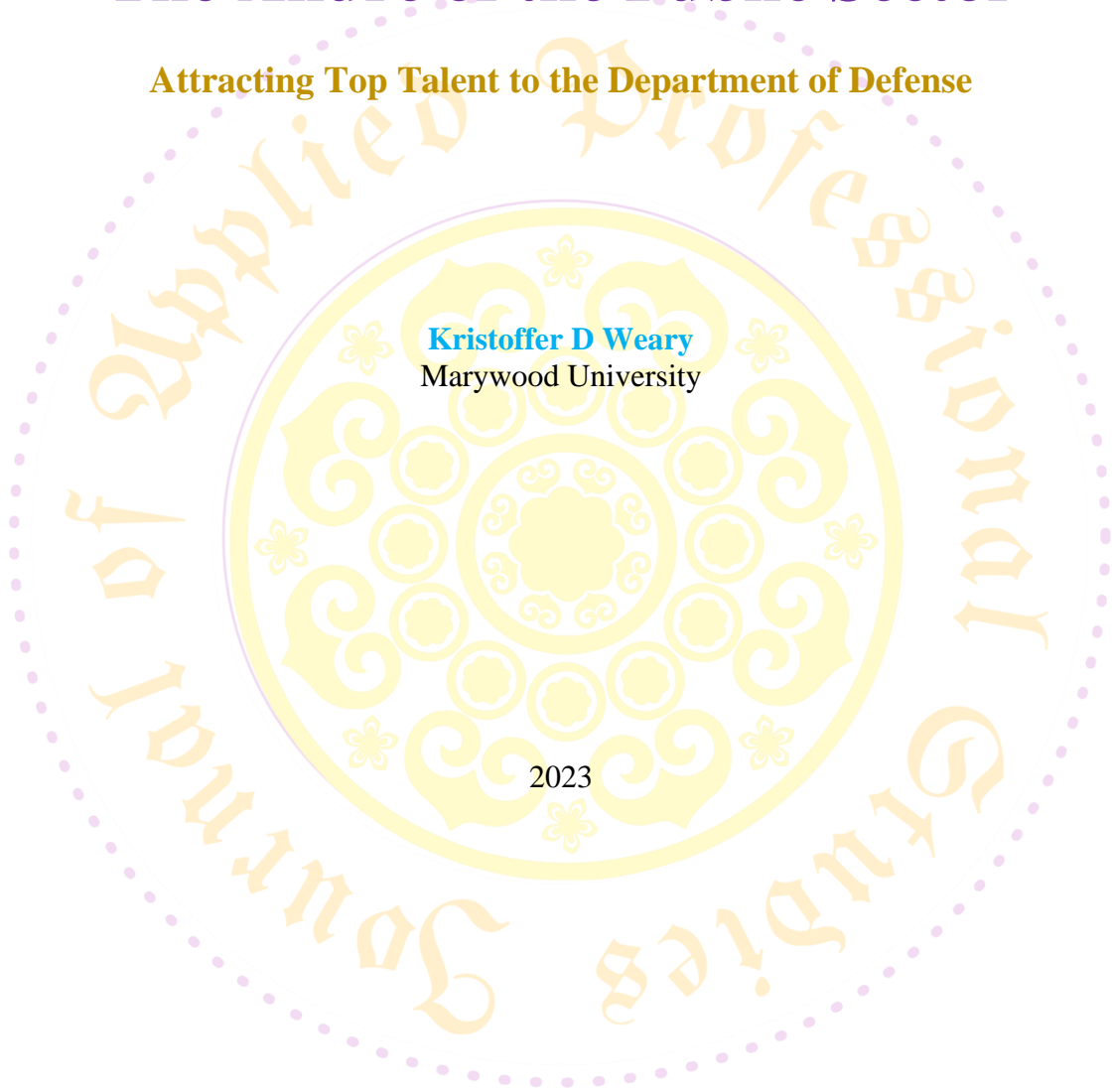


# The Allure of the Public Sector

Attracting Top Talent to the Department of Defense

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2023



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## Abstract

The Federal Government, the single largest employer in the United States, now more than ever is in a battle to recruit and maintain top talent. Within the Federal Government, the single largest agency of civilian employees, the Department of Defense (DOD), is competing with private sector business and nonprofits to attract the next generation of workers as an aging workforce begins to filter out of the ranks towards retirement. Coupled with high turnover in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) positions and the possibility of conflict with our fiercest enemies in near peer combat; one can begin to see that a crisis has formed in the Federal Government that needs to be quickly addressed. In their recruiting efforts towards the Millennial Generation and Gen Z, DOD hiring managers need to recognize exactly what it is that motivates these younger generations towards public service, and how to tap into those needs and wants in order to leverage those identified factors of employment in public service. Once managers understand what attracted these generations into public service, they then need to focus on what is required to retain them in an effort to minimize turnover.

*Keywords:* Department of Defense, public sector, Millennial Generation, Gen Z, top talent, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

## Introduction

### The Problem

In the United States, the Federal Government is the single largest employer with roughly 2.1 million full-time permanent employees. This number precludes part-time, contractors, temporary, and seasonal employees, which is estimated to bring the number closer to 3 million workers (OPM, 2022). Even though the Federal Government is the largest employer in the U.S., there is a pay disparity of approximately 23% when compared to the private sector when job duties and responsibilities are similarly aligned (Yoder, 2020).

There is also a pay disparity within the Federal Government itself when looking at geographic areas and locality pay increases, i.e., someone working in New York City makes more money doing the exact same duties as someone living in Mobile, Alabama. The simple answer for this internal disparity is that locality pay is based off of cost of living in those geographic areas (OPM, 2022). Therefore, someone in NYC doing the same job as someone in Alabama needs to make more money because NYC is far more expensive to live in when compared to other parts of the country.

The government is competing with the private sector, public interest, perceptions of corruption, and fiscal irresponsibility. How then, does the Federal Government attract the best talent to work

