Public Sector Stereotypes

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Abstract

Dedicated public sector workers are crucial for a well-functioning society. We all depend on them for our safety, health and mobility. However, public sector workers are constantly portrayed as lazy, incompetent and even evil. The 'lazy bureaucrat' is a well-known negative characterization of public sector workers. When studying the literature on public sector stereotypes it becomes apparent that there are only a handful of studies on the topic, which often argue that it is unjustified that public sector workers are being bashed. We currently lack a model describing the content of public sector stereotypes, effects of stereotyping, and ways stereotypes change. This paper develops such a model, thereby combining insights from public administration, psychology, and economics. It also highlights potential future research areas to understand and potentially reduce public sector stereotypes and their effects.

Keywords

Introduction

"Who works harder, government workers or workers in the private sector?"

Survey question by polling organization Rasmussen

This question was recently asked in a national survey of 1,000 Americans by the polling organization Rasmussen (Marvel, 2015). 71% of the respondents thought that private sector workers work harder. Only 5% thought public sector workers worked harder, and 24% was unsure. From 2011 on, the polling organization has asked this question seven times. Each time, a large majority of respondents thought that private sector workers show higher work effort than their public sector counterparts.

This poll does not stand on its own. Public sector workers are often portrayed as lazy, incompetent and even evil (Goodsell, 2004; Wilson, 1989). When consulting the academic literature on stereotypes of public sector workers it becomes apparent that this literature is surprisingly limited. There are only a handful of studies that analyze the stereotypes the public holds regarding public sector workers. These are predominantly American scholars taking a normative stance, arguing that it is unjustified that public sector workers are being negatively stereotyped (for instance Goodsell, 2004; Hubbell, 1991; Milward & Rainey, 1983).

Public sector stereotypes deserve systematic study for two reasons. First, negative stereotypes could have severe negative effects. Highly skilled workers can become less attracted to start working as in the public sector when public sector workers are negatively stereotyped. Garrett et al. (2006:233) quotes a senior public manager who states that negative stereotyping of public sector workers results in lower quality candidates for positions: "What you get are second- and third- and fourth choice political appointees who are incompetent or totally believe everything they heard in the [political] campaign." Related to this, graduates from elite public policy schools are increasingly becoming consultants and bankers instead of civil servants (Piereson and Schaefer Riley 2013). This even led to a

notorious – and ultimately successful – lawsuit by the Robertson family against Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School. The Robertson family was irate as the initial mission – namely to educate future civil servants – was not being fulfilled. Stereotypes not only affect who enters the public sector. Chen & Bozeman (2014) show that perceiving the inferiority of the public sector undermines public sector workers' confidence and work morale.

A second reason for systematically studying stereotypes of public sector workers is that the current body of knowledge is based on a limited number of American studies. This can be misleading. Stereotypes of public sector workers could differ considerably between countries. For instance, in some Confucian-oriented countries, government jobs often have high status. Order and harmony, rather than competition, are considered supreme values in such societies and these values are upheld by among else public organizations. Related to this, Cho and Lee (2001) showed that in South-Korea government managers experience more prestige than bank managers. This can be contrasted with the situation in the United States, where government managers perceive much lower job prestige as compared to private sector managers. In addition, stereotypes probably differ between groups within countries. People from lower socio-economic classes could hold different stereotypes as they encounter civil servants in different ways. Private sector workers could also have potentially more negative stereotypes of civil servants than the general public or public sector workers themselves.

This paper aims to provide a theoretical model for the systematic study of public sector stereotypes. It takes an interdisciplinary approach (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017) by combining literature from public administration (for instance Goodsell, 2004) with literature from related disciplines that have a long track record in studying stereotypes, especially economics (for instance Bordalo et al., 2016) and psychology (for instance Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000).

In the next section I will provide a background on the literature on stereotypes. Hereafter, I will proceed to build a model for public sector stereotypes. This model helps in

analyzing – and measuring - public sector stereotypes, their effects, and ways stereotypes can change. This does not mean that these are the only topics that could be studied regarding public sector stereotypes. But as I will argue below, all three are critically important for understanding public sector stereotypes. The first element of the model focuses on measuring stereotypes. Based on an analysis of the stereotyping literature, I highlight five ways in which public sector stereotypes can be measured. The second element concerns the potential effects of stereotypes. I highlight various potentially effects, and especially analyze important societal effects such as selection into the public sector, employability of public sector workers, and their job performance. The third element looks at stereotype change. Here, I highlight how stereotypes themselves can be changed, and whether the (possibly detrimental) effects of stereotypes can potentially be modified. These three elements are then used to build a model for studying public sector stereotypes.

