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*Artículos científicos*

## **Career Preferences: Master Degrees in Public Policy and in Business Administration**

***Preferencias Profesionales: Maestrías en Políticas Públicas y en Administración  
de Empresas***

***Preferências Profissionais: Mestrado em Políticas Públicas e Administração de  
Empresas***

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to describe and explain the career preferences of Masters in Public Policy (MPP) students and Masters in Business Administration (MBA) students.

Based on the data provided by 424 students (MPP = 134 and MAE = 290) from Guadalajara, Mexico and analyzed through t-Student tests (independent samples) and exploratory factor analysis, it was found that MPP students have a more accentuated motivation to work in the public sector than MAE students, particularly in their ideal future job and professional career. Our analysis shows that MPP students have a stronger motivation to work in the public sector than MBA students, particularly on their ideal future job and professional career. We also found MPP students scored higher on the personal values that were often associated with the private sector. While we found that those who studied public policy have public-sector oriented values (i.e., “peace”, “equality”, “justice”, and “charity”), we also found them to have a relatively higher score on private-sector oriented values (i.e., “power,” “achievement”, “change”, and “sacrifice”). Our findings show that there is a shift in preferences of students in the public sector management styles. They appeared to have a strong appeal to apply the private sector practices in the public sector.

**Keywords:** Master of Public Policy, Master of Business Administration, career choice, personal values, work motivations

## Resumen

El propósito en esta investigación es describir y explicar las preferencias profesionales de estudiantes de las Maestrías en Políticas Públicas (MPP) y Administración de Empresas (MAE). Con base en los datos proporcionados por 424 estudiantes (MPP=134 y MAE=290) de Guadalajara, México y analizados a través de pruebas *t-Student*, para muestras independientes, y análisis factorial exploratorio se encontró que, los estudiantes de MPP tienen motivación más acentuada por trabajar en el sector público que los estudiantes de MAE, particularmente en su futuro trabajo ideal y carrera profesional. También, los estudiantes de MPP obtuvieron puntajes más altos en los valores personales que a menudo se asociaron con el sector privado. Si bien, aquellos que estudiaron políticas públicas tienen valores orientados al sector público (i.e., “paz”, “igualdad”, “justicia” y “caridad”), también tienen una puntuación relativamente más alta en valores asociados con el sector privado (i.e., “poder”, “logro”, “cambio” y “sacrificio”). Estos



resultados muestran que hay un cambio en las preferencias de los estudiantes en la gestión pública. Parece que tienen gran interés por aplicar las prácticas del sector privado en el sector público.

**Palabras clave:** Maestría en Políticas Públicas, Maestría en Administración de Empresas, selección de carrera, valores personales, motivaciones por el trabajo.

## Resumo

O objetivo desta pesquisa é descrever e explicar as preferências profissionais dos alunos do Mestrado em Políticas Públicas (MPP) e Administração de Empresas (MAE).

Com base nos dados fornecidos por 424 alunos (MPP = 134 e MAE = 290) de Guadalajara, México e analisados por meio de testes t-Student, para amostras independentes, e análise fatorial exploratória, verificou-se que os alunos do MPP são mais motivados pelo trabalho no setor público do que os alunos do MAE, especialmente em seu futuro emprego e carreira profissional ideal. Além disso, os alunos do MPP pontuaram mais alto em valores pessoais que costumavam ser associados ao setor privado. Embora aqueles que estudaram políticas públicas tenham valores orientados para o setor público (ou seja, "paz", "igualdade", "justiça" e "caridade"), eles também pontuam relativamente mais alto em valores associados ao setor privado (ou seja, "poder", "conquista", "mudança" e "sacrifício"). Esses resultados mostram que há uma mudança nas preferências dos alunos na gestão pública. Eles parecem ter grande interesse na aplicação de práticas do setor privado no setor público.

**Palavras-chave:** Mestre em Políticas Públicas, Mestre em Administração de Empresas, seleção de carreira, valores pessoais, motivações para o trabalho.

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## Introduction

What explain individuals' choice of sector of employment? There have been debate about the distinctions among those who work in the public sector (government and nonprofit) and private sector. For example, graduate students tend to have a certain expectation about the private and public sectors, which reflects their preferences for a particular sector. According to Tschirhart *et al.* (2008) the expectation captures "an internal compass [that] guides their careers."(p. 668). A stereotype view of those who are employed in the private sector, for example, is that they earned higher salary and better prospect in promotion. On the other hand, in the public sector, those who

work as public employees are often perceived as being comfortable in their working environment, e.g., higher job security and good fringe benefit. They are intrinsically motivated ---they brought with them personal values (such as fairness, honesty, obedience, justice, equality) into their work environment.