in and lead the government and serve the public interest whilst competing against the private sector? How do we as citizens then ensure that the individuals that we entrust with public servitude are held to the highest levels of trust, patriotism, and fidelity in order to avoid corruption and maintain transparency with the public, of which their tax dollars are utilized in the name of community prosperity?

This paper aims to expound upon the allure of the public sector in the U.S. in terms of what motivations exist that workers actively pursue when choosing public service as the vehicle for their career, especially the younger generations that will eventually replace older generations. The focus is primarily on the Department of Defense (DOD), because the DOD is the single largest agency within the Federal Government that employs roughly 750,000 employees out of the entire 2.1 million federal workers, and serves as a prime sample to study. This research will allow connections to be made on a humanistic level to better explain the importance of other available literature so that hiring managers within the DOD will have a better understanding of exactly what attracts people to public service and what makes them stay.

## Literature Review

The current literature provides some clarity, at least generationally, across the globe as it refers to Public Service Motivation (PSM), i.e., what motivates young workers to take up careers in the government (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013). However, much of the research has been conducted on a global scale across several countries, mostly in Europe, and therefore only contributes broad strokes to the argument and leaves the U.S. public sector out of the bulk of the argument, or at the very least fragmented (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013). Other research focuses on a generational attitude towards public service. In this case, PSM is focused on the current Millennial Generation seeking entry into public service (Ng, et al., 2016).

This puts a narrow focus on a defined population that essentially leaves everyone else out of the research. On average, a typical government worker starts their career with the government around the age of 30 years; however, unforeseen events such as the Great Recession saw a surge of workers clamoring into government work across older generations seeking to sustain their career for the last decade or so of their working life before reaching retirement age (Laird, 2017). Understanding the holistic picture of the individualistic reasons one joins the public sector, parallels can be established in order to determine patterns and commonly shared experiences that may be used to generalize the allure of the public sector (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The intent is to make known factors and incentives as a tangible representation of what the Federal Government can offer individuals seeking employment in order to shore up and bolster civilian employee numbers, which in turn can increase the overall effectiveness of the government for all.

