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Publisher: Routledge

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UK



## Public Performance & Management Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/mpmr20>

### Factors Affecting Job Performance in Public Agencies

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Published online: 08 Dec 2014.

To cite this article: James Gerard Caillier (2010) Factors Affecting Job Performance in Public Agencies, *Public Performance & Management Review*, 34:2, 139-165

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2753/PMR1530-9576340201>

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# FACTORS AFFECTING JOB PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC AGENCIES

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**ABSTRACT:** *Articles empirically examining job performance in the public sector are scant. As a result, in this article a theoretical research model is developed to examine job performance, and it is subsequently tested on state government workers. The findings are clear: Role ambiguity negatively affects employee job performance; mission contribution is fully validated (i.e., employees who directly contributed to the mission of the agency reported higher performance); government employees reported higher performance levels when they believed agencies received enough funding to fulfill their goals; and individual job performance was higher when employees believed that their agency spent appropriated funds efficiently. The implications these findings have for public agencies and officials are thoroughly discussed.*

**KEYWORDS:** *funding, job performance, job satisfaction, mission contribution, public service motivation*

Since the early 1900s, several work-related processes and theories have been proposed that were designed to help organizations get the most output from their workers (e.g., March & Simon, 1958; Mayo, 1933; Taylor, 1911). Because individual worker productivity is difficult to measure in some sectors (e.g., government), these job performance models have mainly been applied to employees in private sector organizations where outputs are more easily quantified (Bohnet & Eaton, 2003). As a result, few researchers have empirically studied job performance in public sector organizations. This article assists scholars, as well as human resource personnel, supervisors, and government officials, by empirically examining how several individual, environmental, and job-related factors affect job performance in government agencies. Specifically, a theoretical research model is developed that predicts job performance in government organizations and is subsequently tested on New York state government employees. This model's unique contribu-

tion to the field of public performance management is that it includes employee attitudes about funding, mission contribution, and the fairness of the agency's reward system—all of which have been absent in public job performance studies. The objective is, therefore, to determine the relation between job performance and several aspects of employee attitudes.

### Review of Literature and Hypotheses

*Job performance* is a term used to depict how well an employee performs his or her work-related duties. Performance is important to workers and employers because it inevitably influences decisions regarding promotions, terminations, merit increases, and bonuses. Because so much is riding on this aspect of organizations, individual job performance has been studied extensively by administrative theorists. Beginning in the early 1900s, Frederick Taylor (1911) argued that organizations could increase worker productivity by identifying and standardizing the most efficient movements needed to perform a task. Despite the fact that this process contributed heavily to productivity studies by demonstrating that tasks could be precisely measured, it has often been criticized because it focused on “mechanization” rather than on the human side of the organization (March & Simon, 1958). In other words, Taylor's theory was too narrow and did not include other elements that could affect productivity.

Two decades later, Elton Mayo and his associates conducted a study at the Western Electric Hawthorne plant. In so doing, they discovered that worker productivity was affected by managerial decisions, the social interactions of workers, and the physical environment (Mayo, 1933). In the end, Mayo and his associates successfully moved the discussion beyond individual tasks and motivated numerous others to examine individual and organizational factors more thoroughly.

For the most part, job performance studies, such as those just mentioned, have been conducted on private sector organizations that are heavily profit driven and, thus, are dependent on productivity. The public sector, however, has been undergoing a series of reforms since the 1990s, with increased productivity being one of the chief objectives (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

Naff and Crum (1999) were the first to examine those individual characteristics associated with the job performance of government employees. In that study, they analyzed a federal government survey and found job performance was affected by public service motivation, race, gender, grade level, and job type. While this study was enlightening, it was limited because it did not include any organizational factors. More recently, another study examined several factors and their association with job performance (Bright, 2007). In this article, Bright examined the effect of employee characteristics as well as public service motivation and person–organization fit on

the job performance of local government workers. The findings revealed that job performance was associated with person–organization fit, or the worker’s congruence with the organization’s purpose. Public service motivation, on the other hand, was not associated. Because neither study included organizational factors, it was unclear which organizational factors affected individual performance in the public sector. As a result, I introduce a theoretical research model in this study that includes several key factors related to job characteristics, the work environment, and individual attributes.

### **THEORETICAL RESEARCH MODEL**

The theoretical research model is depicted in Figure 1. The underlying rationale of this model is that employee attitudes about job characteristics, the work environment, and individual attributes have an effect on their job performance. Although this model includes some conventional factors, it also contains several factors that have not been included in the job performance literature. For instance, several scholars have found that job performance is associated with public service motivation, job satisfaction, role ambiguity, and employee demographic variables (Alonso & Lewis, 2001; Bright, 2007; Naff & Crum, 1999). Thus, these factors are included in the model. On the other hand, worker perceptions about organizational funding, mission contribution, and fairness are conspicuously absent from public job performance literature as well as job performance literature at large. As a result, my theoretical model illustrates the relation between these employee attitudinal factors and job performance; that is, employee attitudes toward several factors, especially funding, mission contribution, and fairness, may be expected to have an effect on how well they perform their duties. In this regard, this model makes a significant and original contribution to the organizational literature.

The goal of this theoretical model is, therefore, to further the understanding of managers, human resource personnel, and theoreticians regarding employee performance, so that they are better able to know how to increase worker productivity. To accomplish this objective, I examine three new employee perceptual factors within the work environment context of public organizations: agency funding, adequate funding, and efficiency. As demonstrated in the model, I expect attitudes toward agency level of funding and perceptions regarding adequate funding to have a direct and positive effect on job performance. Because government workers are assumed to be loyal stewards, employee attitudes toward the efficient use of agency funds are also expected to positively impact job performance. Moreover, I also develop and explore job characteristic factors pertaining to mission contribution and fairness here. These factors are expected to have a positive impact on job performance. Immediately following is a discussion of each job characteristic, work environment, and individual attribute factor in the theory.