While some individuals are guided by their preferences and personal values, others would not tie themselves down to a particular sector of employment (Tschirhart *et al.*, 2008). Their career patterns are not static, i.e., they could work in sector that is not necessarily in their field of study but cut across multiple sectors. Individuals' early training as students may not tell us much about their loyalty to a particular sector of employment. Instead, individuals are most likely assimilating their values when they work in an organization due to the process of socialization. However, according to Baarspul and Wilderom (2011), the process of self-selection---detects that individuals make choices based on how they "fit" within their working environment. That is, the notion that a "person-organization fit" influences the individuals' preferences for employment (Van der Wal and Oosterbaan, 2013). The process highlights how individuals will choose their sector of employment, i.e., based on what the sector could offer them in terms of their career development.

There is a need to study individual's choice of sector of employment, particularly the preferences, motivation, and personal values of graduate students regarding the public and private sectors. According to Tschirhart *et al.* (2008), "Models that explain sector choice and sector shifting may aid in the design and delivery of graduate curricula and career counseling." (p. 670). Understanding the preferences, motivation, and values of graduate students can help us develop curricula and train future leaders and managers. Moreover, models that can explain individual's choice of sector of employment are important given the current administrative challenges that often cut across multi-sector boundaries and thus demanding future managers to have expertise and skills that are transferable across sectors. Given the competitive nature of the labor market, there is also a need to pay attention on human resource management to attract the most talented individuals into the public sector.

This article examines the differences in perceptions, motivation, and values of graduate students in two universities in Guadalajara, Mexico: Masters in Public Policy (MPP) and Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs. There were distinctions between graduate students and their preferences for these programs. MPP students have a stronger motivation to work in the public sector than MBA students. In particular, we found that there were differences between MPP and MBA students with regards to their ideal future job and professional career. We also found

MPP students scored higher on the personal values that were often associated with the private sector, i.e., “power,” “achievement”, “change”, and “sacrifice” compared to the MBA students. While we found personal values such as “Peace”, “Equality”, “Justice”, and “Charity” were scored higher by both MPP and MBA students, the mean score for the MPP students was significantly higher than the MBA students. These findings suggest that the perception of graduate students regarding management styles in the public sector in Guadalajara were similar to what Box (1999) referred to as a “sector shift” phenomenon. (p. 20).

The next section of the paper discusses the motivation and attitudes of students to work in the public sector. The third section provides an overview of institutional reforms in Mexico as well as the state of graduate programs in public policy and administration. In the data collection and analysis section, we describe our sample in two universities in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area. Before we discuss the implication of the study, we provide interpretations of our analysis and discussions of our major findings.

### **Theory and hypotheses**

Studies have shown graduates in Masters of Business Administration (MBA) and Masters in Public Policy/Public Administration (MPP/MPA) tend to have different motivation, personal values, and perceptions of public and private sectors; and that, these differences determined their provisional employment preferences. MPA and MBA programs, for example, generally provide training to students about management competencies. While both programs are professional master’s degrees, they tend to differ in terms of courses and subjects. For instance, scholars have pointed out that MPP/MPA differ from MBA program in terms of the goals in which the program aimed to achieve (Box, 1999). The long tradition of MPA program in the United States, for example, has been “to develop the capacity of graduates to exercise delegated public authority wisely, effectively and lawfully” (Henry *et al.* 2009, p. 122). Whereas MBA programs tend to offer courses related to accounting, economics, marketing, management, finance and analytics.

MBA students who are more “business-oriented” generally preferred to find employment in the private sector. Students in MBA programs are more extrinsically motivated. According to Van der Wal and Oosterbaan (2013), they tended “*[to look] for a dynamic environment in which they can earn a great deal of money and where high work pressure leads to many challenges.*” (p. 255). Indeed, several empirical studies have shown that managers in the private sector were strongly motivated by higher opportunity to get employment, higher salary, promotion, financial

rewards, a clearer promotion path, and professional development (*see* Buelens and Van den Broeck, 2007). These are incentives driven mostly by economic and material needs, such as good retirement, accomplishing goals that align with organizational mission. In short, an individual is drawn to the private sector in order to satisfy personal needs rather than society needs (Wright and Grant, 2010).

While business school graduates are usually hired in the private sector, MPP/MPA graduates often seek employment and positions in the public sector (Bright, 2016). MPP/MPA programs tend to attract those that are aspired to work as public managers or executive level positions in the public sector. According to Tschirhart *et al.* (2008), the “[c]hoice of an MPA over an MBA program may reflect a call to public service.” (p. 672). MPA graduates can be found working as policy analysts, state and local government officials, public managers and city managers. They can take on leadership role in managing nonprofit organizations, such as charitable foundation, grassroots or activist organizations. For the most part, students in MPA programs received training in a broad set of management and leadership skills; these may include courses related to public management, public institutional values, administrative analysis, theory of organizations, and financial skills. Some MPA programs cover topics related to service leadership and ethical theory.

