‘the Attraction of Human Resource Program’ and ‘Talent Management’ program to attract young workers with at least bachelor’s degrees to the city offices and non-profit sectors including public hospitals and schools (Bui and Chang, 2018).

Interestingly, however, Vietnamese government has not been successful in having good quality civil servants in its organizations and in turn, reputation and performance of the public sector has remained less competitive, compared to other sectors. In World Bank’s *Government Effectiveness Indicator*, Vietnam’s score constantly ranked low (below 50% on average in 2000s). Vietnam also received low scores (33 out 100) in Transparency International’s latest survey on perception of corruption (2018, ranked 117 out 180 countries). Moreover, the ratio of annually employed workforce (15 years of age and above) in the public sector has substantially decreased by 15% during the last decade (ILO database, 2005 – 2016) and the employment of the skilled workers with more than bachelor’s degree in the public sector has also steadily been downward trend, as the

² Das Koushan. 2018. ‘Labor Market Trends in Vietnam,’ Vietnam Briefing June 29. Retrieved from <https://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/labor-market-trends-vietnam.html/> on 15 May, 2019.

Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) data indicates (Figure 1). To summarize, the government of Socialist Republic of Vietnam has been pervasive as well as powerful, but not attractive to young skilled workers.

<Figure 1> Ratio of the Skilled Workers in the Vietnamese Public Sector



Source: Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, *Statistical Yearbook*

Note: Percentage indicates the ratio of annually employed population with more than bachelor's degree in the public sector

Traditionally the public sector jobs were preferred in Vietnam like other East Asian countries, but the changing trend and environment indicate that younger generation's job motivation is more complicated than before. For a long period, it has been argued that low level of civil servant salary discouraged prospective job seekers' entry to public service in Vietnam, but as unsuccessful Danang City's policy experiment – i.e., providing two- or three-times higher salary, higher education opportunities, etc. – shows (Bui and Chang, 2018), compensation itself may be not the only factor. In this paper, we intend to identify Vietnamese young workforce's career motivation in public sector by asking the following questions: First, how do different motivating factors explain young Vietnamese students' career choice in public or private sector? Second, how could Vietnam attract young talents to the public sector?

Based on the motivation theories and public service motivation framework, we attempted to answer these questions by using survey data collected from 433 fresh university graduates within six months and final year undergraduate students in Vietnam. We confirm that there was positive

relationship between public career choice and motivation to serve the public as PSM theory expected, but traditional extrinsic motivators such as materialistic benefits, job security and stability were more important in Vietnamese context. As a rare case of a socialist state in Asia and a rapidly growing developing economy, the case of Vietnam contributes to our empirical understanding of public service job motivation by highlighting rapidly changing younger generation's intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors associated with the public sector employment from a comparative perspective and complementing an empirical gap in Western-centric literature.³

Prospective Job Seekers' Public Service Career Motivation: A Theoretical Framework

Career Choice Motivation

In public and private as well as nonprofit organizations, understanding what motivates people to join them has been critically important to academics and practitioners. Over the past century, a great deal of research has been done about job motivations in various fields including sociology, business, industrial psychology, public administration, and so forth (Kleinginna et al., 1981). The vast literature on motivating factors underlying career intentions focuses on multifaceted and multi-dimensional mix of human motives in occupational preference formation (Vandenabeele and Van Loon, 2015), and often argues that a broad range of aspects from culture and socialization to rewards for individuals draws people to work for either public or private sector.

While the abovementioned motivation theories were widely adopted and evolved over time, a notable strand of research in the study of job motivation emphasizes that individuals are attracted to different sectors – i.e., public or private sector – for different reasons. Drawing on the notion of 'motiving factors' (or intrinsic factors) such as social recognition, opportunity to do something

³ Recently, scholarly research on public service motivation has extended to non-Western regions such as Northeast Asia (Japan, South Korea, Singapore, China, for example), but most studies still focus on the PSM in developed or middle-income countries. It means that PSM in developing countries or traditional societies is still a missing link (Liu and Tang, 2011; Van der Wal, 2015).

meaningful, attraction to policymaking, belief in public interests, and so forth, many public management studies has examined whether individuals inclined to public sector jobs have different set of motivational structure. In earlier literature, a number of scholars suggest that civil servants do have more of 'public service ethic,' 'altruistic behavior' or 'service to community' mindset than those of private sector (Rainey, 1982). In a similar vein, many researchers also argued that people motivated by public ethics are likely to hold public service position and be committed to their jobs (Crewson, 1997; Houston, 2000). Not surprisingly, this notion that 'public and private employees are different' in values and reward expectations has led to the development of PSM theory in public management.

Since James Perry's work on PSM, a growing body of work more clearly demonstrates that public employees have distinctive motivations from that of private counterparts, – for example, attraction to policymaking, commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice – which are in general associated with public service (Crewson, 1997; Frank and Lewis, 2004; Houston, 2000; Perry and Wise, 1990; Vandenabeele, 2008). A majority of the PSM scholarship have tested the claim that normative and what is so called 'prosocial' motivation such as helping others and being useful to society and theorized the positive link between prosocial behavior (or motivation) and public service career intention. This means that to the varying extent public service motivation is a 'calling' to public service, and individuals having bigger PSM are likely to seek jobs in public sector organizations and would place a lower value on material incentives or monetary rewards (Perry and Wise, 1990: 370-1). There are many empirical analyses that support the positive linkage between PSM and occupational choice in public sector in North America, Europe, East Asia, and so forth, although the actual understanding of PSM among individuals can vary country by country and region by region due to cultural differences and administrative context (Kim et al., 2013).