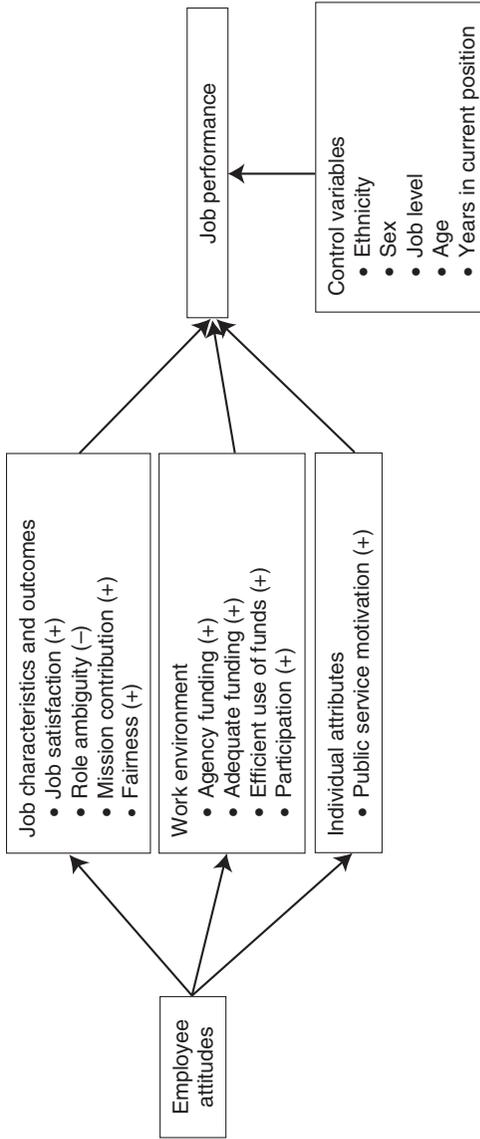


Figure 1. Theoretical Research Model

## **JOB CHARACTERISTICS AND OUTCOMES**

The link between job performance and various job characteristics has been explored by researchers. Job characteristics are those factors directly related to the duties and tasks that employees perform at work. Two job characteristics associated with job performance are role ambiguity and mission contribution. On the other hand, job characteristics are also assumed to affect job satisfaction directly. Therefore, job satisfaction is an outcome of job characteristics, and it is also related to job performance.

### ***Job Satisfaction***

An often-studied facet of organizational behavior is job satisfaction, which indicates how satisfied employees are with their current duties. As early as the 1920s, scholars commonly assumed that job satisfaction was related to performance (Petty, McGee, & Cavender, 1984); that is, satisfied employees were expected to be more productive than dissatisfied ones. As a result, human relations theories have often been expressed as an effort to increase productivity by satisfying the needs of workers (Vroom, 1964). Despite the earlier widespread acceptance of this belief, the hypothesis has not been consistently validated by studies that have examined the relation between job satisfaction and performance (Brayfield & Crockett, 1955; Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Petty et al., 1984). For example, Petty et al. performed a meta-analysis on previous studies and found a positive correlation between job performance and job satisfaction, while Iaffaldano and Muchinsky conducted the same type of analysis and concluded that the correlation was very low. Because it is logical to assume that satisfied workers will extend an extra effort on their job, the hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 1: Job performance will increase as job satisfaction increases.*

### ***Role Ambiguity***

Role ambiguity occurs when an employee's job-related duties are unclear. Scholars have consistently shown that an association exists between role ambiguity and job performance (Abramis, 1994; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Tubre & Collins, 2000). The implication of this finding is that workers perform better when they are less confused about the duties that are involved in carrying out work assignments. Therefore, it is important that duties and tasks be thoroughly communicated by human resource personnel and managers. Despite this consistent finding, however, some disagreement exists concerning the strength of this association. For instance, earlier studies pointed to a weak association between role ambiguity and job performance (Abramis, 1994; Jackson & Schuler, 1985), while a more recent study reports a robust relation (Tubre & Collins, 2000). Because scholars have found a significant negative relation, the second hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 2: Job performance will decrease as role ambiguity increases.*

### **Mission Contribution**

In any agency, employees can make different levels of contribution toward the organization's mission. On the one hand, a caseworker makes a substantial contribution to an agency's mission of assisting unemployed citizens when the caseworker helps someone find a job. On the other hand, employees in a supportive role, such as mailroom clerks, may not feel as if they are making the same contribution because they are not directly impacting the agency's purpose of assisting unemployed citizens. Moreover, sometimes an employee's position has nothing to do with it, as a connection is lacking between the work that employees perform and their agency's purpose. Thus, the question then becomes, "What will happen to workers' job performance when they do not contribute directly to an agency's purpose?"