### **Motivation, perceptions, and values: Why MPP/MPA and MBA students have different career preferences?**

Most studies have shown students in public policy or administration programs prefer to work in the public or nonprofit sector (Pedersen, 2013); and that, the motivation to work in the sector was driven by their selflessness, integrity, and compassion (Baarspul and Wilderom, 2011). The desire to work in the public sector that makes a difference to society at large is consistent with the logic presented in the public service motivation (PSM) literature (Pedersen, 2013; Van der Wal and Oosterbaan, 2013).

An extension of the PSM theory suggests MPP/MPA graduates are motivated to work in the public sector because, over time, they developed a sense of belonging and sympathy for people who need help; they feel obligated to self-sacrifice for the collective good; sympathetic to others with a sense of civic duties to protect and represent the public’s interest (Perry, 1996; Wright and Grant, 2010; Pedersen, 2013). Students in MPA/MPP programs were assumed to be intrinsically motivated. They sought to enhance and protect the public interest in working in the public sector.





They are also attracted to the policy-making process because they feel they can make a difference by developing and implementing changes through the policy-making process.

Studies have also shown that students who have higher levels of PSM score were more likely to engage in socially valued or charitable activities, e.g., volunteering or giving donation (Clerkin *et al.*, 2009). Piatak (2016), for example, studied 122 graduate students and found that students who donated to charities have higher levels of PSM score; and that they were more likely to work in the public sector. At the international level, Pederson (2013) studied 718 Danish students to understand PSM in students from fields of economics, political science, and law. While the field of study mattered less in predicting sector choice, the study found individual student's desire to serve others made a difference in their decision to get employment in the public sector. Wright (2007) finds that the mission statement of organizations plays a significant role in one's choice of an organization for employment. That is, individuals are attracted to public sector because they feel passionate about certain issues. Homberg and Vogel (2016) found that human resources practices that pay attention to the intrinsic needs of employees tend to have a higher level of PSM among employees. Others found similar findings (Vandenabeele, 2008).

The main argument is that graduate students in the MPP/MPA program tend to have a string conviction for public service and thus a higher level of PSM compared to MBA graduates; and that, they are more likely to be interested in serving their community, more likely to have a higher sense of duty and service, and less likely to be interested in gaining resources. Subsequently, students who are driven by intrinsic needs are more likely to choose public administration, public affairs, and public policy as a graduate field of study. The assumption is that they are interested to expand knowledge and skills as well as gain employment in the public sector. Thus, we hypothesize

*H1: MPA/MPP students have stronger motivation to work in the public sector than MBA students*

*H2: MPA/MPP students have a more positive perception of the public sector than MBA students.*

A study of 884 public and private managers in America and Canada by Stackman *et al.* (2006) found a difference in their personal values highlighting the importance of a public- versus private-sector ethos. While there are various definitions of personal values offered in the management literature (Van der Wal and Oosterbaan, 2013), Van der Wal *et al.*, (2008) defined values as "important qualities and standards that have a certain weight in the choice of action." (p. 468). For

example, personal values such as world peace, equality, inner harmony, and wisdom are often associated with those who prefer to work in the public sector; whereas comfortable life, happiness, pleasure, and accomplishments tend to be ranked higher by managers in the private sector (Stackman *et al.*, 2006). These values capture the “existence of a sector’s ethos ... the values systems of managers who work within that sector.” (Stackman *et al.*, 2006, p. 578). They are the “goals or criteria that we use to determine the desirability of certain actions or motives in our lives” (Lyons *et al.*, 2006, p. 606).

However, there may not be a significant difference between students who are private-sector oriented and students who are public-sector oriented. Two factors could explain this phenomenon. First, MBA and MPP/MPA students share similar moral judgements than originally hypothesized. For example, MBA curricula are increasingly emphasizing on ethics (Richards *et al.*, 2002; De Volkskrant, 2009). There has been a growing attitude towards corporate social responsibilities--an integral part of public accountability, where MBA programs are not just focusing on consumers and marketing but also on workplace spirituality. According to Minitzberg (2002), MBA programs also focus on “solving messy, value-laden, ambiguous problems that often have no clear solutions.” (p. 10).

Second, similar to the private sector, employees working in the public sector is increasingly facing similar managerial challenges, i.e., high expectation and pressure to meet organizational goals and missions. Scholars have warned about the rise in the New Public Management (NPM) movement, which influences MPP/MPA curricula. Students who aspired to work in the public sector are more extrinsically motivated and career-oriented (Lyons *et al.*, 2006). They are also motivated by monetary rewards. Another related factor is related to the blurring of sectors. Most employees in modern day public sector are expected to work in an environment that contributes to the blurring of public and private sectors. The working environment--especially for those in the public management and business administration--- is becoming complex (bureaucratic structure), which means public-private distinction becomes less relevant. The complex bureaucratic structure requires managers to retain skills crucial to solve wicked managerial problems (Van der Wal, 2012). Despite this, we assume that

*H3: MPP/MPA students have a higher score on public-sector oriented values than MBA students.*

*H4: MPP/MPA students have a lower score on private-sector oriented values than MBA students.*