A background on stereotypes

The Oxford Dictionary (2019) defines a stereotype as "a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing." Stereotypes can refer to many objects, like countries (Italy is beautiful), institutions (marriage is hard), types of organizations (startups are cool), and groups in society (girls are good in reading). Also when focusing on the field of public administration, there are many potential objects for stereotypes. Although the demarcation is not often made explicit and there are many overlaps, we can distinguish between stereotypes about institutions (The IRS is bound with red tape), organizational forms (bureaucracies are inefficient) and groups of people (bureaucrats are lazy, see also Arkin et al., 2003).

In this article, I focus on stereotypes regarding groups of people, aligning with the general academic definition of stereotypes as generalized "beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups" (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996:240). Applying this to public sector stereotypes, these are then defined as beliefs about the

characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of people working in the public sector. The public sector is "those parts of the economy that are either in state ownership or under contract to the state" (Flynn, 2007:2). Stereotypes are highly related to prejudice, which can be described as unfavorable affective reactions to or evaluations of groups and their members (APA, 2006). Stereotypes and prejudice can lead to discrimination, which concerns differential treatment by people toward some groups and their members.

Hence, a stereotype could be that 'public sector workers never work overtime'. Based hereon, someone can hold prejudice – negative affective reactions - against public sector workers in general or individual public sector workers. This person can for instance note that he does not like Jeff, and arguing his case by noting that this is because Jeff works for the government. If this person than does not hire Jeff just because he is currently a public sector worker, this can be called discrimination.

Stereotypes can be seen as special cases of cognitive categories – or schema – that people use on an everyday basis. This helps them to navigate through the complexities of life (Allport, 1954). Social cognition studies show that in trying to make sense of others, people regularly construct and use categorical representations to simplify and streamline the person perception process (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). This means that we can classify people based on the predominant social categories they belong to (Jilke & Tummers, 2018). Attributes that are used in this process of 'putting people in categories' may include race and gender, but also they way they are dressed, the type of car they are driving, and their occupation, such as being a policy advisor at a Ministry. These categories are then used to form stereotypical beliefs.

We can distinguish between stereotypes of public sector workers in general and more specific groups within the public sector. Regarding public sector stereotypes in general, most American studies show that public sector workers are negatively stereotyped (for instance Goodsell, 2004; Frank & Lewis, 2002; Chen & Bozeman, 2004). Hence, people might have stereotypes about public sector workers, such as that they are lazier, more boring, and less creative than private sector workers. Although in common language stereotypes are often

negative, stereotypes can be both positive and negative. Stereotypes of public sector

workers may also include positive statements, like being conscientious, patient, less

interested in money, and more interested to serve society (Perry, 2000).

We can also be more specific about groups within the public sector. Some groups in

the public sector represent core governmental functions, such as providing security,

collecting taxes and upholding the rule of law (Fukuyama, 2013). Within such functions, there

are police officers (security), tax officers (taxes) and prosecutors (rule of law). The

stereotypes about such groups may differ in various ways from the general stereotypes

about public sector workers. For instance, social workers may be seen as very warm but not

very intelligent, while the reverse may be true for a secret service agent.

Stereotypes are always implicitly or explicitly relative: they are compared to some

reference group. In the quote starting this article ("Who works harder, government workers or

workers in the private sector?", based on Marvel, 2015), the reference group is private sector

workers. When we would change the reference group – for instance by comparing

government workers to welfare claimants or by comparing government workers in the United

States to government workers in Italy – the scores could change substantially. This shows

that stereotypes are context dependent, the assessment of a target group depends on the

reference group to which it is compared (Bordalo et al., 2016).