According to the mission contribution hypothesis that is developed here, public servants will be less motivated and less likely to expend extra effort when they perceive their contributions are not directly impacting their organization's mission. For instance, government employees place a high value on performing work that benefits society, which is the generic mission of most government agencies (e.g., Rainey, 2003). As a result, employees can be motivated to work harder when they perceive that their tasks contribute to the fulfillment of this mission (Wright, 2007). When employees have a different perception—that is, that they either contribute very little or do not contribute at all to the organization's mission—they will be less motivated to work hard due to the difference between their work expectations and actual duties. Considering the aforementioned scenario, the assumption is that the case worker would perceive a higher mission contribution than the mailroom clerk, resulting in the former being more productive than the latter. Employees would also be presumed to work harder in those agencies in which their tasks are clearly connected to the organization's mission than they would in those organizations in which their tasks are not as clearly connected. Therefore, the following hypothesis is averred:

*Hypothesis 3: Job performance will increase as the level of contribution toward an agency's mission increases.*

### **Fairness**

Fairness concerns the pay and promotional opportunities available to employees, and the conventional hypothesis is that it has a direct effect on job performance. For instance, managers are tasked with formally appraising the performance of employees each year. Once these assessments have been completed, pay and promotions are then awarded to employees. Because these rewards are extrinsic

motivators, on the one hand, employee job performance is expected to decline when workers feel pay and promotions are not awarded fairly, and, on the other hand, job performance is expected to increase when they are being fairly rewarded. Unfortunately, this hypothesis has not been tested by public administration scholars. Therefore, the hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 4: Job performance will increase as employee perceptions of fairness increases.*

### **Work Environment**

Work environment refers to factors that are related to the organizational setting in which employees work. Typically, work environment factors have been used to explain employee behaviors and organizational outcomes (Wright & Davis, 2003). Because a relation exists among employee behaviors, organizational outcomes, and employee job performance, the inclusion of work environment factors is important. Specifically, this article examines the following work environment factors: agency level of funding, efficient use of funding, and employee participation in organizational decision making.

### **Agency Level of Funding**

Deciding how much money is appropriated for agencies is an important decision typically made on an annual basis by policymakers and chief executives. These decisions, which are the result of much deliberation (Rubin, 2006; Smith & Lynch, 2004), can affect not only allocations but also employee behaviors and performance (Levine, 1979; Rubin, 1985). Specifically, funding levels affect the amount of financial incentives that are available to motivate employees to work harder, as well as the amount of resources that employees need to perform their jobs. Unfortunately, scholars have largely ignored this connection, and the ones who did not have been only speculative about this relation.

While discussing cutback management, for example, Levine argued that “organizational contraction produces some serious morale and job satisfaction problems which make it difficult to increase productivity to make up for the cuts” (1979, p. 180). To restate differently, decreasing an agency’s funding can lead to lower employee morale and, subsequently, lower employee performance. In another study, Rubin (1985) investigated five different federal government agencies during a time of cutback management and argued through case studies that productivity and morale were negatively associated with declining budgets. Why did this occur? Rubin’s findings revealed that productivity in agencies decreased because cutback management resulted in a loss of positive incentives and an uncertain and fearful environment, which in turn reduced employee productivity.

Moreover, budget cuts may not be related to the level of funding the agency

needs to fulfill its purpose. For example, officials “often pad their budget requests because they wish to meet unanticipated contingencies and compensate for the fact that reviewers often cut requests almost automatically” (Smith & Lynch, 2004, p. 138). Because of this occurrence, the final appropriation could still be much more than what the organization needs to perform its mission, despite a drastic budget cut by the legislature. To account for these two budget scenarios, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*Hypothesis 5: Job performance will increase as perceived agency funding increases.*

*Hypothesis 6: Job performance will increase as employees perceive that agencies receive enough funding to fulfill their goals.*

Although the aforementioned scholars presumed that actual funding affected job performance, I examine employee perceptions of funding instead (as indicated in the hypotheses). Therefore, this is a limitation. However, studies indicate that employee perceptions regarding financial indicators are highly correlated with actual financial indicators (e.g., McCracken, McIlwain, & Fottler, 2001), suggesting the factors are similar. In sum, both factors are assumed to have an effect on job performance.

### ***Efficient Use of Funds***

An organization is efficient when it is able to convert inputs into outputs while using the least amount of resources or funds. In terms of government organizations, efficiency is achieved when agencies use only those resources that are needed to support their purpose. According to budget experts, however, public organizations are inefficient; that is, officials spend more than what is needed to achieve their objectives (Osborne & Hutchinson, 2004; Smith & Lynch, 2004). Partly because of this inefficiency, a significant amount of attention and resources has been devoted to uncovering inefficiency and waste in government (e.g., Office of the Inspector General and good-government groups). However, little is known about the impact that efficiency/inefficiency has on the bureaucracy or, more specific to this article, on employees.

Because of the positive perception surrounding the achievement of efficiency and the negative feelings toward wastefulness, I argue that efficiency is positively related to employee job performance. To explain further, surveys have shown that citizens believe government wastes a lot of money,<sup>1</sup> and the revelation of using public funds carelessly results in hearings, prosecutions, firings, and so forth. As a result, employee morale and job performance will presumably be affected after waste is discovered because these negative perceptions will be directed toward the agency and its employees. However, agency waste is not always apparent to external individuals and entities. In those circumstances, government employees

should be able to detect any unnecessary spending because they are able to see the resources that are bought and used by the agency. Thus, because of the connotations attached to efficiency, government employees are assumed to be affected by this situation as well. For these reasons, the hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 7: Job performance will increase as employees perceive that agencies are using appropriated funds efficiently.*

### **Participation**

Participation is a process in which influence is shared vertically among different echelons in the organization. Participatory management, on the other hand, balances “the involvement of managers and their subordinates in information-processing, decision-making, or problem-solving endeavors” (Wagner, 1994, p. 312). This management practice, which is becoming more prevalent in public organizations (Kim, 2005), is also being explored more frequently by researchers. Typically when doing so, researchers have examined the association between turnover and participation or a similar factor called *voice*. For the most part, researchers have found that participation is inversely related to turnover (Abraham, Freidman, & Thomas, 2005; Iverson & Currivan, 2003; Kim, 2005; Moynihan & Landuyt, 2008).