## **Background: institutional reform and the study of public policy and administration in Mexico**

To understand Mexican public policy and administration graduate programs and training, there is a need to briefly examine the historical and institutional context. This is particularly important in understanding graduate students' perceptions, their values, and motivation to either work in the public or private sector. Traditionally, Mexico has a relatively low level of public participation and citizen involvement in public affairs. Being the 14<sup>th</sup> largest global economy with more than 127 million people in 2015, there have also been a strong distrust of government among its population, especially corruption, electoral frauds, and violent related to drug cartels (Benavides *et al.*, 2013). However, since the early 1980s, the country has experienced institutional reform and a gradual change (*see* Klingner, 2000; Cabrero, 2005; Sullivan, 2006; Cejudo, 2008; Arellano-Gault, 2013). After 71 years of single-party government and 12 years of opposition party, the country has been experiencing complex societal changes that struggled with transparency and good governance. For instance, the Civil Service Law enacted in 2003 aimed to eliminate the spoils' system in Mexico (Arellano-Gault, 2013) and encouraged civic duty and good governance among its citizens and public bureaucracies from the local level to the national administrative bodies.

According to Cejudo (2008), "public administration becomes more professional ..., it will be necessary to reopen the debate about [institutional] reforms" (p. 124); and the possible linkages between institutional reforms and educational training for future managers and executives. Criticisms of the institutional reform aside (Cejudo, 2008; Arellano-Gault, 2013), there has been a strong belief that such an overarching goal can be achieved via educational training and professional education. Sullivan (2006) made a similar argument more than a decade ago: "The democratization and decentralization reforms that have taken place in Mexico have dramatic implications for local governance ... opened opportunities for participatory local governance by ... expanding the voice of the people." (p. 41). The reform inevitably has influenced graduate programs in public policy and administration, especially when the government, since the mid-1990s, "has used some of the tools associated with NPM" (Cejudo, 2008, p. 112).

The institutional reforms in Mexico make it an appropriate backdrop to examine the existence of public and private sector ethos, which may help us understand why graduate students are attractive to one graduate program but not the other. Mexico has one of the largest markets for civil servants and number of master programs offering public policy and administration in Latin America Counties (*see* Purón Cid, 2019; Sanabria-Pulido *et al.*, 2016). According to Benavides

*et al.* (2013), it was estimated that there were about 5.15 million civil servants in Mexico. About 50.5 percent of civil servants have some types of higher education degree but only 8.35 percent have master and 1.6 percent doctorate degrees. Out of these graduate degrees, about 10.1 percent and 13.9 percent have a master degree and a doctorate degree respectively in the fields of public policy and administration. Nearly a quarter of public officers in Mexico was certified as civil servant in 2011, i.e., out of 36,028 qualified public officers, about 8,500 were certified Civil Servants (Arellano-Gault, 2013, p. 945).

Historically, the creation of public administration and programs in Mexico was largely the responsibility of the National Institute of Public Administration (INAP by its initial in Spanish) and the national schools of political and social sciences at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in the 1950s (*see* Sánchez, 2009; Purón Cid, 2019). Currently, there are about 68 masters' programs with 1,138 courses in Mexico. Studies have shown that most master programs offering public policy and administration reflect the demand for talented staff and executives, i.e., labor and educational markets (Benavides *et al.* 2013; Purón Cid, 2019, Smith *et al.*, 2019). Benavides *et al.* (2013) concluded that, most public policy and administration programs in Mexico were teaching courses that prepared graduates for public services careers. They also taught students on the basic principles of public administration. While there were variations across the region on the types of courses that were being offered, some programs paid less attention on subjects such as ethics and citizen participations, transparency, and government reforms. Smith *et al.* (2019) made a similar observation on MPP programs, which emphasis on analytical and evaluative aspects of policy and public programs. Most MPP program tend to focus on economic principles in their public finance and budgeting courses. They concluded that, when assessed against public administration principles such as transparency and accountability, there were still much needed to be done in MPP programs, especially topics related to inequality and re-distributional and social insurance and insecurity, social choice theory.

Given the institutional reforms that occurred in the early 1980s, there have been much changes in the approach in the study of public administration. However, the literature on the effect of institutional reforms on public policy and administration programs has not been clear, especially on graduate students' perceptions, values, and motivation to work either in the public or private sector. Although some scholars would argue that Mexican public administration culturally has been influenced much by the principles of New Public Management (NPM) movement (Cabrero-Mendoza, 2005; Cabrero-Mendoza, 2000), others would suggest otherwise (Cejudo, 2008;



Arellano-Gault, 2000; 2013). For example, Cabrero (2005) argued that public officials at the local levels were influenced much by administrative reforms championed by the NPM movement. The core-values of reform and managerial tools, despite their limitations, were introduced in the 1990s; and that, they were increasingly becoming attractive to local managers, an acceptable path to modernization and democratization of municipalities. Cabrero-Mendoza (2000) argued that, given the decentralization reform, there have been important development at the municipal levels, i.e., new leadership style, broader citizen participation, intergovernmental relations, and new management systems. What does the institutional reform mean for sectoral ethos and graduate program and future training for managers in Mexico?