Various studies have analyzed whether stereotypes are rooted in reality. They found

mixed evidence. For some stereotypes there indeed seems to be some evidence. Various

studies have shown that public sector workers are more risk averse than private sector

workers (Bellante & Link, 1981; Buurman et al., 2012; Dong, 2017) and that they have a

higher Public Service Motivation (Bullock et al., 2015; Dur & Zoutenbier, 2014; Houston,

2000). However, for many stereotypes the evidence is far less compelling. For instance, it

can be questioned whether the public sector workers are truly 'lazy', as the stereotype of the

'lazy bureaucrat' might lead us to believe. Frank & Lewis (2002) found that public sector

workers reported slightly *higher* work effort than private sector workers (see also Brehm &

Gates, 1997; Goodsell, 2004). Bordalo et al. (2016) conclude that although stereotypes often contain a 'kernel of truth', judgment errors can be significant.

Measuring public sector stereotypes

After having provided a background on stereotypes, I will develop a model for studying public sector stereotypes. The first objective is finding out ways to measure public sector stereotypes. I will discuss five ways of measuring public sector stereotypes, of which two are direct measurements and three are indirect. I have chose these five ways as they are all applicable to measuring public sector stereotypes, although they all have their downsides.

Measuring stereotypes directly

The first way of measuring stereotypes is by directly asking people about them. This straightforward approach has been developed by Katz & Braly (1933) and is still very often used (for instance Madon et al., 2001; Schneider & Bos, 2014). First, a pilot group of respondents is asked to "list as many specific characteristics or traits as [people in general/you] think are typical of the following groups". These groups can for instance include public sector workers, private sector workers, police officers, and tax officers. The phrase 'people in general' can be used instead of 'you' as asking about stereotypes people themselves hold is potentially more prone to social desirability. However, by asking about people in general there is a potential for exaggeration: people think others hold more extreme stereotypes than they really do (Jussim et al., 2016). After the pilot group is asked to lists attributes, the most often mentioned traits are then tested on a larger sample. For instance, Schneider & Bos (2014) used a master list of 111 traits and asked participants to place a mark next to every trait that people in general thought would be used to describe a particular group (such as female politicians), and asked them to identify the five most important traits. A downside of this approach is that this procedure generates a list of quite general adjectives (like competent, beautiful, stubborn) that may become outdated. Furthermore, the degree to which a particular adjective applies is not measured (Devine &

Elliot, 1995). This long list of attributes is also not very parsimonious nor theoretically informed.

As a response to criticism of this approach, scholars started to develop more parsimonious models (for instance Alexander et al., 1999). Most prominently, Fiske et al. (2002) developed the Stereotype Content Model (SCM). The Stereotype Content Model is a more parsimonious and theoretically informed model arguing that there are two universal stereotype dimensions: competence and warmth. These can help in classifying outgroups. For instance, it could be that prosecutors are high on competence and low on warmth. The two dimensions are based on the social structural relations between groups. That is, competence would be predicted by high social status, and warmth would be predicted by low competition.

The Stereotype Content Model has various advantages over the approach of Katz & Braly (1933). It has a stronger theoretical basis, and can indicate a clear causal chain from social structure (cooperation, status), which predicts stereotypes (warmth, competence), which in turn effect prejudices, and ultimately discrimination (Fiske, 2018). On the other hand, it loses in flexibility and some have argued that focusing on the two dimensions of warmth and competence is too limiting (see for instance Koch *et al.*, 2016).

Measuring stereotypes indirectly

In addition to measuring stereotypes by directly asking respondents, there are various ways to indirectly measure stereotypes. Indirect measures do not to rely on explicitly asking (such as when asked to list adjectives you think are related to police officers). Here, I highlight three important ways in which stereotypes can be measured indirectly.

Perhaps one of the most well-known indirect measures of stereotypes is by using implicit associations, often done via the Implicit Association Test (IAT, Greenwald et al., 1998). The IAT has also been used in public administration research (Marvel, 2015; Marvel & Resh, 2019). In an IAT participants are asked to match categories with each other. In the IAT in Marvel (2015), the four categories were the United States Postal Service (USPS), FedEx,

fast, and slow. A stereotypical negative view of the public sector (here represented as the United States Postal Service) would be that participants would automatically associate the postal service with slow, and FedEx with fast. Marvel indeed found this to be the case: they responded more quickly when the USPS is matched with slow and FedEx is matched with fast, than when USPS is matched with fast and FedEx is matched with slow.