Taking performance into account, it has frequently been argued in the private sector that unionized companies are more productive because they allow employees to participate collectively through their unions (e.g., Abraham et al., 2005). Simply stated, employees are assumed to perform better when the organizational leadership shares decision making with its subordinates. However, empirical studies in this sector suggest that the direct association between participation and job performance might not be as significant as expected (e.g., Locke & Schweiger, 1979; Wagner, 1994; Yukl, 1989). For instance, Wagner concluded in a meta-analysis “that participation can have statistically significant effects on performance . . . but the average size of these effects is small enough to raise concerns about practical significance” (p. 312). Unfortunately, no study was found that examined this link outside of the private sector. For this reason, the link between participation and employee job performance is unclear in the public sector. Nonetheless, the next hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 8: Job performance will increase as employee participation increases.*

### **Individual Attributes**

Individual attributes are what an employee brings to the organization. Scholars usually include individual attributes such as demographic characteristics in organizational behavioral models. Most scholars do not expound on the influence

of individual attributes, and I follow this same approach. However, one attribute called *public service motivation* (PSM) is included in the model.

### **PSM**

PSM refers to “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations” (Perry & Wise, 1990, p. 368). While high PSM individuals possess many desirable work-related characteristics, such as a desire to seek employment in public organizations, they are assumed to have better individual performance than individuals with lower PSM. For instance, Perry and Wise argued that individuals with PSM possess key attributes that are linked to job performance.

When empirically examining the association between PSM and individual job performance, however, researchers’ results varied. Naff and Crum (1999) analyzed federal employee survey responses and concluded that PSM was positively related to individual job performance. Bright (2007), on the other hand, reached a different conclusion. In the latter study, an additional variable was added, person–organization fit. Bright concluded that PSM did not have a direct influence on job performance, while controlling for person–organization fit. Therefore, the suggestion is that PSM does not directly affect job performance when the individual’s congruence with the organization is included. Despite these varying results, the hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 9: Job performance will increase as PSM increases.*

## **Method**

### **POPULATION SELECTION AND SURVEY ADMINISTRATION**

Survey data from New York state government employees were used to test the hypotheses. There are 169,403 New York state government employees (New York State Department of Civil Service, 2009). This survey was administered to this state’s employees in the following manner. First, employee work addresses were obtained from the state’s online information directory, managed by the Office of Information Technology. This directory includes only employees whose telephone service is managed by information technology and others that are selected for disclosure by authorized entities. As a result, this directory contains only 34,230 employees, amounting to about 20 percent of all New York state government employees. Furthermore, this employee listing was the only one found for this state government. The limitations associated with using this data are discussed in the next section.

Second, I used a systematic random sample method to select a sample from the Office of Information Technology’s directory. This process involved dividing the number of employees by the packets to be sent and then sending a packet

to every  $n$ th employee. Because this method was used to select the sample, no preference was given to agencies or employee positions. In total, 1,747 packets were mailed, representing 5 percent of employees in the directory and 1 percent of all state government employees.

### Measurement of Variables

The state government survey was used to collect data on employee attitudes regarding job performance, job characteristics, work environment, and individual attributes. Employees' responses were recorded using a Likert-type scale with the following ranges and descriptions: 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*), 1 (*highly agree*) to 7 (*highly disagree*), and 1 (*highly dissatisfied*) to 7 (*highly satisfied*). Several variables were also measured using multi-item scales that were then summed to obtain an item score. A discussion of the dependent and independent variables and their measures follow. This information is also listed in the Appendix.

#### DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Employee job performance is the dependent variable in the model. In most studies, job performance has been derived from questionnaires asking employees to state the last performance appraisal score they received from their supervisor (Bright, 2007; Naff & Crum, 1999). Instead of using this item, I use a multi-item measure of job performance that is based on goals established by supervisors and employees. Moreover, separate items are used to measure supervisory goals and employee goals.

First, the rationale for using supervisory goals in lieu of the more restrictive measure, performance appraisal rating, is that supervisory goals are a broader measure that represents both the implied and explicit objectives used by superiors to determine performance. For instance, performance appraisals are based on job descriptions, and the latter seldom indicate the actual duties that employees perform (Kettl & Fesler, 2009). Simply put, performance ratings may not always reflect an employee's performance. When employee activities do not completely match performance requirements, managers will inevitably supplement employee objectives contained in formal documents with their own informal goals and expectations. Supervisory goals, therefore, represent both those objectives specified in the performance appraisal document and those that are communicated by supervisors. For this reason, it is argued that, in general, goals are a better indicator of employees' performance than is the more restrictive performance appraisal rating.

In the model, the following statement has been used to measure supervisory goals: "I am able to achieve the work-related goals my supervisor established." However, a limitation to this measure is that a difference exists between actual performance, as determined by supervisors, and what employees perceive.

The next part of the multi-item scale used to measure job performance is employee goals. The rationale behind the inclusion of this variable is that employees also set performance expectations and objectives. This measure is suggested in studies that examine the benefits of having both the supervisor and employee participate in the goal-setting process (e.g., Latham, Mitchell & Dossett, 1978; Latham & Waxley, 1994; Latham & Yukl, 1976). For instance, “participative goal setting resulted in more difficult goals being set than was the case when goals were assigned” solely by the supervisor (Latham et al., 1978, p. 163). Moreover, in a separate study, employees were found to set higher performance goals than supervisors (Latham & Waxley, 1994), which seems to indicate that employees are responsible for the higher standards in the participative process. Therefore, these studies clearly show that employees are also able to establish goals and objectives for themselves, and because these standards are different, job performance measures would be more useful if they included goals from both employees and supervisors, as is the case in participatory goal setting. Many agencies, however, do not use the participatory goal-setting process. To compensate for this situation, I include a separate item to measure employee goals. Specifically, the measure for employee goals is the following: “I am able to achieve the work-related goals that I have established for myself.” Cronbach’s alpha for the scale is 0.82.