On the other hand, there have also debated regarding the implementation of NPM in Mexico and its application of managerial tools. Much of the reforms were poorly implemented and the outcomes were mostly symbolic (Arellano-Gault, 2000); and the managerial tools inevitably clash with Mexican organizational culture---shaped much by a long tradition of a patrimonial culture (Cejudo, 2008; Arellano-Gault, 2013). They also argued that the core-values inherently found in the NPM movement were partly responsible—or at least one of several sources----for the institutional reform in Mexico, i.e., economic liberalization and political democratization (*see* Cejudo, 2008). A similar observation was argued by Ibarra-Colado (2007), particular in the context of institutional reform in the Mexican higher education system. That is, in the spirit of entrepreneurial public administration, how should universities best confront the multiple challenges of globalization and transformation.

## **Data collection**

### **Students selection**

We implement a questionnaire to all graduate students enrolled in Masters of Public Policy (MPP) and Masters of Business Administration (MBA) in two universities in Guadalajara Metropolitan Area (GMA)--the largest metropolitan region in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. The instrument was administered between November and December 2014. One of the universities was a public university while the other was a private university with a religious affiliation. The former was selected because of its importance in research and teaching in Mexico. As one of the largest universities in the country, the university has been regarded as the oldest university with a student population just above a quarter of a million (as of 2014). The university has 117 undergraduate programs and 182 graduate programs. The total number of graduate students, at the time this study



was conducted, was about 3,322. The latter university, although private, has a smaller number of student body, i.e., 9,652 undergraduates with 35 degree programs and 908 graduate students with 24 graduate programs. Both universities offered MPP and MBA programs.

We limit our study to graduates studying in these two universities for several reasons: First, consistent with sampling from other studies, these students can be expected to highlight differences in personal values and motivation to work in the private or public sector (Van der Wal *et al.*, 2008). Second, they can also report these values better than other graduate students in other disciplines. All the students from both MPP and MBA programs in each university answered standard survey questions. That is, 273 and 151 students from public and private university respectively. Out of 424 students, 134 students were enrolled in MPP program and 290 were enrolled in the MBA program.

The characteristics of participant students in this study can be summarized as follows (*see* Table 1): About 59 percent of respondents were males. Overall, 72 percent were 25 to 34 years old age group. Only 8.7 percent reported being 40 years or older. Students with Mexican nationality made up 97 percent of the total respondents. When asked about work experience in the last five years, about 42.5 percent of the MPP students reported they had worked compared to 53.1 percent of the MBA students. A majority of the MPP students reported that they have worked in the public sector (i.e., 71.7 percent). About 83.1 percent of the MBA students reported having had private sector experience. Students from both groups reported that they would like to be employed in the sectors according to their graduate program (88.7 percent and 73.4 percent respectively).

**Table 1.** Respondent characteristics (percentages)

	MPP (n=134)	MBA (n=290)
Characteristics		
Gender		
Female	38.1	42.1
Male	61.9	57.9
Age		
20-24	9	7.6
25-29	44	44.1
30-34	19.4	31.7
35-39	13.4	10.3
40 and older	14.2	6.2
Years of work experience		
Less than 2 years	21.6	14.5
Between 2 and 5 years	27.6	28.6
More than 5 years	42.5	53.1
Sector of work experience		
Private	28.2	83.1
Public*	71.7	16.9
Religious		
Yes	61.2	68.3
No	38.8	31.7
Parental employment		
Father		
Private	46.6	37
Public	19.1	22.4
Own business	23.7	33.9
Other/No work	10.7	6.6
Mother		
Private	18.9	19.4
Public	21.2	27.7
Own business	16.7	16.6
Other/No work	43.2	36.3
Preferred sector of employment		
Private	11.3	73.4
Public	88.7	26.6
* Public includes governmental and non-profit organizations.		

Source: own elaboration

The questionnaire used in the study was developed by Van der Wal (2017). The questionnaire asked graduate students' perceptions on the public and private sectors, their values, and motivation to either work in the public or private sector. They were also asked about

preferences regarding provisional sector choices after they graduate. The original questionnaire, which was in English, was translated into Spanish. We translated the Spanish version back into English to ensure consistency of interpretation of the survey items.

## Measurements

*Work Motivation:* In our survey instrument, we have 14 work motivation items. We classified work motivation into two sub-categories because scholars have argued that millennials tended to be motivated to “doing good for society” regardless of which sector they get employed or preferred to work in (Holmes-Peters, 2012; Twenge and Campbell, 2012). They also tended to have different attitude towards work in general (Van der Wal, 2017). The first sub-category was *Ideal Future Job*, which included the motivation factors such as “Being Successful”, “Contributing to Society”, “A High Salary”, “Being Service-Oriented Toward Others”, “An Intellectually Stimulating Work Environment”, “Total Commitment to my Employer”, and “Balancing Work and Family Obligations”.