While the extant literature on PSM tries to understand the relationship between PSM and employment choice (attraction – selection), the relationship is unfortunately not crystal clear. It is

partially because many of the existing research did not exclude the possibility of respondents' adaptation to prosocial or normative orientation of public organizations where they are working. In other words, unlike PSM theory's attraction-selection link explains, incumbent public employees' on-the-job 'socialization' or self-confidence formulated in public organizations possibly determine the level of public service motivation (Kjeldsen and Jacobsen, 2013).⁴ If prosocial norms or public service orientation of individuals is 'distinctive' motivation factor for employees in public sector, it would be equally important that they have the spirit *before* and *after* entering the public sector (Wright and Christensen, 2010: 157). In this regard, to avoid the unintended disruption from the socialization effect or incumbent public workers' self-confidence and to support the influence of PSM on career choices, we paid more attention to prospective job seekers' job motivation and their career choice in this paper.

However, uncovering the relationship between prospective job seekers' motivation and their career sector choice can be complicated than expected. In addition to the fact that New Public Management and emphasis on 'small government' with neoliberal ideas possibly let job seekers lean toward finding jobs in businesses, the young 'grown-ups' across the globe are increasingly being cynical about government (Lewis and Frank, 2002). Although the stereotyping of the younger generations – the Millennials, digitally native Generation Z, etc. – is difficult, some have argued that the new generations do not have similar kind of public ethos (Lyons et al., 2014). Others rather emphasize they are relatively entrepreneurial, less hierarchy-dependent, networking-oriented, and so forth, which might imply challenges and opportunities for public personnel administration (Twenge and Campbell, 2012).

Likewise, the empirical studies testing the relationship between the younger generation's career choice and job motivations are often contradictory. Ng and Gossett (2013), for example, analyzed the survey of Canadian university students on their career choice in government (public

⁴ For example, a panel study of Danish physiotherapy students done by Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2013) showed that unlike the previous assumptions, PSM was primarily associated with the public sector affiliation and did not directly influenced job attraction to the public sector.

sector) and concluded that their 'pre-PSM' was consistent with what PSM theory expected, while they also prioritized certain values such as work-life balance, further educational opportunities, contributing to society as their top career motivations. Henstra and McGowan (2016) similarly studied the job motivation of the Canadian 'Millennial generation' (graduate students, born after 1980) and demonstrated that the students who intended to work in public sector valued intrinsic – i.e., contribution to society – and extrinsic values – i.e., career advancement.⁵ In her study of American public policy students' career preference, Chetkovich (2003) observed that those planning to have jobs in government were motivated by their desire of making a difference in society, while others looking for financial gains and development opportunity were inclined to enter private sector.⁶ For Australian university students, job attributes such as job security and fair salary were the main motivational factor (Taylor, 2005). As a rare comparative study on the job motivation of East Asian countries (China, Singapore and South Korea), Ko and Jun (2015) explored whether different job motivations and perception on government in similar but different administrative context shape the job preference of university students differently and found that a normative value (chances to benefit society) was not necessarily a single motivator. They found that the relationship between the normative motivator and career choice in public sector among Chinese university students, unlike that of Singaporean and Korean students was still uncertain, and the mix of normative and extrinsic value (job security and salary) were commonly important for those who prefer private or public sector jobs. To summarize, these divergent and mixed results from the vast literature on the motivation of the prospective workforce's career choices rather strongly calls for systemic and contextualized comparative studies on it from a comparative perspective.

⁵ The empirical evidence that public service motivation (e.g. contribution to society) and extrinsic factor (e.g. better salary) were equally important was supported in other studies as well (Karl and Peat, 2004; Van de Walle et al., 2015). Van de Walle et al. (2015) sought to find common determinants of career choice in public sector by comparing 26 countries and found that regardless of some variations among countries, public service motivation and extrinsic values were important motivating factors.

⁶ According to this research, curriculum at public policy schools emphasizing analytical skills and policymaking did not make big difference in promoting public sector jobs (Chetkovich, 2003).

Contextualizing Vietnam and an Analytical Framework

In investigating the career choice motivation in Vietnam, understanding the cultural and institutional context of the country is critical due to the inherent weakness of PSM as a universal concept. A number of scholars in the field recognized that the earlier conceptualization and operationalization of PSM (e.g., Perry and Wise, 1990) may encounter cultural and language differences in other countries, as Kim et al., (2013: 97) note that scores and measurements on the dimensions of PSM may not have the same meaning and strength across countries as those of initial studies. In this context, Vietnam, a rare example of one-party-dominant socialist with market economy, requires a closer scrutiny prior to studying career intention of job seekers.

Comparatively speaking, the development of modern civil service system in Vietnam was late and even distant from Southeast Asian neighborhood in many respects. As a former colonial country of France, Vietnam's civil service has had somewhat distinctive features. Haque (2007) classified Vietnamese system as one of 'colonial bureaucratic systems,' which was developed based on the bureaucratic models in western societies and forcefully imposed on developing countries during the colonial period. In particular, countries under the control of French ruler inherited the highly centralized and hierarchical administrative system, and Vietnam sharing the similar administrative tradition disrupted further by the communist takeover of political power and a series of war (Haque, 2007: 1302). While the colonial legacy deterred the modernization of civil service and government structure until the 1970s, Vietnam under the communist rule also underwent unclear division between the politics and administration stemming from the Soviet Union model of central planning,⁷ which led to the under-specialization and underdevelopment of skills and capacity of the civil service system without 'Weberian bureaucracy' until the socialist marketization and subsequent administrative reform in the mid-1980s and the early-1990s (Haque, 2007: 1305).

⁷ The term 'the cadre system' is frequently used in most of socialist nations including Vietnam and the system does not clearly differentiate civil servants from other public officials affiliated with the Communist Party (Poon et al., 2009).