### **CONTROL VARIABLES**

Several respondent demographic variables, including sex, age, ethnicity, job level, and tenure, are included in the model. First, sex is measured using dichotomous variables (male = 1, female = 0). Next, respondents were asked to indicate how old they were. Therefore, this variable is measured using a continuous variable. Ethnicity is also examined because Naff and Crum (1999) found that it was associated with job performance, and I therefore employ the same measure used by Naff and Crum (white [0] and nonwhite [1]). In public management studies, differences have been noted between organizational echelons (Enticott, Boyne, & Walker, 2008; Guest, 1999; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Purcell, 1999; Wilson, 1994). For instance, Podsakoff and Organ reported that top-level managers were more likely to have a positive view of the organization than were lower-level employees. Furthermore, Naff and Crum concluded that performance was associated with a similar measure, grade level. As a result, job level is used as a proxy for employee echelon. Employee job levels include employee (coded 1), midlevel manager (coded 2), and top-level manager (coded 3). Last, the number of years that employees have spent in their current position is used to indicate tenure. Although this variable is not significant, previous job performance studies have included tenure (Bright, 2007; Naff & Crum, 1999). This variable is measured using a continuous variable.

## INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

### *Job Characteristics and Outcomes*

The first job characteristic variable, job satisfaction, is measured using a multi-item scale. The measure of employee job satisfaction used the same measures used by Bright (2007):

- “How satisfied are you with your opportunities for achievement?”
- “How satisfied are you with your recognition opportunities?”
- “How satisfied are you with your level of responsibility on your job?”
- “How satisfied are you with the meaningfulness of your job?”
- “How satisfied are you with your advancement opportunities?”

Cronbach’s alpha is 0.87.

Second, role ambiguity is comprised of a multi-item scale that was initiated by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). The utilized items include the following statements: “My job has clear, planned goals and objectives,” “I feel certain about how much authority I have,” and “I know exactly what is expected of me.” Scoring for these items is reversed. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale is 0.87.

Third, I develop a measure for mission contribution because this concept has not been previously examined. This measure includes the following item: “I contribute directly to the organization’s mission.” Last, the following items are used to measure fairness: “Workers in my agency are promoted fairly,” and “Workers in my agency are rewarded financially fairly.” Cronbach’s alpha for the scale is 0.80.

### *Work Environment*

The first work environment variable is agency level of funding, and it is measured using the following statement: “Over the past several years my agency’s budget has (1) been drastically cut, (2) been cut slightly, (3) stayed the same, (4) increased slightly, and (5) increased drastically.” Multiple years are used in the statement because agency funding fluctuates from one year to the next, and previous performance-related literature advocated using multiple years (e.g., Hanushek, 1989). As mentioned, a shortcoming of this measure is that it is based on employee perceptions and not actual funding. However, research has suggested that these differences are minimal (McCracken et al., 2001). Also—and a little more problematic—real funding cannot be controlled for. Therefore, employees probably indicated nominal changes versus those adjusted for inflation. Nevertheless, this measure is useful because it is important to see the connection between perceived funding and employee job performance.

Second, respondent perceptions regarding whether their employing agency receives enough funding are measured with the following statement: “My agency receives enough funding to achieve its goals.” Third, agency efficiency

is measured using the following item: “My organization manages its funds efficiently and effectively.” A qualification to this measure was that it looked at efficiency from the perspective of the employee and, therefore, did not utilize economic equations to determine efficiency. Thus a difference would inevitably be perceived between efficiency and economic efficiency. Nevertheless, employees are on the front lines and in a good position to detect any waste that may occur. Last, “my agency values employees’ opinions” is the item used to measure participation. This statement is similar to one of the items used by Moynihan and Landuyt (2008) to examine participation, albeit with a different research focus (i.e., turnover intentions).

### *Individual Attributes*

The following items are used to measure PSM: “Meaningful public service is very important to me,” “I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another,” “Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements,” and “I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.” These items were chosen from Perry’s (1996) multi-item scale because they represent commitment, compassion, and self-sacrifice, which are more congruent than other items to the affective and normative motives associated with public sector altruism (Wright & Pandey, 2008). Others have also used a reduced measure that is based on these dimensions (Alonso & Lewis, 2001; Brewer & Selden 2000; Kim, 2005; Wright & Pandey 2008). Cronbach’s alpha for this scale is 0.86.

## **Results and Findings**

### **DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

In total, 369 packets were returned, for a response rate of 21 percent. As shown, the mean respondent is 49 years old, with 9 years of experience in the present position. Also, most respondents are white, and most have at least a college degree.

As mentioned earlier, the employee directory that was used to derive the sample contained only 21 percent of all state government employees. Moreover, 21 percent of mailed questionnaires were returned. Therefore, response and sample bias are a concern. To detect the presence of these biases, the data were compared to employee characteristics that are aggregated by the New York State Department of Civil Service (2009). In this publication, 50 percent of state employees are male and the average age is 47. Thus, these figures are similar to the results in Table 1. However, ethnicity breakdowns are different. For instance, Civil Service indicated that 73.0 percent of all employees were white, compared to 89.6 percent found in this study. As a result, the study’s findings may not generalize to the entire state government workforce.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Survey Respondents**

	<i>N</i>	%
Ethnicity		
White	328	89.6
Nonwhite	38	10.4
Educational attainment		
Some high school	2	.5
High school/GED	24	6.5
Some college	40	10.9
Associate degree/technical certificate	61	16.5
College	127	34.4
Master's degree or higher	115	31.2
Sex		
Male	188	50.9
Female	181	49.1
Job level		
Top-level management	29	7.9
Midlevel manager	133	36.1
Employee	206	56
<i>N</i>	369	
Avg. age	49.4	
Avg. number of years in position	9.36	

I examine several independent variables for internal reliability. First, I perform a Cronbach's alpha test on the multi-item measures, which finds that they indexed well (job performance = 0.93, job satisfaction = 0.87, role ambiguity 0.87, PSM = 0.86, and fairness = 0.80). A coefficient of 0.7 or greater is deemed acceptable (Bohrstedt & Knoke, 1988). Next, I check the model for the presence of severe multicollinearity. The variance inflation factor (VIF) suggests that multicollinearity is not a problem in the model.<sup>2</sup> Third, I perform a confirmatory factor analysis on each multi-item measure (job satisfaction, job performance, role ambiguity, PSM, and fairness). All of these items within the measures loaded on the same factor. This finding suggests that these items could be used as one measure. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics and correlation comparisons for each hypothesized variable.