The second sub-category was *Professional Career*, which included the motivation factors such as “Meaningful public service is very important to me”, “In the years after I graduate, my career will be more important to me than family and friends”, “Considering the welfare of others is very important to me”, “I like to be successful in creating innovative products and services”, “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”, and “It is best for society when the market is given maximal freedom”. The responses were based on the Likert scale of 1 for “total agreement” and 5 for “total disagreement.” However, to ease interpretations of the final analysis, the responses were recoded, i.e., 1 for totally disagree, 3 for neither agree or disagree, and 5 for totally agree.

*Perception on Sectors:* We measured students’ perception about the public and private sectors by a set of questionnaire items. For the private sector, graduate students were asked the following three questions: (1) Working for the government means contributing to the society, (2) Working environment in the government is friendlier than in business, and (3) People play “dirty games” to maximize gains. For their perception on the public sector, graduate students were asked the following four questions: (1) Government is bureaucratic, (2) business is more efficient than the government, (3) promotions in business are faster than in government, and (4) employees working in government get caught in the “political web.” The responses were based on the Likert scale of



1 for “total agreement” and 5 for “total disagreement.” The responses were recoded, i.e., 1 for totally disagree, 3 for neither agree or disagree, and 5 for totally agree.

*Personal Values:* We captured the concept of personal values based on a set of questions from the survey. The literature on the different personal values related to career in the public and private sectors suggests a clear contrast (Stackman *et al.*, 2006; Van der Wal *et al.*, 2008). The Likert scale consists of minimum 1 for value that was not at all important to the respondents to 10 for value that was very important. We employed exploratory factor analysis with principal components to analyze the data reported on personal values. We found two factors. The first factor was related to “peace”, “equality”, “justice”, and “charity”. The second factor was related to “power”, “achievement”, “change”, and “sacrifice”. Both factors indicate high reliability scores of Cronbach’s Alpha 0.792 and 0.725 respectively. We compared both groups of graduate students’ values by using the program as a control variable. We note that the personal values such as “Fun” and “Prosperity” have lowest factor loadings, with results indicating less than 0.5. Therefore, we did not consider these values in the final analysis because of the potential problem of cross loading among factors that implies lack of reliability.

## Results and discussions

### Work motivations

Our analysis suggests a significant difference on the motivation of employment among graduate students in MPP and MBA programs in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area Mexico. For example, in Table 2, there were differences between MPP and MBA students with regards to work motivations in organizations (*i.e.*, ideal future job and professional career). The results highlight that graduate students were motivated to work in public organizations; and that, the motivations were based on extrinsic and intrinsic needs. Specifically, we found evidence that MPP students have a stronger motivation to work in the public sector than MBA students. Our analysis provides support for hypothesis 1 and suggests that the MPP students’ ideal future job was based on the nature of employment that can contribute to the society at large ( $MEAN=4.82$ ,  $SD=0.405$ ) and whether the employment was orientated toward providing services to the public ( $MEAN=4.48$ ,  $SD=0.514$ ). A high salary, however, was reported of greater importance by the MBA students ( $MEAN=4.41$ ,  $SD=0.576$ ) compared to the MPP students ( $MEAN=4.22$ ,  $SD=0.679$ ).

On the differences related to professional career, we found that MPP students placed items such as meaningful public service ( $MEAN=4.43$ ,  $SD=0.74$ ) and public provision of collective



goods ( $MEAN=4.31$ ,  $SD=867$ ) to be of greater importance. The one PSM item in the survey [“Meaningful public service is important to me”] shows a significant difference between both groups. However, the MBA students tend to report that it is best for society when the market were allowed to operate freely ( $MEAN=3.51$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ).

Our results on the differences between MPP and MBA students with regards to work motivations in public organizations was consistent with other studies. Graduate students in MPP programs---similar to the public employees with high score in PSM--- tend to be more likely to aspire to work in the public sector because of the service-sector oriented (Piatak, 2016); and the fact that the public sector would allow them to contribute to society (pro-social behaviors). This was based on the belief that the society would be better off when the public sector is responsible for the provision of collective goods, e.g., energy, public transport and safety. Our finding about MBA students’ preference for extrinsic factors was not surprising.

**Table 2. Work motivations**

	MPP (n=134)		MBA (n=290)		<i>t</i> -test
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Ideal Future Job					
Contributing to society	4.82	0.41	4.47	0.61	0.000#
A high salary.	4.22	0.68	4.41	0.58	0.004
Being service-oriented toward others.	4.68	0.51	4.29	0.73	0.000#
Professional Career					
Meaningful public service is very important to me.	4.43	0.74	3.93	0.80	0.000
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.	4.31	0.87	3.98	1.19	0.002#
It is best for society when the market is given maximal freedom.	3.23	1.14	3.51	1.04	0.012
All <i>p</i> -values statistical significant at $p<0.05$ , <i>SD</i> = Standard Deviation. #Independent samples <i>t</i> -test were executed assuming no homogenous variances based on the Levene’s Test for equality of variances. Scale ranges from 1= "Lowest importance", 5="Highest importance".					