## Established Patterns

A common pattern involves PSM, which conceptualizes what attracted people to a job in the first place, and if that motivation is still relevant after being hired (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013). Other identified patterns include the Great Recession, or lean times in general (Laird, 2017). Other patterns are the prestige of working for the government, or individuals wanting to give their time to government service/doing their duty to serve their community/country (Ljungholm, 2014).

These patterns help to define factors, referred to as influences and motivations, that drive people towards public service, specifically within the Federal Government and its largest agency, the DOD (Ljungholm, 2014).

### **Public Service Motivation**

There are several definitions of public service. The definitions include “people employed by the government that carry out services authorized by the government and provided to the public, but also a motivation by those workers to fulfill a sense of duty or responsibility to the community or public good as a whole, i.e., helping others” (Perry and Hondeghem, 2008).

A Danish study conducted by Kjeldsen and Jacobsen in 2013, examined PSM and employment in the Public Sector to better understand if the attraction is to serve others or socialize with others. Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2013), found that “PSM is relevant for neither attraction to the public sector nor actual sector employment.” They concluded that PSM is more associated with the nature of the work performed in public service rather than with the public sector itself (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013). PSM declines as one enters the sector, but being a part of the Public Sector keeps PSM from diminishing when compared to private sector employment.

It is hypothesized that pay versus prestige may account for that diversity. If an individual’s career is considered prestigious within society, the pay can be low without much frustration by the individual. However, if pay is low and prestige is low, the individual will tend to refuse the job and seek out either high pay and low prestige or high pay and high prestige (Perry and Hondeghem, 2008). A job frequently considered high prestige with low pay is that of a civil servant. Often considered noble and selfless work, one lives modestly but with pride. A job with low prestige and high pay, such as an oil rig worker, is the opposite. Theoretically, one doesn’t care for how society views their work due to the high salaries they receive. An example of high pay and high prestige would be that of a Supreme Court Justice or US Senator. The balance between pay and prestige is determined by the individual based on their values system and socio/psychological place within society (Perry and Hondeghem, 2008).

In the United States, working in the public sector (more specifically the Federal Government) is more than just a whimsical spur of the moment decision. When one enters federal service, they pledge their allegiance to the Constitution, thus entering a covenant (Stahl, 2023). This commitment is sealed in the power of swearing an oath, a sacred bond of one’s word. Once entered, civil servants get the opportunity to do something meaningful with their lives through a higher calling in the noble form of solving public problems for the greater good of their fellow citizens (Stahl, 2023).

The uniqueness of the U.S. model of PSM has civil servants divided into four categories: Samaritans, Humanitarians, Communitarians, and Patriots (Brewer et al., 2000). Humanitarians favor social justice over self-gratification; Communitarians believe it is their duty to give back to the community via public service as a civic duty; Samaritans specifically focus on the underprivileged and helping others in need; and Patriots answer the call to duty (as represented by military service) for the public good (Brewer et al., 2000).

For this study examining the workforce in the DOD, the Patriot and the Communitarian motivators are the focus; due to their fit within the that agency's culture, mission, and motivations. People are attracted to government agencies through psychological expectations of obligations and rewards associated with that specific work, and those who entered those agencies through internal recruitment experience fewer unmet expectations as compared to those who are recruited externally (Moser, 2005). If someone is psychologically attracted to a type of work or agency that aligns with who they are as a person, they're more motivated in their service due to expectation management.

When an employee finds employment with an organization that matches their goals and values, he/she/they tend to be more satisfied and less likely to leave that organization, regardless of other factors such as low pay, terrible hours, or lack of praise (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013). Finding the right person at the right time for the right job seems to be an underlying theme that plays a significant part in PSM. The focus on PSM has been on matching the work of the public sector to individual characteristics of people who are motivated by helping others and contributing to society for reasons other than personal gain (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013).