Next, I perform an ordinary least squares technique to determine the effect the independent variables have on job performance.<sup>3</sup> As shown in Table 3, 52 percent of the variance in job performance is explained by the variables, and the equation is statistically significant at the 0.00 level. This result demonstrates the robustness of the model. In addition, four of the independent variables in the model were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that they are associated with job performance.<sup>4</sup> First, Hypothesis 2 is supported; that is, role ambiguity negatively affected job performance ( $p = 0.00$ ). Second, employees reported higher perfor-

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Measures of Correlations and Reliabilities**

Variable	Mean	SD	Potential range	Potential														
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10					
1. Job performance	10.74	2.59	2-14	(.82)														
2. Job satisfaction	22.86	7.08	5-35	.41**	(.87)													
3. Role ambiguity	9.52	4.57	1-7	-.55**	-.56**	(.87)												
4. Mission contribution	5.67	1.41	1-7	.59**	.40**	-.40**												
5. Fairness	7.15	3.30	2-14	.31**	.58**	-.32**	.26**	(.80)										
6. Actual funding	2.11	0.99	1-7	-.01	.09	-.02**	-.04	.13*										
7. Enough funding	3.78	1.83	1-7	.20**	.16**	-.12*	.06	.23**	.35**									
8. Efficiency	4.42	1.68	1-7	.44**	.45**	-.40**	.40**	.47**	.07	.22**								
9. Participation	3.94	1.76	1-7	.32**	.56**	-.43**	.34**	.52*	-.02	.23**	.48**							
10. Public service motivation	19.2	4.25	4-28	.10	.03	-.04	.20**	.09	-.02	.09	.07	.09	.07	.07	.07	.07	.07	.07

Notes: Cronbach's alpha is reported in parenthesis for each multi-item variable. The control variables are not in this table, but none of the correlation statistics are above .35. \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ . \* $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 3. Ordinary Least Squares Regression for the Effect of Individual and Organizational Variables on Job Satisfaction**

<i>Independent variables (hypothesized relation)</i>	<i>Standardized coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
Job characteristics		
Job satisfaction (+)	-0.047	0.023
Role ambiguity (-)	-0.333***	0.028
Mission contribution (+)	0.452***	0.086
Fairness	0.068	0.043
Work environment		
Actual level of agency funding	-0.039	0.114
Agency has enough funding to achieve goals (+)	0.107***	0.064
Efficiency (+)	0.114**	0.080
Participation (+)	-0.052	0.085
Individual attributes		
Public service motivation (+)	0.020	0.026
Control variables		
Position level	-0.034	0.184
Educational attainment	0.003	0.090
Years in current job	-0.017	0.014
Age	-0.044	0.012
Nonwhite	-0.024	0.357
Male	-0.003	0.223
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.520	
<i>F</i>	220.19***	
<i>N</i>	322	

*Note:* Dependent variable = job performance. \*\*\**p* = 0.00. \*\**p* < 0.01. \**p* < 0.05.

mance when they directly contributed to the organization's mission ( $p = 0.00$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported. Third, job performance increased as employees perceived that agencies received enough funding to fulfill their goals ( $p = 0.01$ ), thus supporting Hypothesis 6. Last, Hypothesis 7 is supported ( $p = 0.01$ ), meaning that employees were more likely to report higher levels of performance when the organization was more efficient.

The remaining variables were not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). First, job satisfaction is not associated with job performance, and, as a result, Hypothesis 1 is not supported. Second, actual level of funding is not associated with job performance, thus failing to confirm Hypothesis 5. Third, support is not found for Hypothesis 4, which indicates that employee attitudes toward fairness do not affect their job performance. Fourth, a relation is not found between employee participation and job performance, therefore not validating Hypothesis 8. Finally, PSM is not associated with job performance, and thus Hypothesis 9 is not confirmed.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on these findings, this article strongly suggests that employee job performance is affected by several factors. First, the results indicate that employees will perform better when they are more certain about the duties that are involved in completing their assignments. This finding implies that employee job performance suffers when government workers either do not have sufficient information to complete their assigned duties or they do not have information about the most effective means needed to complete assignments. Moreover, scholars have suggested “that efforts to reduce role ambiguity could have a meaningful impact on job performance” (Tubre & Collins, 2000, p. 165). As a result, managers should make sure that assigned duties and tasks are clearly documented and communicated to employees.

Large-scale meta-analysis studies have also found a negative association between role ambiguity and job performance (Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Tubre & Collins, 2000). Therefore, this study provides support for their findings. However, a closer examination of these studies reveals that the relation between role ambiguity and job performance is strongest in studies that use survey data containing self-reported performance, as this one does. Furthermore, supervisory and peer ratings were also associated with these factors in previous research but with a weaker level of significance. Based on these studies, a potential caveat is that perceived role ambiguity may lead employees to perceive lower levels of job performance, while objective job performance is only minimally affected. Stated differently, perceived role ambiguity may be more negatively correlated with perceived job performance than with actual job performance.