Source: own elaboration

## Perceptions on sector choice

MPP students' attitudes toward the private sector – perception on the private sector —was that they are more concerned most with self-interest and corporate interest ( $MEAN=3.29$  vs.  $MEAN=2.97$ ). They also perceived those working in the private sector aimed to maximize their profit by playing “dirty games” ( $MEAN=3.38$  vs.  $MEAN=3.17$ ). On the other hand, MPP students perceived the working environment in the public sector to be friendlier compared to the private sector ( $MEAN=2.72$  vs.  $MEAN=2.45$ ); and that, by working in the public sector, they can contribute more to society ( $MEAN=4.35$  vs.  $MEAN=3.93$ ).

The MBA students generally perceived the government in the negative light. Compared to the MPP students, MBA students tend to see government as bureaucratic ( $MEAN=4.65$  vs.  $MEAN=4.40$ ); and that, those who worked in government often find themselves caught in a bureaucratic web and political interests ( $MEAN=4.63$  vs.  $MEAN=4.50$ ). However, MBA students generally believed that the working environment in the private sector is more efficient and effective compared to the public sector ( $MEAN=4.28$  vs.  $MEAN=3.71$ ). Moreover, they believe they can get promoted easier and into a better position than they could in the public sector ( $MEAN=3.61$  vs.  $MEAN=3.39$ ). These results provide support for  $H2$ .

**Table 3.** Sector perceptions

	MPP		MBA		<i>t</i> -test
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i> -value
When you are working in the business sector, you are only concerned with your own benefits and that of your company.	3.29	1.12	2.97	1.05	0.004
In the business sector, people often play “dirty games” to maximize profit.	3.38	0.95	3.17	0.90	0.030
Government is a much friendlier working environment than business	2.72	0.98	2.45	0.99	0.010
When you work for government, you can contribute positively to society.	4.34	0.78	3.93	0.98	0.000
In general, government is very bureaucratic.	4.40	0.66	4.65	0.57	0.000#
When you work for government, you are often caught in a web of political interests.	4.50	0.69	4.63	0.57	0.039#
In general, business works much more efficiently and effectively than government.	3.71	0.98	4.28	0.85	0.000
In the business sector, it is easier to get promoted to a better position.	3.39	1.02	3.61	1.05	0.040
All <i>p</i> -values statistical significant at $p < 0.05$ , <i>SD</i> = Standard Deviation.					
#Independent samples <i>t</i> -test were executed assuming no homogenous variances based on the Levene’s Test for equality of variances. Scale ranges from 1= "Totally disagree", 5="Totally agree".					

Source: own elaboration

### Personal values

In Table 4, the results suggest personal values such as “Peace”, “Equality”, “Justice”, and “Charity” scored higher by both MPP and MBA students. However, the mean for the MPP students was significantly higher than their counterparts ( $MEAN=9.06$  vs.  $MEAN=8.6$ ). This support  $H3$ .

We also found MPP students scored higher on the personal values that were often associated with the private sector, i.e., “power,” “achievement”, “change”, and “sacrifice” compared to the MBA students ( $MEAN=8.03$  vs.  $MEAN=7.7$ ). That is, MBA students scored significantly lower than the earlier mentioned group of values. Once again, the MPP students have higher scores in comparison to MBA students in terms of values that reflect doing good for their communities. In addition, the mean difference was statistically significant (i.e.,  $p < 0.042$ ) and in favor of MPP students. Finally, we did not find a significant difference between the two groups of graduate students when we asked them about religion and parents’ work experience.

**Table 4.** Personal values

	MPP		MBA		t-test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	p-value
Peace, Equality, Justice, Charity (Cronbach's Alpha 0.792)	9.06	1.14	8.6	1.53	0.001#
Power, Achievement, Change, Sacrifice (Cronbach's Alpha 0.725)	8.03	1.45	7.7	1.58	0.042
All p-values statistical significant at $p < 0.05$ , $SD$ = Standard Deviation. #Independent samples <i>t-test</i> assuming no homogenous variances based on Levene's Test for equality of variances. Scale ranges from 1="not at all important" to 10= "very important".					

Source: own elaboration

The results highlight two important patterns of MPP and MBA students' personal values. First, we found graduate students in the MPP program in Guadalajara Metropolitan Area generally have public-sector oriented values. These values include what some would call "moral values" that were associated with "peace", "equality", "justice", and "charity" (Van Der Wal *et al.*, 2008; Baarspul and Wilderom, 2011). These values will guide their future managerial conducts; and that, they are consistent with the public services ethos. MPP students, at least in our sample, were prepared to enter the public or private sector with a set of ethical judgements that were often associated with the public sector.