It was not until the late 1990s that Vietnamese government introduced a basic civil service legal framework (the Ordinance of Cadre and Civil Servants, 1998), and based on this ordinance, the government attempted to rearrange its administrative agencies and manage civil servants in more systemic manner. In addition, the rise of foreign investment and market forces became increasingly vocal and kept pressured the communist government to adopt administrative reform measures that focused on rationalization of public administration procedure, civil service recruitment, red tape reduction and so forth by making new laws and decrees. The Public Administration Reform (PAR) Master Programme (2001 – 2010) introduced competitive civil service exam and decentralized some personnel management functions to line agencies and local governments. With given some financial autonomy (block grants), some state agencies and local government proactively retained and trained civil servants (Poon et al., 2009). Recognizing the importance of ‘quality workforce’ in public sector, the government also introduced special measures to attract young talents and young scientists to public organizations by creating resources and offering attractive packages (Decree 140/2017/ND-CP, 2017; Decision No. 1229/QĐ-BGDĐT, 2018). For example, according to the decree announced in 2004, excellent university graduates would be given ‘specialist’ (or equivalent) rank with relatively higher salary and benefits (Decree No.204/2004/ND-CP, 2004), which was much higher than regular government staff. A local government (Danang City) even offered full scholarships for excellent high-school achievers (Bui and Chang, 2018: 2).

However, regardless of the series of administrative reform and some notable success for the last two decades, Vietnam’s civil service system still displays long-standing problems and challenges ranging from salary adjustment to broader corruption issue. Vietnam adopted merit-based civil servant recruitment system but still largely depends on career-based system lacking appropriate job analysis and evaluation (Poon et al., 2009: 6). Testing knowledge unrelated to actual jobs through competitive exam raises questions as to the ‘validity’ of the recruitment system. Salary for civil servants and cadres as well as armed forces is still calculated simply by multiplying the

coefficient of the minimum wage (Decree No. 72/2018/ND-CP, 2018), which covers only 60% of basic living cost in Vietnam. Under this circumstance, it is not too difficult to imagine that many civil servants hunt for additional jobs or engage in corruption.

The current problems and challenges that Vietnamese government faces pose some interesting research agendas on career choice among Vietnamese workers. First, regardless of slow improvement of public administration and personnel management, Vietnamese civil service has undergone ‘brain drain’ and high ‘job turnover’ phenomenon (Poon et al., 2009; Bui and Change, 2018). Second, private sector has become a major source of job creation and absorbed more than 80% of new workforces every year (Vo, 2016),⁸ although providing good quality jobs for younger generation becomes a big challenge for sustainable economic growth in Vietnam. Lastly, it is unclear why Vietnamese workforce prefer public or private sector jobs, as the limited number of studies on Vietnamese’s career intention do not show coherent explanation (Chang and Ryu, 2017; Phan, 2018; Tang, 2017). International Labor Organization (ILO) conducted *the School-to-Work Transition Survey* in 2012-13 and 2015 and reported that about two third of the Vietnamese youth preferred jobs in public sector, but the definition of ‘youth’ (age from 15 to 29) in the survey was not successful in differentiating prospective job seekers’ career intention from that of incumbent public sector workers.

PSM literature increasingly calls for more systemic comparison with rich datasets surveyed in western countries but understanding PSM in developing countries can encounter unexpected obstacles, as there is little research on the nature and meaning of public service motivation in the context of developing countries yet (Van der Wal, 2015). Previously the context of Confucian culture and pervasive state apparatus of the communist political power in Vietnam shaped people’s perception of public sector jobs but increasing market influence after Doi Moi (1986) provides somewhat ambiguous implication for the younger generation’s career choice. At the same time, the

⁸ Vietnam News, June 6, 2016. Available at <https://vietnamnews.vn/economy/377671/how-the-private-sector-can-drive-vns-growth.html#VWDshYYRoOw0iiB7.97>

definition and measurement of public service motivation for incumbent civil servants face practical constraints as well, because their career intention and the definition of work motivation can be re-worked by the Communist Party's political off-limits. Therefore, to avoid any misunderstanding about the career motivation in relatively distinctive administrative, political and socio-economic context, we decided to explore various motivating factors among young Vietnamese, beyond simply testing PSM that was usually measured with scales developed by Perry (1996) and the followers.

Research Design and Hypotheses

Given that this is an exploratory research about differences among Vietnamese prospective job seekers who indicate their career intention for a career in public sector vis-à-vis private sector, no prior hypotheses on PSM is assumed in this paper. Instead, we measured what classical motivation theories proposed earlier on workers' motivation including intrinsic factors – i.e., recognition, achievement, opportunity to do something meaningful, etc. – and hygiene factors – i.e., wages, working conditions, annual leave, and so forth (Herzberg, 1966; Anyim et al., 2012), while we also looked for the influence of some elements of PSM (e.g., contribution to society) on their career choice.

Based on the above theoretical discussion and accounts, we tested the following hypotheses in this paper: a. Whether Vietnamese young job seekers have similar or different career motivation; b. Whether intrinsic factors or extrinsic factors are important; and c. Whether university majors, family background, parents' influence, public sector image as well as public service motivation are important in choosing jobs. First, despite the hypotheses that PSM theory has made, intrinsic and extrinsic factors can be equally important for job seekers in both public and private sectors. As a rapidly growing new economy, there is a possibility that Vietnam's prosperous market and expanding business sector have different implications from the premises of PSM theory. Second, as an exploratory research, identifying some commonly perceived job motivators is a crucial task.

Lastly, in Vietnam experiencing socio-economic transformation under traditional political structure and culture, how individual attributes, perspectives on government and social background affect young workforces' career choice provide somewhat important context.