Second, this article validates the mission contribution hypothesis in relation to employee job performance. As mentioned earlier, the rationale behind this hypothesis is that public employees will put forth extra effort to increase their output when they perceive that their duties contribute directly to their employing agency’s mission because they place a high value on performing work that benefits society. This very important finding has at least two managerial implications. First, managers can expect employees to produce more when their duties are aligned with the organization’s mission and, conversely, can expect performance to be lower when their duties are not aligned with the organization’s mission. Second, employees might be more productive, as their jobs are aligned with the organization’s purpose, because they ultimately want their agency to achieve its mission and, as a result, are motivated by organizational effectiveness. For example, Boardman and Sundquist (2009) argued that employees are motivated by organizational efficacy.

Therefore, the association found between mission contribution and job performance strongly suggests that managers should communicate to workers how their duties aid in the fulfillment of the organization’s purpose. For instance, each

agency employee provides some benefit to the organization, including those in supportive roles. Therefore, managers should explain to employees in supportive roles that, while they do not contribute directly to the fulfillment of the mission, others would not be able to perform their jobs without the assistance of these support personnel. Organizational mission and goals could also be expanded to include support staff. This inclusion of support personnel would ensure that all employees are able to see their mission contribution. Additionally, special efforts should be made to include support staff in the decision-making process by including them in key meetings, task force assignments, and other participatory decision-making practices.

Third, government employees reported higher performance levels when they believed agencies received enough funding to fulfill their goals. This finding implies that workers will produce more in agencies that are believed to be funded appropriately. Two explanations are possible for why this association is validated. The first possible reason for this occurrence is that agency employees have enough resources to perform effectively when agencies receive enough funding. For example, operating expenses, which include supplies and equipment, assist employees in performing their tasks. When these items are underfunded, it is thus logical to expect that job performance will suffer. Another possible explanation is that employee motivation and morale could decrease as agencies do not receive enough funding to fulfill their purpose; that is, employees will become frustrated when they believe the organization does not receive enough purpose-related funds.

Fourth, this model indicates a relation between agency efficiency and job performance. Specifically, government workers reported higher job performance levels when employees believed their organization spent appropriated funds efficiently. Because this relation has not been previously examined, there is much that is not clear. Therefore, this finding raises more questions than it answers. For instance, exactly how does organizational efficiency affect individual job performance? Are funds being wasted on items that do not lead to an increase in performance? For example, workers may not have the appropriate equipment needed to complete tasks. Moreover, organizations that are perceived to be inefficient may opt to divert more money to areas such as deliberative democracy and accountability reporting that do not lead to elevated productivity in the end. Declining job performance could also be the result of a negative stigma attached to the agency via news reports, audit findings, and so forth. In addition, do employees inherently want the organization to be efficient? If so, does it affect motivation, which then causes employees to increase their output?

Based on these findings, I revise my theoretical research model to include only those significant factors. Therefore, Figure 2 indicates the attitudinal variables that affect job performance.

Several associations are not supported in the model. First, no support is found

for the hypothesis that employee-reported levels of job performance would rise as workers were more satisfied with their jobs. This finding lends some support to Iaffaldano and Muchinsky's (1985) meta-analysis study that found an extremely low correlation factor for this relation. As mentioned, this study used items to measure specific aspects of job satisfaction, while previous scholars used a general measure (e.g., "What is your overall satisfaction with your job?"). Therefore, a qualification is that the correlation is not clear between the specific measure used here and the more general measure used in previous studies.

Second, job performance is unrelated to perceptions regarding fairness. This finding is important because it suggests employees will continue to perform duties and tasks diligently despite the appearance of partiality in the distribution of merits and promotions. Viewed from a different angle, it also suggests that just rewards may not be beneficial in enticing employees to perform better. What this finding does not indicate, however, is that more or better pay is unrelated to job performance.

Third, the variable for participation is not significant in the model. To be precise, job performance was not elevated when employees reported that their agencies valued their opinions. As mentioned, previous scholars' conclusions were mixed (Locke & Schweiger, 1979; Wagner, 1994; Yukl, 1989). My findings, however, suggest that the participatory management practice of managers valuing employees' opinions will not increase job performance. One caveat, however, is that I only examine one dimension of participatory management. Therefore, the result may have been different if I had included other variables, such as empowerment.

Fourth, job performance is not related to budget cuts. Therefore, this study fails to validate claims made by Levine (1979) and Rubin (1985), who argued that job performance and morale were negatively affected by budget cuts. As mentioned, however, job performance is associated with whether an agency received enough funding to fulfill its purpose. When taken together, therefore, these two budgetary findings indicate that job performance is affected by the perceived sufficiency of an agency's funding but not by yearly budget variations. Moreover, this finding strongly indicates that yearly funding is not related to the funding an agency needs to fulfill its purpose. As Smith and Lynch (2004) noted, agencies frequently pad their request with more funding than is necessary. To provide further validation, the correlation statistic between these two variables is low. This finding also strongly implies that workers care more about the funding that is needed to achieve the agency's goals than overall funding. Therefore, public officials should make certain that they devote as much funding as possible to the fulfillment of the agency's mission.