A clear advantage of the IAT is that it seems less prone to social desirability bias as compared to direct measures. In other words, the IAT can reveal attitudes even for people who do not want to express such attitudes. Furthermore, the IAT may uncover stereotypes people are unaware of. Greenwald & Banaji (2017) provide the example a feminist who might discover via an IAT that he or she has a strong implicit stereotype associating male with career and associating female with family.

However, the IAT is not without problems (Marvel & Resh, 2019). One major criticism is whether the implicit associations predict the relevant behaviors that is should predict. For instance, Oswald et al. (2013) argue that ethnic and race IATs have only very weak correlations with ethnic and race discrimination, one key effect that such IATs should be correlated with. Proponents of the IAT countered that although statistically small, small effects can be substantial in real life when they can affect many people simultaneously or when they can affect one person repeatedly (Greenwald et al., 2015). Other criticisms of the IAT relate to only modest test-retest reliability, that context impacts IAT scores, and that it is potentially more malleable than previously thought. In a recent overview article, Jost (2019) discussed these critiques in detail, and concludes that the IAT is not a 'pristine' measure, but that it can be a very useful indirect, unobtrusive, and context-sensitive measure of attitudes. It can be used to measure stereotypes of public sector workers, where attitudes (such as corrupt, hard-working, reliable) are linked to categories (public versus private sector worker), and such implicit stereotypes could for instance impact hiring decisions in real life.

Another indirect measure of stereotypes is the so-called who-said-what paradigm (Kurzban *et al.*, 2001; Pietraszewski, 2018). It has roots in psychology (Taylor et al., 1978), and has been applied in the field of political science (Petersen, 2012). It has received less

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criticism than the IAT and is less known to the general public so potentially less easily gamed. It can be used to measure both implicit and explicit categorization. However, a downside of the method is that it is memory intensive, which makes it unsuitable for people with memory problems.

In the who-said-what paradigm, participants are presented with photos of people and are asked to read a statement of each one of these people. The people in the photos differ along dimensions of interest. For scholars studying stereotypes of police officers, this could be a photo of a police officer and a photo of a private sector security guard. The statement could concern that this person is corrupt or not. Each face and statement is shortly presented on a separate screen. In the second phase, participants are given a surprise recognition task in which they are asked to match statements to the photos that were presented to them.

Participants often make errors. By analyzing the pattern of errors, scholars can analyze which categories the participants have in their heads (Cosmides et al., 2003). For instance, studies regarding race stereotypes show that when participants have race stereotypes, they will more often misattribute a sentence uttered by a black person to another black person rather than to a white person (Taylor et al., 1978; Hewstone et al., 1991). In contrast, when participants would not have encoded race, they would produce random errors. By using combinations of photos (for instance race and occupation, such as photos of black and white police officers and black and white private security guards) or by varying statements (for instance statements about public and private sector and effort, such as a private sector worker who is hard-working) scholars can furthermore analyze the specific stereotypes.

A third potentially valuable way of indirectly measuring stereotypes does not involve recruiting participants to take part in studies, as is the case in all previous approaches. Instead, it relies on machine learning, a method coming from computer science that is making an entrance in public administration (Anastasopoulos & Whitford, 2018). Machine Learning is a data-driven method that aims to discover patterns without using explicit instructions. Although to date it has not yet been applied to studying public sector

stereotypes, scholars have used it to study other stereotypes (for instance Caliskan *et al.*, 2017). It can be helpful to analyze how stereotypes develop over time, something which is harder to study via the previous methods, although not impossible (see for instance Eagly *et al.*, 2019). It is also less prone to social desirability bias.

As an example of how machine learning approach can be applied to stereotype research, I highlight the study of Garg and colleagues (2018). They uses word embedding (a particular way of machine learning for text) to study trends in the gender and ethnic stereotypes in the 20th and 21st centuries in the United States. They base their work on 100 years of text data – among else based on *New York Times* articles - and validate it using census survey data. They among else show that the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s led to a more positive adjectives (such as intelligent and thoughtful) for women and provides a quantitative way to measure this change.

Concluding, the above shows five ways that can be used to measure public sector stereotypes, ranging from asking respondents to list attributes of specific groups, to using Machine Learning tools. An overview is shown in Table 1. Which method to use is of course primarily dependent on the research question one is interested in. Furthermore, it can be valuable to combine different methods as each have strengths and weaknesses. For instance, Caliskan et al. (2017) combined machine learning with implicit association tests while Agerström & Rooth (2011) combined the implicit association test with direct measures.