Sources of Data and Descriptive Analysis

In this research, we intentionally targeted the younger Vietnamese, final year undergraduate students and fresh bachelor's degree holders graduated within six months across Vietnam, who are classified as prospective workforces (age 21-22). In this way, we attempted to minimize the effects of socialization and self-persuasion bias of incumbent workers in the public sector (Chen et al., 2018). We administered an online survey to total 589 young Vietnamese via Google Survey Platform from October 23 to November 2, 2018. It turned out that 536 responses were the right target of this study and thus removed invalid cases and finally got 433 usable responses, yielding a response rate of 73.5%. Since our research aimed at drawing inferences about the factors and the benefits that motivate the younger Vietnamese people to pursue public service, we intentionally targeted prospective job seekers having a bachelor's degree or final year university students who represent a group of skilled workers and want to work in either the public or the private sectors. We also considered the respondents' university majors, GPAs and parents' jobs to understand how these factors influence the projective civil servants' career intention.

As the descriptive characteristics of the sample (Table 1) shows, the demographic distribution of the sample used in data analysis was 68.5% female, much higher than that of male respondents (31.6%). Respondents in this survey who came from many universities in entire Vietnam mostly showed their career intention in private sector (77.1%), while only 99 respondents out of 433 (22.9%) chose public service job as their future career.⁹ There were also 347 prospective job seekers with more than good GPA in their universities. About 4.5% of respondents studied or

⁹ Even compared to other Asian countries (China, Singapore, South Korea), career intention in private sector is very high. In the three Asian countries, preference to work for private sector was a bit higher (53%) than for public sector (47%).

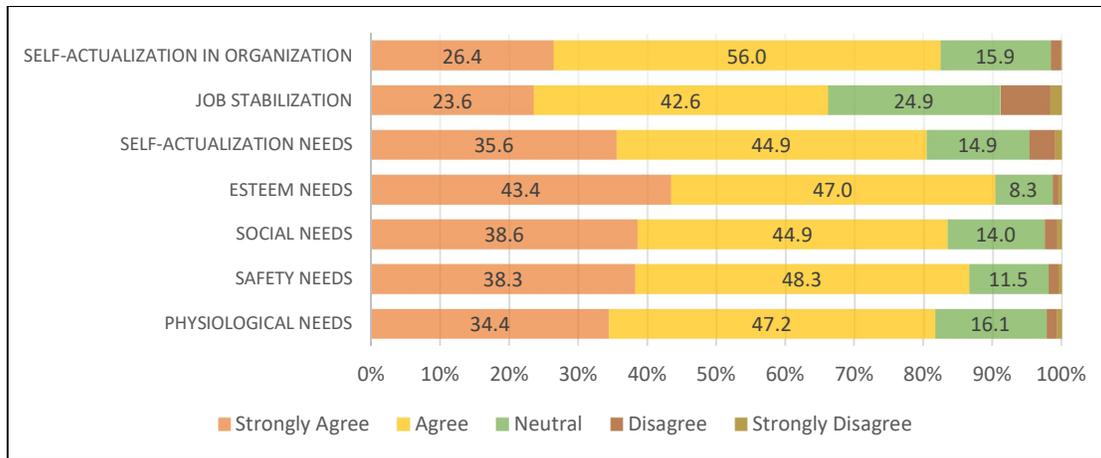
are majoring in public administration, public policy, or public service related majors. The average number of family members was 4.5 with about 2.5 members working and 21.9% of respondents' parents (one of or both) have jobs in public sector.

<Table 1> Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristics	Sub-Categories	Career choice				Sample	
		Public sector		Private sector		Total	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Gender	Male	27	19.71%	110	80.29%	137	100%
	Female	72	24.32%	224	75.68%	296	100%
GPA classification	Excellent	6	24.00%	19	76.00%	25	100%
	Very good	23	32.39%	48	67.61%	71	100%
	Good	53	21.12%	198	78.88%	251	100%
	Ordinary	17	19.77%	69	80.23%	86	100%
Major in university	Education – Health	20	32.79%	41	67.21%	61	100%
	Social sciences - Humanities	5	20.83%	19	79.17%	24	100%
	Public administration/Public services/Policy	9	47.37%	10	52.63%	19	100%
	Military	3	100.00%	0	0.00%	3	100%
	Law	9	31.03%	20	68.97%	29	100%
	Economics - Business	11	10.28%	96	89.72%	107	100%
	Others	42	22.11%	148	77.89%	190	100%
Parents' job	Both your parents are civil servants	13	29.55%	31	70.45%	44	100%
	At least one of your parents is a civil servant	13	25.49%	38	74.51%	51	100%
	Both your parents are not civil servants	73	21.60%	265	78.40%	338	100%

Our independent variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), and the general statistics on the variable influencing the career choice of job seekers are as below. According to <Figure 2>, all respondents commonly chose esteem needs (“opportunity to have an important position in jobs”, “recognition on your efforts and loyalty by the organization”, “encouragement by your boss and the organization”) as one of the most important career choice motivation (more than 90%). Social needs (“good relationship with colleagues and boss”, “the bias in the organization”, “coordination with colleagues”) and safety needs (“safe working environment”, “pressure in jobs”, “health and accident insurance by the organization”) also marked higher score among respondents, while agreement on job stability (“stable job”, “work-life balance”) was somewhat low (66%) and received higher disagreement (9%), compared to other variables.