This is interesting to keep in mind, because one has to understand that there is a wide distinction between public service and non-profit/501(c)(3) employment. A significant difference is paid work versus volunteerism, with volunteerism not necessarily associated with federal service, but more so with social service organizations. While one might have the need to help others, doing it for free and doing it as a career is a distinct difference when trying to better understand PSM and why individuals choose to work for the government in the public sector versus the private sector.

Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2013) conclude that PSM is associated with the service performed rather than the sector. However, individuals with a high level of PSM are still more likely to seek employment in the public sector. There was no direct correlation found between PSM as a predictor of an individual's attraction to public versus private sector employment, at least not for Danish health professionals (Kjeldsen & Jacobsen, 2013). This conclusion shows a gap in the literature and research that still has yet to be filled.

PSM is the understanding of what motivates potential employees to take a career in the public sector. This is important, due to the fact that there is an aging public workforce primarily staffed by older generations on the fringe of retirement, and little desire by younger generations to take up the role of civil servants and replace that workforce in the numbers required to adequately replace those workers (Ng, et al., 2016). Ng, Gossett, and Winter (2016), take a specific look at the Millennial Generation (those born between 1980 and 1995) to better understand if they have the same level of PSM that the Gen Xers (those born between 1965 and 1980) had when they entered the workforce by asking four key questions: (1) Are Millennials different from Gen Xers with respect to their antecedents to PSM? (2) Are there Millennials who exhibit PSM values as they have been understood? (3) Do PSM values found in Millennials translate into an interest in public sector employment? And (4) Is PSM related to volunteer behavior among Millennials?

While the values each generation hold in esteem change as one replaces the other as the primary workforce, there is still a connection to PSM whether it is towards public service, or away from it. The conclusion from the study found that PSM levels among Millennials is far lower than with

Gen Xers, with Millennials caring more about extrinsic rewards like pay and praise, as well as lifestyle preferences such as work-life balance (Ng, et al., 2016).

Interestingly, research found that service (specifically community service) is an important component to career choices among Millennials, but not civil service when compared to non-profit work (Ng, et al., 2016). This leads to the conclusion that Millennials are interested in public service to a degree, but civil service needs to become more competitive when trying to attract the next generation of workers away from the private sector and non-profits due to the shift of generational values from that of the Gen Xers to the Millennial Generation.

### **DOD Civilians**

When it comes to the United States and its Military Industrial Complex, the DOD is considered unusual and unique in its design due to the fact that it has a vast number of civilians working within military establishments, whereas other countries only have military personnel working strictly within their military establishments (Cancian, 2021). One argument is that the US Military has grown too large, beyond what it was intended, but, since the first civilizations were formed, it has been expected of the government to protect their citizen's lives and property (Johnson, 2014). In the ever-evolving world of globalization, you can make the argument that the Military Industrial Complex is the direct result of the US being the global superpower and the world's police (Johnson, 2014). In essence, with US interests reaching across the globe, the evolution of its military was a natural response in order to maintain and ensure future resources for the continued growth of a young nation that finds itself thrust into leadership of all free peoples.

As of Fiscal Year 2021, the DOD employed roughly 773, 600 personnel (excluding military) that performed a variety of functions to include maintenance, intelligence, medical care, operations services, family support, and force management. The reasons behind a civilian workforce performing many functions alongside their uniformed counterparts, is because civilians provide long-term expertise and stability unlike their uniformed counterparts, who rotate frequently in assignments and military careers (Cancian, 2021). DOD civilians also offer a greater level of flexibility than military personnel because civilians do not need to meet strict military standards such as fitness, health, combat proficiency, or worldwide assignments in order to maintain their careers (Cancian, 2021). Having this level of flexibility helps the DOD perform at high operational tempos and significant levels of output.

Some facts about DOD Civilians include 96% are employed outside of Washington D.C., with the remaining 4 % (roughly 31,000) working within any level of management at headquarters levels. Seventy-three percent work within the five Military Departments: Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force. The DOD states “effective and appropriate use of civilians allows the Department to focus its Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Guardians on the tasks and functions that are military essential—thereby enhancing the readiness and lethality of our warfighters” (Cancian, 2021).