Table 1 Five ways to measure public sector stereotypes

	1. Adjective checklist	*2. Stereotype Content Model*	*2. Implicit Association Test*	*4. Who-said-what paradigm*	*5. Machine Learning*
Type	Direct measure	Direct measure	Indirect measure	Indirect measure	Indirect measure
Method	Using a list of adjectives (like 'lazy') and asking respondents whether the adjectives are applicable to a group (like 'social workers')	Asking respondents to rank a group on a list of standardized adjectives concerning competence (such as 'intelligent') and warmth (such as 'sincere')	Measuring automatic associations of respondents between groups and adjectives. See https://implicit.harvard.edu	Asking respondents in a surprise recognition task to match statements with photos of people belonging to groups	Applying word embedding to a corpus of text to connect groups and adjectives
Potential	- Straightforward way of measuring stereotypes - Easily scalable across adjectives and groups	- Theoretical basis - Parsimonious	- Less prone to social desirability bias than direct measures - Can uncover stereotypes that people are unaware of	- Less prone to social desirability bias than direct measures - Less known than IAT so potentially less easily gamed	- No respondents needed - Less prone to social desirability bias
Pitfalls	- Theory poor - Prone to social desirability bias	- Inflexible as it only focuses on two dimensions - Prone to social desirability bias	- Weak relationship with behavior - Modest test-retest reliability	- Memory intensive - Inflexible	- Needs high quality text corpus - Text corpus may contain other biases
Core source	Katz & Breely (1933)	Fiske et al. (2002)	Greenwald et al. (1998)	Taylor et al. (1978)	Caliskan et al. (2017)

Effects of public sector stereotypes

After describing various ways to measure stereotypes, we discuss potential effects of stereotypes on public sector workers. This aligns with the second objective: to analyze the potential effects of public sector stereotypes. I focus on three potentially important effects that are related to the process of work life in the public sector: selection (related to who enters the public sector), job performance of public sector workers, and employability of these workers (related to exiting the organization). These three effects should be seen as examples. More effects are possible. These include work morale (Chen & Bozeman, 2014; Garrett et al., 2006), organizational commitment (Gilad et al., 2018), and trust in the public sector (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003).

A first important potential effect of public sector stereotypes is selection. As hinted at in the introduction, hardworking and ambitious people might not 'select into' the public sector when the public sector is negatively stereotyped (Garrett *et al.*, 2006; Delfgaauw & Dur, 2007). Nezhina & Zaytseva (2018) show that a negative image of a civil servant is highly correlated to students' intentions to work for government. When people do not select into the public sector, they could argue that this is not because of stereotypes, but because of other reasons, such as higher pay or less red tape in the private sector. Although these reasons may be rational, they also can be based on stereotypes. Salaries at the top of the pyramid are indeed to be found in the private sector, but on average the differences are not always substantial, and in some countries and for some people it can be financially wise to select into the public sector (Hospido & Moral-Benito, 2016). Regarding red tape, multiple studies have found that the difference between the public and the private sector are not always in line with the beliefs of the public (Rainey et al., 1995). Hence, it could be rational for some groups to move to the public sector, notwithstanding the by definition oversimplified public sector stereotypes. Related to this, studies focusing on other stereotypes have shown that people self-select into groups based on stereotypes (Galinsky et al., 2013; Nosek et al., 2009).

A second potential effect of public sector stereotypes is job performance, which can be broadly defined as "observable things people do (i.e. behaviors) that are relevant to the goals of the organization" (Campbell *et al.*, 1990:314). When studying the effects of stereotypes on job performance, it pays to look at research concerning effects of other stereotypes, such as age, gender, or race. In a meta-analysis on age stereotypes, Lamont *et al.* (2015:180) note that age-based stereotypes can be self-fulfilling: older people who (are led to) believe in stereotypes about aging can start behaving in such a way as to further perpetuate these false ideas. The authors conclude that "Negative stereotypes, not facts, do the damage". For instance, in an experiment to analyze how people perform on a strength test, Swift et al. (2012) showed that when older people were told that they would be compared to younger people, they started confirming stereotypes, in this case the stereotype that older people had less physical strength. Applying this to public sector workers, it can be hypothesized – based on stereotype threat theory (Steele, 1997; but see Cullen et al., 2014; Lewis & Michalak, 2019) – that when public sector workers are explicitly compared to private sector workers regarding their work effort, they would start confirming the stereotype of the 'lazy' worker, and would put in less effort. Related to this, when civil servants experience negative stereotypes they may sabotage (Harris & Ogbanna, 2002) services for citizens. A negative spiral can then develop. A civil servant can experience that multiple citizens question whether he is really hard-working, even sometimes calling him 'lazy'. The civil servant then feels threatened and works less hard for the citizens to 'get back at them' and subsequent citizens he encounters.