<Figure 2> Assessment of Individuals on Motivation Factors



Based on the descriptive statistical results indicated in <Table 1> and <Figure 2>, we can make some inference about career goals and motivation here. First, above all things, female students' job preference in public sector (24.3%) was slightly higher than that of male students (19.7%). Many empirical studies note that gender is an important factor in bringing different results in career choice, but in this paper, regardless of gender, all respondents predominantly prefer private sector jobs.¹⁰ Second, in a similar way, students with good academic record (very good and excellent GPA) inclined to choose their jobs in private sector. Third, it seems that students' field of study (public administration, public policy, public service) make difference in pursuing public service career (47.4%), although the number of respondents is small (n = 19). But after our statistical significance test (t-test = 1.96, at 5% significance level), GPA and majors were significant, while gender and parents' job were less meaningful.

Findings

This research used the descriptive statistical analysis and the regression model to understand the career choice of job seekers in Vietnam. In this paper we used a series of Probit regression as our dependent variable (career choice, CARCHO) is binary value in nature (0 = future career in private

¹⁰ For example, Ng and Gossett (2013) noted that male students are more attracted by material factor (more salary) than the females, and 36.7% of women indicated to their work preference in public sector, while only 17.6% of men preferred public service jobs. Yet, empirical evidence in other studies are mixed.

sector, 1 = future career in public sector). But for comparison purpose, we used the OLS and Logit models in this regression analysis. X_i indicates independent variables in the model. β_0 is the slope coefficient, β_i is the estimated coefficient of the independent variable X_i , and u_i is the residue. Our general equation is:

$$CARCHO = \beta_0 + \beta_i * X_i + u_i$$

X_i variables are aggregated factor variables, made up of multiple questions in the survey questionnaire. To make this variable X_i , we took a test the scale of the factors (Cronbach's Alpha Test) and removed the several bad variables for analytical purposes, which eventually increased the Cronbach's Alpha Index. <Table 2> below summarizes the independent variables X_i and the observation variables that make up the independent variables as well as the corresponding questions in the questionnaire.

<Table 2> Independent Variables and Observation Variables

No	Variable Xi	Code	Questions (observation variables)	Expected impact
1	Physical Factors	PF	8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,17	+
2	Mental Factors	MF	19, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29	+
3	Job Stabilization	JS	32, 33	+
4	Other Incomes	IN2	14	+
5	Contribute to Social Benefits	SB	31	+
6	Internal Reward	IR	34	
7	Public Sector Image	PS	36	+
8	Expectation About Leader	EL	37	+
9	Parent's Influence	PI	38	+
10	Gender	SEX	1	
11	Major Education - Health	MAJEH	2	+
12	Major Social Sciences - Humanities	MAJSH	2	+
13	Major Public Service...	MAJPA	2	+
14	GPA Excellent	GPAEX	3	
15	GPA Very Good	GPAVG	3	+
16	GPA Good	GPAGO	3	
17	Number of Family Members	NUMMEM	4	
18	Number of Members have a job	NUMHAJ	5	
19	Ratio of Members have a job	RATIO	4, 5	
20	Parent's Jobs	PJ	6	+
21	Career Choice	CARCHO	7	

<Table 3> is the respondents' evaluation of motivation factors by sectoral choice. It shows that there are some significant differences in the evaluation of variables among students in two

different groups (private and public sector groups). The respondents who prefer to pursue their careers in public sector agreed in higher proportion in job stability (JS, mean = 4.03 to 3.72), other income opportunity (IN2, mean = 3.93 to 3.69), contribution to social benefits (SB, mean = 4.18 to 3.86), public sector image (PS, mean = 3.97 to 3.49), parent's influence (PI, 3.67 to 3.10), and the field of study (majors in public administration, public policy, and public service, MAJPA, mean = 0.030 to 0.030) as important motivating factors, although they are not necessarily impact on the students' career choice.

<Table 3> Prospective Job Seekers' Evaluation of Motivation by Sectoral Choice

No	Variable – Code	Private Sector (n=334)		Public Sector (n=99)	
		Mean (SE)	[95% CI]	Mean (SE)	[95% CI]
1	Physical Factors – PF	4.10 (0.029)	[4.04, 4.16]	4.14 (0.056)	[4.04, 4.26]
2	Mental Factors - MF	4.40 (0.028)	[4.34, 4.45]	4.34 (0.051)	[4.24, 4.45]
3	Job Stabilization - JS***	3.72 (0.042)	[3.64, 3.80]	4.03 (0.071)	[3.88, 4.17]
4	Other Income - IN2**	3.69 (0.051)	[3.59, 3.79]	3.93 (0.094)	[3.74, 4.12]
5	Contribute to Social Benefits - SB***	3.86 (0.046)	[3.77, 3.95]	4.18 (0.066)	[4.05, 4.31]
6	Internal Rewards - IR	4.02 (0.040)	[3.94, 4.10]	4.06 (0.072)	[3.92, 4.20]
7	Public Sector Image - PS***	3.49 (0.055)	[3.39, 3.60]	3.97 (0.084)	[3.80, 4.14]
8	Expectation About Leader - EL	4.45 (0.033)	[4.38, 4.51]	4.40 (0.064)	[4.28, 4.53]
9	Parent's Influence - PI***	3.10 (0.051)	[3.01, 3.20]	3.67 (0.087)	[3.49, 3.84]
10	Parent's Job: Civil Servants - PJCS	0.093 (0.016)	[0.062, 0.124]	0.131 (0.034)	[0.064, 0.199]
11	Parent's Job: Education Industry - PJEI	0.015 (0.007)	[0.002, 0.028]	0.030 (0.017)	[-0.004, 0.065]
12	Gender – SEX	0.329 (0.026)	[0.279, 0.380]	0.273 (0.045)	[0.183, 0.362]
13	Major Education - Health - MAJEH**	0.123 (0.018)	[0.087, 0.158]	0.202 (0.041)	[0.122, 0.283]
14	Major Social Sciences – Huma... - MAJSH	0.057 (0.013)	[0.032, 0.082]	0.051 (0.022)	[0.007, 0.094]
15	Major Public Service ... - MAJPA***	0.030 (0.009)	[0.012, 0.048]	0.091 (0.029)	[0.033, 0.149]
16	Major Law - MAJLA	0.060 (0.013)	[0.034, 0.085]	0.091 (0.029)	[0.033, 0.149]
17	GPA Excellent - GPAEX	0.057 (0.013)	[0.032, 0.082]	0.061 (0.024)	[0.013, 0.108]
18	GPA Very Good - GPAVG	0.144 (0.019)	[0.106, 0.182]	0.232 (0.043)	[0.148, 0.317]
19	GPA Good - GPAGO	0.593 (0.027)	[0.540, 0.646]	0.535 (0.050)	[0.435, 0.635]