A 2020 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) that polled employees on the best places to work in the Federal Government. Employees ranked the DOD number 7 out of 17, with an overall employee job satisfaction rating of 71.4%, with NASA ranking number 1 at 86.6% and Homeland Security ranking last at 61.1% (Guy and Ely, 2022). Noteworthy items include NASA employees have the

highest concentrated levels of education per worker between scientists and engineers performing public service in their fields, whereas Homeland Security has control of Customs and Border Patrol which is often wrought with morale issues due to the stressful nature of working on the Southwestern Border (Guy and Ely, 2022).

In 1999, the DOD employed roughly 680,000 civilian personnel across 10 agencies. That number drastically increased due to recruitment efforts that came about due to a need for more workers during the 2008 troop surge, which brought DOD civilian employment up to roughly 770,000 by 2011 (Cancian, 2021). Between 2012 and 2014, civilian employment dropped to approximately 721,000 due to initial drawdowns, Base Realignments And Closures (BRAC), and furloughs (Cancian, 2021). By 2017, recruitment efforts were made to begin bringing the number of civilian personnel back up to roughly 760,000 by initiating a long-standing move of certain functions from high-cost, and difficult recruitment of military personnel to lower-cost civilian workers that can perform the same job functions but require fewer benefits and pay as compared to their military counterparts (Cancian, 2021).

### **Veterans in Public Service**

The literature offers an explanation into how veterans enter the workforce. Dempsey and Schafer (2020) explain that a surge of veteran unemployment coincided with the Great Recession of 2008, and the beginning of the drawdown in Afghanistan and Iraq after the major troop surge at the same time. Massive veteran unemployment created a crisis that led to advocacy groups assisting veterans with finding employment. Cancian (2021) references total DOD civilian workforce growth from 1999-2021, which shows that civilian employment spiked to 760,000 workers in 2011, and has since leveled off.

Schulker (2017), conducted a study that focused on veteran employment and which industries veterans tend to flock to, both in the public and private sectors. The results showed that veterans tend to flock to civilian careers that align best with their military occupations they performed while in uniform. This result coincides with Cancian's (2019, 2021) findings that many veterans return to the DOD for civilian employment, because the DOD understands the training and value veteran employees bring with them from the Uniformed Services. However, MacLean (2017), points out that there is a level of skills mismatch that occurs, particularly in the private sector, which also leads to pay disparities. The research concluded that veterans of combat arms occupations in the service had to rely more on the "soft" skills they learned in the service such as leadership and discipline when trying to get civilian employment, but the findings point out that employers did not value veteran worker's time in the military as much as time in the civilian labor market when determining initial pay levels (MacLean, 2017).

A divide exists when veterans leave the service, and seek civilian employment because employers may only have exposure or familiarity with the military through the media. This can lead to a misperception and false understanding of veterans when they seek employment, thus leading to a skills mismatch or even being turned down for employment, even when they have the necessary proficiencies and training (Carter, et al, 2017). Due to this misperception, research over the years has focused mostly on the many public and private sector initiatives that help veterans translate their skills into civilian employment. New research has emerged on the effectiveness of these programs, and the experiences veterans have had, as well as the benefits civilian employers have

reported when they hire veterans and place them in the right job that matches the skills they learned (Batka & Hall, 2016).

Some research dives deeper by not just looking at the two populations of veteran and nonveteran, but by also dissecting the veteran population into women and minorities to analyze the levels of disparity in their post-military career seeking experiences (Padavic & Prokos, 2017). This research is reinforced by additional studies that found that after the Great Recession of 2008, black employment, specifically black female employment, in the public sector shrank exponentially, thus creating a double disadvantage, regardless of veteran status (Laird, 2017).