Second, the institutional reforms that had taken place since the early 1980s may have influenced students' personal values. We found that students in the MPP program tend to have a higher score on private-oriented values compared to students in the MBA program, i.e., "power," "achievement", "change", and "sacrifice." Contrary what we had suspected (*H4*). This finding can be partly explained by the shifting of management styles in the public sector that were similar to what Box (1999) referred to as a "sector shift" phenomenon. The phenomenon occurs when public managers "[conducted their] affairs in a businesslike way." (p. 20). There also appeared to be a strong appeal among MPP students to employ the market-oriented values and apply private sector practices in the public sector. It is also possible that the MPP students' personal values were influenced by the blurring of distinction between public and private organizations in Mexico. This is an important finding because it highlights the possibility that MPP program in Mexico are producing graduates with general competencies that can be employed across sectors. As pointed out by Kaptein (1998) and Caiden (1999), public and private organizations can apply the same moral criteria; and that, the statements related to public and private values may be intertwined (*see* Van der Wal *et al.*, 2008).

## Conclusion

The employment preferences of graduate students occur through the process of self-selection. Even before they graduate from their respective programs, for the most part, graduate students “gradually socialize into a particular sectoral ethos” (Van der Wal, 2017, p. 603). For instance, MBA students tend to prefer higher salary, a clear promotion path and being successful compared to MPP students who generally value meaningful public service, welfare of others, and contributing to society. However, much of these studies tend to be based on western world, with a few exceptions, suggesting that the motivation to work in certain sectors, perceptions about their profession, and personal values after graduation maybe different.

In order to understand the effect of graduate students’ preferences, values, and motivation, we conducted a study among graduate students in two universities in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area, Mexico. This study highlights that students studying public policy were driven by strong intrinsic needs and yet were motivated to serve the public and their community. In other words, students in the MPP program generally have a higher sense of public service motivation. Our results were consistent with other findings, i.e., public sector employees were driven by the desire to serve their local community, contribute to society at large, and uphold social justice (Perry, 1996; Perry and Wise, 1990; Crewson, 1997). On the other hand, the MBA students were mostly driven by extrinsic needs, i.e., higher salary, promotion, and power. The finding also was consistent with Bright (2005; 2008; 2009; 2016), who argued that public service motivation was embedded in individuals who were driven by social and cultural norms. We also found that, compared to the MBA students, MPP students in Guadalajara generally scored higher on the personal values that were often associated with the private sector, i.e., “power,” “achievement,” “change,” and “sacrifice”. While we found personal values such as “Peace”, “Equality”, “Justice”, and “Charity” were scored higher by both MPP and MBA students, the mean score for the MPP students was significantly higher than the MBA students.

There are several practical values to compare graduate students in MPP and MBA programs. Our findings help programs and departments to design and deliver curricula in order to fill the demand for future managers. In the context of institutional reform in Mexico, for example, there is a need to think about curricula development emphasizing ethic, social justice, and transparency. The findings also reflect the need to understand the motivation of students in order to recruit future talents to work in the public sector, i.e., competition to attract and recruit the most talented individuals. This also helps the human resources management in terms of recruitment and



retention of public employees. While the private sector can offer high salary and financial incentives, the public sector in Mexico may rely on intrinsic mechanisms such as fringe benefits and ways in which they can make a difference in their communities and solve a wider societal problem.

There are several limitations to this study. We limited our study to MPP and MBA programs in two universities in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area. Another limitation is that the study was conducted prior to COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has affected students' wellbeing and their ability to interact with each other during lockdowns and quarantine. While online learning provides students the opportunities to complete their studies using technologies, the pandemic has disrupted students' learning, their employment opportunities, and socialization. Some students extended their stay in higher education instead of starting their career.

The study was also conducted before new reforms were introduced by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, i.e., reversing business-friendly legislations that were implemented by the previous administration. The current political and economic environment will have an effect on the perception of graduate students about their chosen career.

Despite the limitations, our study has several implications to understand the motivation of graduates seeking employment in the private and public sector. We found that sector preferences still matter among graduate students. We believe the NPM movement in Mexico has influenced much of the Mexican's public administration core-values. The students in MPP programs have a strong sector preference for public sector; and that, the preference was influenced by their attitudes, motivation, and values related to public interests.

### **Future research**

Future study can extend to students studying Master of Public Administration (MPA) and Master of Public Affairs (MPAff). Moreover, we have not examined whether students in the MBA and MPP/MPA and their personal values may differ depending on where the programs are located in the business school or public affairs college. While some MPA programs are located independently, others can be found in the business school or located in political science and law schools. Additionally, future research should examine how the disruption and limited socialization during the pandemic affects students' motivation, values, and interests. Finally, future studies should examine the effect of political climate on graduate student choice of sector employment, particular a shift in the national government policy from a market approach toward state-owned

enterprises. This is because, as shown in this study, the differences in sector and employment choice among graduate students are also shaped by motivation, values, and public interests.

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