Note: F test for sectoral differences (private vs. public). 9 first variables are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, others are measured on the binary scale (yes =1, no = 0). CI = confidence interval. *p < .1. **p < .05. ***p < .01.

<Table 4> Regression Statistics Result (Logit, Probit)

No	Variable	HYPOTHESES	Code	Logit1	Logit2	Probit1	Probit2
1	Physical Factors		PF	-0.0547	-0.0824	-0.0341	-0.0465
2	Mental Factors		MF	-1.1044**	-1.1210**	-0.6253**	-0.6321**
3	Job Stabilization	H3	JS	0.4325	0.4415	0.2581	0.2613
4	Other Income	H1	IN2	0.1266	0.1368	0.0789	0.0833
5	Contribute to Social Benefits	H2	SB	0.6183**	0.6062**	0.3613**	0.3554**
6	Internal Rewards	H4	IR	-0.2908	-0.2847	-0.1864	-0.1836
7	Public Sector Image	H5	PS	0.4205*	0.4100*	0.2623**	0.2569**
8	Expectation About Leader	H6	EL	-0.2064	-0.1833	-0.1225	-0.1113
9	Parent's Influence	H7	PI	0.4136*	0.4130*	0.2338*	0.2325*
10	Parent's Job: Civil Servants	H11	PJCS	0.6726	0.733	0.3684	0.4002
11	Parent's Job: Education Industry	H11	PJEI	1.11	1.1428	0.6452	0.6646
12	Gender		SEX	-0.3971	-0.3664	-0.2287	-0.2114
13	Major Education - Health	H8	MAJEH	0.6248	0.6149	0.3655	0.3608
14	Major Social Sciences - Humanities	H8	MAJSH	0.2734	0.2593	0.1619	0.1558
15	Major Public Service/ Administration...	H8	MAJPA	1.4839**	1.4310**	0.8783**	0.8478**
16	Major Law	H8	MAJLA	0.5603	0.5727	0.3323	0.3386
17	GPA Excellent	H9	GPAEX	0.325	0.3536	0.2001	0.2161
18	GPA Very Good	H9	GPAVG	0.7555	0.7411	0.4247	0.4139
19	GPA Good	H9	GPAGO	0.1542	0.1655	0.0741	0.0786
20	Ratio of Members have a job	H10	RATIO	-1.013		-0.5134	
21	Number of Family Members	H10	NUMMEM		0.2114		0.1141
22	Number of Members have a job	H10	NUMHAJ		-0.2501		-0.1269
23	Constant		Constant	-1.6425	-2.4874	-1.0831	-1.5399
Number of observes				433	433	433	433

*** p < 0.01 ** p < 0.05 * p < 0.1

Whether the result of the estimated coefficients of the variables are statistically significant or not, their values helps us answer the abovementioned hypotheses about career motivation.

<Table 4> suggests the estimated results of logit and probit models. we can see that factors such as mental factors (i.e., good relationship with colleagues, coordination among members, appreciation of efforts and loyalty, encouragement from the boss and the organization, opportunity to learn a lot of new things, opportunity to show ability in work); sense of contribution to the social benefits; the public sector image; and parent's influence and field of study at university (public administration, public service, and public policy) have impact on career choice in the public sector of students.

To explain the meaning of the regression statistics shown in 'Probit 2' model in <Table 4>, we can take an example of two students (student A, student B) having similar characteristics (age, career of parents, gender, etc.), except for university majors. Student A studied public administration (or public service / public policy related major), while student B major in others. The estimated coefficient of the MAJPA variable in the Probit 2 model is 0.8478, which means that if student B has 30% of probability of choosing public service career, the difference in coefficient is calculated as $e^{0.8478} \times (0.3/0.7) = 1.0005$. Then, the probability of student A's choice in public sector would be $1.0005 / (1.0005 + 1) * 100\% = 50\%$, which means that the probability of student A' career in public service would be higher than that of student B by 20%. <Table 5> exemplifies this calculation.

<Table 5> Regression Statistics Result by an Example

Variable	Coefficient	Student A		Student B	
		Value of variable	Probability chooses a future job in the public sector	Value of variable	Probability chooses a future job in the public sector
MAJPA	0.8478	MAJPA = 1	50%	MAJPA = 0	30%
SB	0.3554	SB = 1	37.9%	SB = 0	30%
PS	0.2569	PS = 1	35.7%	PS = 0	30%
PI	0.2325	PI = 1	35.1%	PI = 0	30%
MF	-0.6321	MF = 1	18.60%	MF = 0	30%

As such, Vietnamese students whose majors are directly related to the public sector such as public administration, public services or public policy would have a higher probability of future career choices in public sector than students who study other majors, according to our analysis. The variable ‘sense of contribution to the benefits of society’ (SB) has also a positive effect on career choice in the public sector of students. For those students who have positive views about public sector image in the future (PS), there is a higher chance of career choice in public sector than other students. This is an interesting statistical result, because the widespread corruption and bureaucratic pathologies such as red-tapes and inefficiency have been the common image of the communist Vietnam. Yet, considering the nature of the questionnaire (“I think Vietnamese public sector will be better in the future (less corruption, more equity, more efficiency, etc.), we assume that continuous economic growth and government reform programs gave respondents somewhat positive prospects about public sector positions. Students who think that the influence of their parents on their decision to choose a job (PI) would also have a higher probability of choosing a job in public sector. Interestingly though, students who thought that mental factors (MF) were important on their decision to choose a job will also have a higher probability of choosing a job in the private sector than the public sector.