However, the effects of stereotypes on job performance do not have to be negative. For instance, regarding race stereotypes, Shih et al. (1999) showed that activating the stereotype "Asians are good at math" caused Asian-American women to perform better on a math test. Applying this to public sector workers, it is possible that for countries which have a low corrupt public sector – like Denmark - activating the stereotype of a public sector worker would encourage these workers to behave less corrupt (Barfort et al., 2019). On the contrary,

in countries such as India – were the public sector seems to attract people that are prone to corrupt behavior (Hanna & Wang, 2017) – a reverse relationship might be found.

A third potential effect of public sector stereotypes concerns the employability of public sector workers. A study in the UK (London Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Hays, 2010) shows that negative stereotypes might make it harder for civil servants to transition from the public to the private sector. Only 17% of private sector workers thought that an influx of public sector workers is helpful to their organization. This is increasingly problematic given the shrinking public sector. Public sector workers were seen as 'lazy', 'clock-watchers', and 'promoted beyond their ability' (p.8). Although there is to date no robust evidence of hiring discrimination of public sector workers, field experiments on other stereotypes such as those concerning race and gender have shown that they can lead to discrimination in the labor market. In a famous study concerning race, Bertrand & Mullainathan (2004) showed that white names receive 50 percent more callbacks for interviews than African-American names, holding everything else constant. Such discrimination can be related to (implicitly held) stereotypes (Rooth, 2010). Concerning public sector stereotypes, scholars could analyze whether and how working in the public sector affects hiring decisions of public, non-profit, and private sector organizations.

Changing stereotypes or their impact

The final objective of this study is to analyze how stereotypes or their impact of effects can be changed. Van De Walle (2004) notes that improving the image or reputation of the public sector is an important concern for governments (see also Carpenter & Krause, 2012). In this final section I firstly discuss how public sector stereotypes might change, and secondly how the effects of stereotypes can change.

First, it is clear that stereotypes change over time. Various studies have shown that this is the case. Madon et al. (2001) – using the adjective checklist originating from Katz & Breely (1933) - showed that almost all ethnic and national stereotypes had changed in

content from 1933 to the early 2000s. Focusing on gender, Eagly et al. (2019) showed that gender stereotypes have changed considerably, and often became more favorably for women (see also Garg et al., 2018). For instance, women's relative advantage in communion increased over time and women are increasingly seen as more intelligent than men.

Stereotypes do change over time as a result of demographic, political, and economic changes. However, it is harder to develop interventions to actively change stereotypes. For instance, in a series of studies Lai *et al.* (2014) analyzed whether seventeen different interventions could reduce implicit preferences for whites compared to blacks, as measured by the IAT. Eight were effective, such as one were participants read an evocative story in which a white man assaults the participant and a black man rescues the participant. Relating this to public sector stereotypes, this could be a story were a civil servant is very responsive and helps the participant, while a private sector worker is slow, lazy, and rigid. However, in a follow up study Lai et al. (2016) showed that although some interventions immediately reduced implicit preferences, not one of them was effective just a couple of days later.

This does not mean that changing stereotypes is impossible. It does mean that it can be quite hard. Potentially promising interventions must probably occur in real life, outside of the laboratory (Lai et al., 2016). As an example, Broockman & Kalla (2016) show that a single 10-minute conversation encouraging perspective taking can reduce prejudice against transgenders (note that prejudice is highly related to stereotypes, but not the same). This effect lasted for at least 3 months. A similar setup – for instance perspective taking conversations of citizens with civil servants - could be used to analyze whether such conversations can alter public sector prejudice or stereotypes. Furthermore, Trujillo & Paluck (2012) showed that watching a soap opera where the US government is positively portrayed can lead to more positive attitudes and less negative affect toward the government. Similarly, we could hypothesize that less bashing of the bureaucracy would in the end lead to more positive stereotypes (Van de Walle, 2004; Goodsell, 2004). There currently exists only a very limited amount of studies aiming to reduce stereotypes and prejudice via interventions in the field. Paluck & Green (2009) note that causal effects of many widespread stereotype or

prejudice reduction interventions remains unknown. They call for more rigorous empirical assessment of such strategies in the field to determine what works.