Finally, PSM is not associated with job performance. Therefore, the model does not validate the argument made by Perry and Wise (1990) or the empirical

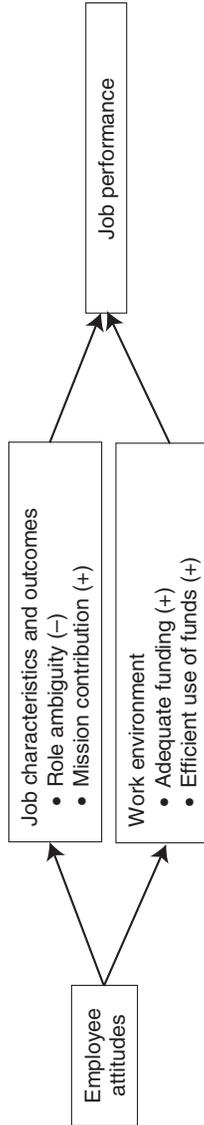


Figure 2. Attitudinal Variables That Affect Job Performance

finding produced by Naff and Crum (1999). One possible reason my model fails to confirm others is that I take a more comprehensive approach that includes measuring individual and organizational factors. Thus, the findings might have been similar if I had included the same individual factors that were employed by Naff and Crum. However, the comprehensive approach I employ here strengthened this study.

## **Conclusion**

I develop a model to examine job performance and subsequently test it on state government workers. The findings from this study provide major contributions to the field of public administration because they have not been empirically tested before. First, my results strongly indicate that role ambiguity negatively affects employee job performance. While this outcome is not new to administrative behavior, it is the first time this association has been examined in government agencies. The remaining findings, however, are new to administrative behavior at large. Second, my model validates mission contribution; that is, employees who directly contributed to the mission of the agency reported higher performance. Third, government employees reported higher performance levels when they believed agencies received enough funding to fulfill their goals. Finally, individual job performance was higher when employees believed their agency spent appropriated funds efficiently.

Despite the strength of these findings, a number of caveats must be considered. First, names of employees to be surveyed were obtained from a public directory that only included about 21 percent of all New York state government employees. Second, the overall survey response rate was low. Because of these occurrences, minorities were underrepresented in the sample. Therefore, coverage and response biases are a concern. Third, causality can only be inferred because the study employed a cross-sectional design. Fourth, I utilize subjective employee interpretations of work environment factors. As a result, differences may exist between employee interpretations and actual work environment factors such as funding (i.e., employee interpretations may be incorrect). However, this approach is useful because it is interesting to see how job performance is affected by employee attitudes regarding the environment in which they work. Last, the model did not include a variable representing professionalism, which may have an impact on performance (Golembiewski, 1983).

As a result, future studies should seek to correct these limitations. They should also further explore the association between job performance and the following factors: mission contribution, agency level of funding, and organizational efficiency. For instance, multi-item measures could be devised to examine dimensions of each. In addition, these findings should be replicated on a national scale.

## Notes

1. The American National Election Studies conducts surveys to gauge citizens' opinions. Regarding government waste, it asked citizens, "Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?" This same question was asked 20 times from 1958 to 2004 and the results indicate that in 17 out of the 20 years the majority of citizens believe government does waste a lot of money. This report is available at [www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab5a\\_3.htm](http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab5a_3.htm).

2. VIF detects the presence of multicollinearity by measuring the variant increases in the coefficients that are due to correlations of the independent variables. A VIF value of 10 or more is believed to indicate severe multicollinearity. None of the variables in the model had a VIF above 2.5.

3. To determine the suitability of ordinary least squares, the data were checked for multicollinearity and large residuals (Norusis, 2005). Only three observations had residuals greater than 3 standard deviations, and a closer check suggests this result is merely random. As previously indicated, all VIF statistics are well below the severe multicollinearity threshold of 10. Therefore, the suitability of this estimator is confirmed.

4. At a reviewer's request, I added to the original model a variable for agency size, which was measured using the natural log of the number of employees in each agency. This variable was left out of the final model because it was not significant, did not change the significance levels of the other variables, and would have significantly reduced the number of participants by 25—many did not want to indicate their employing agency on the questionnaire. The results of the model with this variable's inclusion is available on request.

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### Appendix. Variables and Survey Items

Items were measured using the following Likert-type scales and descriptions: 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*), 1 (*highly agree*) to 7 (*highly disagree*), or 1 (*highly dissatisfied*) to 7 (*highly satisfied*).

#### Job performance

- I am able to achieve the work-related goals my supervisor established.
- I am able to achieve the work-related goals I have established for myself.

#### Job satisfaction

- How satisfied are you with your opportunities for achievement?
- How satisfied are you with your recognition opportunities?
- How satisfied are you with your level of responsibility on your job?
- How satisfied are you with the meaningfulness of your job?
- How satisfied are you with your advancement opportunities?

#### Role ambiguity (scoring for these items is reversed)

- My job has clear, planned goals and objectives.
- I feel certain about how much authority I have.
- I know exactly what is expected of me.

#### Mission contribution

- I contribute directly to the organization's mission.

#### Agency has enough funding to achieve goals

- My agency receives enough funding to achieve its goals.

#### Actual level of funding

- Over the past several years my agency's budget has been (1) drastically cut; (2) cut slightly; (3) stayed the same; (4) increased slightly; (5) increased drastically.

#### Efficiency

- My organization manages its funds efficiently and effectively.

#### Participation

- My agency values employees' opinions.
- My agency is likely to use information that comes from employees.

#### Public service motivation

- Meaningful public service is very important to me.
- I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.
- Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.
- I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.

#### Fairness

- Workers in my agency are promoted fairly.
- Workers in my agency are rewarded financially fairly.

#### Position level

- Which of the following best describes your position in the organization? (0 = midlevel manager, 1 = employee)

#### Educational attainment

- Educational level (1 = some high school, 2 = high school/GED, 3 = some college, 4 = associate degree/technical certificate, 5 = bachelor's degree, and 6 = master's degree or higher)

#### Length in current job

- How long have you been in your current job?

#### Age

- What is your age?

**Ethnicity**

- What is your ethnicity? (0 = white, 1 = nonwhite)

**Gender**

- What is your gender? (0 = female, 1 = male)

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