Based on the analysis, we could summarize the result of hypotheses testing as follows in <Table 6>.

<Table 6> Result of Hypotheses Testing

No	Hypotheses	Hypothesis speech	Expected impact	St. coefficient	P value	Inspection results
1	H1	The higher the likelihood of other income source, the higher probability of career choice in public sector	+	0.0833141	0.414	Rejected
2	H2	The higher the likelihood of contribution to society, the higher probability of career choice in public sector	+	0.3553734	0.004	Accepted
3	H3	The higher job stability, the higher probability of career choice in public sector	+	0.2613064	0.060	Rejected

4	H4	The greater needs of self-actualization in workplace (organization), the higher probability of career choice in public sector	+	-0.183551	0.173	Rejected
5	H5	The better positive image of public sector, the higher probability of career choice in public sector	+	0.2569347	0.009	Accepted
6	H6	The greater expectation about leadership in workplace, the higher probability of career	+	- 0.1112565	0.474	Rejected
7	H7	The greater influence of parents, the higher probability of career choice in public sector.	+	0.2324998	0.014	Accepted
8	H8	Students majoring in public administration, public service, and public policy have higher chance to choose public service career	+	0.8477676	0.008	Accepted
9	H9	The higher GPA at college, the higher probability of career choice in public sector.	+	0.4139321	0.098	Rejected
10	H10	The smaller the size of family (members), the higher probability of career choice in public sector	-	0.1268796	0.133	Rejected
11	H11	Students having parents in public sector jobs would have higher chance to choose public service career	+	0.4002165	0.089	Rejected

Discussion

What messages do the results of this survey offer to public and private sector employers in Vietnam? What challenges will the human resource divisions in the government at different levels face in trying to recruit talents? Are there things that they can do to improve their ability to attract quality workers from the pool of young Vietnamese workers?

In this paper, based on theoretical frameworks and previous studies in developed world and in Vietnam, we proposed a model of research that includes a variety of motivational factors; which influence the decision to choose a career of a student. This model includes basic needs factors in the classical theories on work motivation, some factors which the previous researches suggested and found their impacts, some factors belong to Vietnamese culture or Confucian culture that we think they also have an impact on the dependent variable.

While the most important motivations for Vietnamese students are esteem needs, safety needs, and social needs respectively, but the factors that make up the difference in the future career choice of students in the public or private sector in Vietnam are their major in the university, the sense of contribution to the benefits of society, the perception of the public sector image, and the parents' influence. For those who choose public sector jobs, 'university majors, 'Sense of contribution to social benefits' and 'Public sector image' 'were the three strongest factors for motivating prospective public sector employees. In addition, motivational factors that are non-physical (mental) such as good relationship with colleagues, coordination between members, effort and loyalty are appreciated. Encouragement from the leader and the organization, opportunity to learn a lot of new things, and opportunity to show ability in work also impact on career choices of students; but this particular impact is opposite to our original expectations, as students who think mental motivation factors are more important tend to choose career in the private sector rather than in the public sector.

The study also found that students who have career intentions in public sector have a higher level of consent about job stabilization, other income, contribute to social benefits, public sector image, parent's influence, major education - health, major public service/ administration/ policy than students have career intentions in private sector. In Vietnamese context, some classical hypotheses on different needs or physical factors are no longer make a difference in choosing future career of young Vietnamese students.

As an employer, the government and public employers such as local governments, public hospitals, and schools in Vietnam will find that some of things that they are able to offer already are consistent with the desires of prospective jobs seekers in Vietnam. At the same time, what the Vietnamese government is implementing to attract quality workers to the public sector may not be effective, according to the results of our analysis. For example, the government provides incentives to attract students with high GPAs and the records of national or international awards, but it turned out that those students are likely to choose private sector jobs.

In Vietnam, there have been heated debates about adjusting civil servant salary for the last decade, but according to our analysis, using income to attract good students may not be a good measure. While it is expected that good income can increase satisfaction with the incumbent employees working in government, but to attract new workforce, the government needs to focus on improving public sector's image by reducing corruption, increasing equity, increasing transparency; or increase people's perception. Instead, based on our analysis, we argue that it would be better strategy for the government to target students who study public administration, public service and public policy. This may increase probability of selection career in public sector of those students. The Government of Vietnam may have ensured post-graduation job policies for these students at the central or local level. The policy must be carefully assessed based on the status and expected the personnel needs of the agency. Besides, the Government needs to have an overall effort to improve the image of the public sector, such as reducing corruption, increasing justice, increasing purity, etc. Although to achieve a clear result in this area, the Government needs to show a sustained dedication for years to come, but with such effort, the public sector can attract future educated employees, including students in this research.

Finally, improving the working environment in the public sector such as increasing collaboration, increasing the activeness of employees, greater levels of empowerment, strengthening activities to honor employees' engagement and contribution, increasing motivation activities from leader for employees will help improve work motivation as well as gradually change people's perceptions about the working environment in the public sector, fill the gap in differences between the private and public sectors.