In addition to changing stereotypes themselves, the effects of stereotypes can also change. Firstly, people use coping strategies to alter the effects stereotypes have on themselves (for instance Puhl & Brownell, 2003; Spencer et al., 2016). Coping strategies are cognitive and behavioral responses that people use to manage distress (Lazarus, 1966; Tummers et al., 2015). Coping can buffer the negative effects of negative stereotypes (stressor) on effects (strain). Sometimes people cope with negative stereotypes by changing how they identify with the public sector. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) highlights when and how people identify with certain groups. Public sector workers could activate other social identities. For instance, he or she can think of himself/herself as a 'civic engineer', 'project manager' or 'city planner' instead of as a public sector worker. Stereotypes for these categories can be more positive. This is a potentially fruitful coping strategy, but can also result in lower commitment to the public service.

However, other coping strategies could be less effective. Steele (1997) showed that African-Americans disengage themselves from the academic domain to escape the anxiety that results from performing under the weight of negative stereotypes. This coping strategy lowers motivation in the academic domain, which in the end results in lower academic performance. Similarly, public sector workers can psychologically disengage from work to cope with negative stereotypes. When being disengaged, their motivation to perform well in their job decreases, possibly resulting in lower performance. In both the case of African-Americans and public sector workers, this psychological disengagement can result in self-fulfilling prophecies.

In addition to public sector workers (in)effectively coping with the effects of stereotypes themselves, scholars and practitioners can also develop more top-down interventions that aim to reduce the negative effects of stereotypes, or amplify its positive effects. Some interventions – such as education about stereotypes - could be quite effective. For instance, Johns et al. (2005) showed that educating women about negative stereotypes

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on their ability to do math reduces the detrimental effects. They stated to these women that the anxiety they feel when taking a difficult math test could be the result of negative stereotypes of women and mathematical ability, but have nothing to do with the actual ability to do well on the test. Hence, informing members of stereotyped groups about the effects of stereotypes can increase their performance on stereotype-relevant tasks. Public administration scholars could study whether informing civil servants about the potential negative impact of stereotypes – and the notion that such stereotypes are often unfounded (Brehm & Gates, 1999; Goodsell, 2004) – lowers the effect of negative stereotyping.

In addition to educating about stereotypes, scholars can also develop interventions that change how people interpret situations. Such 'story-editing' or 'wise' interventions focus on (are 'wise to') the meanings people draw about themselves, others, or situations they are in and it uses theory-techniques to alter these meanings (Walton & Wilson, 2018). In a famous study, Walton and Cohen (2011) analyze whether African Americans – which are often negatively stereotyped in college – can be helped to cope with the adversity they encounter at college. The authors developed a social belonging intervention that encouraged these students to attribute adversity not to fixed deficits unique to themselves or their stereotyped group, but to a common college adjustment process. This intervention was effective, raising the GPA of the African Americans three years after the intervention ended. Related story editing interventions that could reduce the negative effects of stereotypes are self-affirmation (Cohen & Sherman, 2014) and implicit self-theories (Aronson et al., 2002). Such interventions have not yet been applied to public sector stereotypes, but could be promising. This does not mean that changing stereotypes is no longer necessary, but that intervening to buffer the effects of negative stereotypes can be a useful additional option that goes hand-in-hand with structural reforms (Walton & Wilson, 2018).

Theoretical framework

Based on the discussion above, Figure 1 has been developed, showing a simplified theoretical framework. As can be seen, it also acknowledges positive stereotypes. Such stereotypes are probably more prevalent in some countries than others. The framework is simplified, and I explicitly welcome other ways of studying public sector stereotypes.
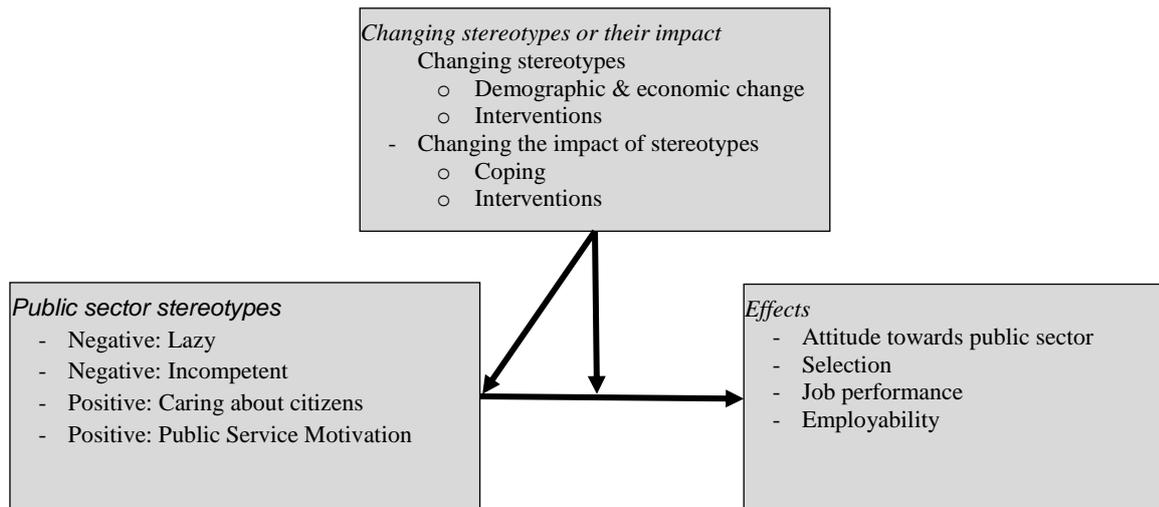
Changing stereotypes or their impact
      Changing stereotypes
        o Demographic & economic change
        o Interventions
  - Changing the impact of stereotypes
        o Coping
        o Interventions

Public sector stereotypes
  - Negative: Lazy
  - Negative: Incompetent
  - Positive: Caring about citizens
  - Positive: Public Service Motivation

Effects
  - Attitude towards public sector
  - Selection
  - Job performance
  - Employability

Figure 1 Model for studying public sector stereotypes (simplified)

Conclusion

Dedicated civil servants are crucial for a well-functioning society. We all depend on them for our safety, health and mobility. However, civil servants are constantly portrayed as lazy, incompetent and even evil. This article argued that stereotypes of public sector workers deserve systematic study. First, negative stereotypes could have severe consequences. There are strong indications that highly skilled workers become less attracted to become a civil servant. Stereotypes also undermine civil servants themselves. They could believe them and behave accordingly. Then, calling bureaucrats lazy becomes a self-fulling prophecy. Second, only basing ourselves on American studies is misleading. Stereotypes most probably differ greatly between countries and between groups within countries.

By providing a model for analyzing – and measuring - public sector stereotypes, their effects, and ways stereotypes can change, I hope to help in a more structured analysis of public sector stereotypes. I have focused on three elements regarding stereotypes: the measurement of stereotypes themselves, the effects of stereotypes, and change stereotypes or their effects. Based on the developed model, different topics might be analyzed in future studies. For instance, regarding the measurement of stereotypes, scholars can analyze to what extent stereotypes of public sector workers show similarities and differences in various countries or parts of a country. Furthermore, it could be analyzed whether various groups in society (such as private versus public sector workers, or higher versus lower social economic classes), encode different public sector stereotypes. Regarding interventions to deal with stereotypes, field studies could analyze how civil servants currently cope with negative stereotypes, and whether training interventions can improve such ways of coping.

This does not mean that these are the only topics that could be studied regarding public sector stereotypes. For instance, how stereotypes develop is not covered. For instance, from what age do children develop stereotypes regarding public sector workers? What are potential determinants of this development? Studies regarding other types of stereotypes have highlighted that stereotypes can form quite early (McKown & Weinstein, 2003).

In conclusion, this study provides insights that help to analyze stereotypes public sector workers face. Further researching such stereotypes should prove to be a timely and productive endeavor for both researchers and practitioners alike.

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