Concluding Remarks

Since Perry and Wise (1990), many people in the field of public management have been excited about PSM models, as it provided some direction of government public personnel policies

and valued the ‘public ethos’ of civil servants. Furthermore, beyond the fact that PSM increased organizational productivity in the public sector, it was also known that public employees are not necessarily motivated by material benefits. Although perception on public sector differ country by country and culture by culture, the core argument of PSM attracted a lot of scholars to the study of job motivation.

Earlier we argued that if PSM is critical to public organizations, prospect job seekers who are interested in public sector jobs as well as incumbent civil servants must have somewhat distinctive passion and mindset. Yet, as a rare communist country adopting market economy, it was necessary for us to test various motivating factors that influence people’s career choice in public or private sector. Therefore, in this paper we tested classical motivating factors argued by Maslow, Herzberg and so forth, but also several questions related to PSM.

For continuous economic and social development as a developing country, the Vietnamese government also recognizes the importance of quality manpower as an asset of the government. In the context of the public sector in Vietnam, according to our results, managers must pay attention to facilitate all motivational factors. We would like to recommend some policy considerations as follows:

First of all, one of the three most important factors affecting career choices of students is ‘field of study’ (major). Public organizations in Vietnam need to seriously consider the current structure of the apparatus to achieve ‘the right people with professional job skills for the right position.’ First, it is required to classify job positions with proper job descriptions for prospective. Some provincial governments in Vietnam have issued mechanisms for linking training programs with national universities for prospective job seekers in public sector of their provinces, supporting education costs and assuring job post-graduation for those students at the provincial. These policies initially worked well, but after graduation, students did not want to work for a long time in disadvantaged districts; this policy has not yet been widely applied, only provincially and over time there are also signs of lack of transparency in the selection of supported students. Second, it is recommended that the government organize career orientation and recruitment workshops every year at universities that

have specialized training in public services, public administration and public policy. The content of these seminars should contain career orientation, recruitment and building a positive public sector image for students. Third, the government needs to create an opportunity to access information on recruitment of civil servants for all students in timely manner, without limiting the conditions not related to the capacity of such students, such as family and occupational circumstances of their parents etc. In addition, it is required to prevent corruption in the recruitment of civil servants and avoid the culture of “born with a silver spoon in your mouth” - descendants of public servants working in state agencies have more opportunities to work in that agency than others. This not only creates fairness and seriousness in the recruitment of civil servants, but also builds a better image of the public sector.

In addition, to enhance the ‘sense of contribution to social benefits’, the Vietnamese leaders must properly recognize the contributions of employees working in the public sector; by which, they feel they have a meaningful work and are contributing to the benefits of society. With such encouragement, they will try to accomplish the task in the best possible way. For example, performing annual large ceremonies to honor the cases of typical public sector employees, with dedication to social benefits in that year is also a feasible solution. To promote the spirit of students’ desire to work for the public sector, the government also needs to organize many programs and seminars on this content. They should convey to students a perception that if they work for the public sector, they will have more opportunities to contribute to the social benefits.

Improving the ‘public sector image’ relates to students’ perception on the sector can be critical. A positive imagination about the public sector in the future such as reducing corruption and increasing equity will motivate students who want to work for the public sector. In recent years, the anti-corruption activities of the Vietnamese government have seen positive changes, but there has not been a significant improvement in the level of corruption as well as the image of Vietnam’s public sector¹¹.

¹¹ According to Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2017 report of Transparency International (TI), Vietnam scored 35 points out of 100 on the 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking 107 out of 180 countries surveyed. According to Towards Transparency (TT), the National Contact of TI in Vietnam, the slight increase of Vietnam’s CPI score in 2017 is a positive signal for its anti-corruption efforts in recent years. However, on the scale of 100 points, corruption in the public sector of Vietnam is still seemed as highly serious.

In addition, promoting administrative procedure reform, increasing fairness in recruitment and promotion, increasing transparency in the operation of the state apparatus, in other words, increasing citizens' satisfaction with the state, are also a way to improve the image of the public sector.

It was interesting to see how the 'parents' influence' factor made an impact on the career choices of students in Vietnamese context having Confucian culture, communist ideology and market economic principle. In addition to building a good image of the public sector with students, their parents need to be sympathetic and want to direct their children to work in the public sector. The students who have a higher level of agreement with statement that the influence of parents on the choice of a child's career, the more likely they are to choose career in the public sector. This is also a problem that managers need to pay attention to in developing a strategy for attracting human resources for the public sector.

Finally, it is kind of new lesson for Vietnam that mental motivational factors such as coworking relationships, encouragement from leader, opportunities to show self-ability, or opportunities to learn new things also need a lot of attention. It will make careers in the public sector more attractive. Eastern culture tends to be more collective, but to increase the value of individuals in the organization, individuality also needs to be enhanced. Obviously the private sector is doing this better than the public sector, so the public sector can learn from them. For example, annual team-building program that can connect individuals in the organization socially, programs honoring the contributions of individuals for overall achievement, internal training courses for employees, annual skills contest for some special positions are all activities that public sector agencies should organize.

Our analysis on career motivation of young Vietnamese people has some limitations as well. The first thing is that the paper did not fully consider all the factors that could affect the motivation of the employee because the motivation is influenced by so many factors. Our paper only deals with a number of factors based on recent research by researchers around the world, as this was first kind

of research on Vietnamese job motivation for public service. Future studies may still need to consider all of the new elements and fundamental elements according to PSM.

Second, the number of students surveyed should be increased. In terms of space and time, the thesis can only carry out research with more than 400 students in Vietnam. However, such numbers do not fully reflect the true results because according to Ministry of Education and Training statistics, by the end of 2016-2017, Vietnam has 235 universities, of which the total size of university students is 1,767,879 students (all students regardless school year). Further studies should consider extending the sample size.

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