### **Public Sector Employment**

The public sector, specifically the Federal Government, is often equated with being an equal opportunity employer, especially for minority workers. Regardless of one's gender, race, age, religion, or sexual orientation, the government hires employees based on merit and experience as is ascribed by the law in Title 5 of the US code. Laird (2017) found that the public sector, specifically the government, continues to be an equalizing institution in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2007-2009. The study focused on public sector employment from 2003-2013 and found that after the recession, black public service employees were at a disadvantage by being concentrated in a shrinking part of the economy and were more likely to experience job loss when compared to their white and Hispanic counterparts (Laird, 2017).

The significance of these findings helps to debunk the age-old myth that working for the government comes with the unbridled perk of "job security," meaning that it is far more likely for one to experience job loss in the private sector as opposed to the public sector. However, prior to the Great Recession, national unemployment sat at 4.4%, and by 2009, it was as high as 10.1%. According to Laird (2017), after a recession, government employment typically expands, however, after the Great Recession, government employment contracted. However, the effects were not felt equally across all levels. The Federal Government experienced a two-week shutdown in 2013, but most of the layoffs were felt at the state and local levels (Laird, 2017). This is consistent with the findings of Cancian (2021) that showed a brief furlough within the DOD, but a sizeable uptick in DOD Civilian employment that coincided with the troop surge in 2008.

Laird (2017) focuses specifically on testing three hypotheses: First, whether public employment inequality reflects compositional differences in education and occupation. Second, whether employment stratification in the public has become increasingly similar to that in the private sector. Finally, to examine whether public sector whites, once unemployed, are more likely to find private employment. These questions are important to answer because historically public sector employment has been an equalizing force of economic mobility for black workers, and the decline of black workers in the public sector may kick start the debate about racial inequality and economic fallout of the Great Recession (Laird, 2017).

Laird (2017) finds that: 1) Even after controlling for education, occupation, and a host of other measurable factors associated with labor force attachment, significant racial and ethnic gaps exist in public sector employment probabilities, especially after the Great Recession. 2) Compared with the private sector, employment disparities are relatively narrow in the public sector, even after the Great



Recession, when nearly one-half of all state and local governments reported layoffs. Regardless of the state of the economy, racial and ethnic employment differences are attenuated in the public sector. 3) Compared with similarly situated whites and Hispanics, unemployed black workers from the public sector are the least likely to transition into private sector employment.

Having a better understanding of the findings will help to better analyze and understand the myth of “Job Security” in the Federal Government and whether there is any credence to its overall existence. More so, this research may prove that the “Job Security” of the public sector has weakened substantially for minority workers since the Great Recession, and should not be relied on as a fundamental factor by employment seekers looking into public service employment.

Another issue with public sector employment also deals with regional disparities. In this case, economically depressed geographic areas throughout the United States, and the competition or lack thereof between the public sector and private sector in that specific labor market. Colley and Brown (2015) looked at the phenomenon of regional disparities that occur across geographic and political borders in the United Kingdom, and if the public sector agencies play a role in regional development, or if their motives were more policy based rather than providing a social safety net. While this research was conducted in the United Kingdom, the social patterns and conclusions reached in this research can be applied to other first-world western governments, mainly the United States and its public sector infrastructure. The study sets the precedent that labor markets are socially regulated and that each labor market differs based on the industrial, political, economic, and social identity of said region, i.e. the geographic area’s prosperity is affected by how well it attracts capital investments (Colley & Brown, 2015).

A clear point here, is that geographic prosperity is affected by the government, and whether or not it chooses to establish a presence by providing physical and social infrastructure and creating a large public workforce (Colley & Brown, 2015). In essence, one can see a common pattern when it comes to finding the physical locations of the sum of 2.1 million federal workers. A large portion of these workers can be found in the D.C. metro area, the states of Virginia and Maryland, and most major metropolitan cities throughout the United States. One would be hard pressed to miss a federal agency and its hundreds of civil servants in areas like Philadelphia, New York City, Chicago, Huston, San Francisco, and everywhere in between.

Colley and Brown (2015), conclude that more public sector jobs are concentrated more in cities and dispersed outwards; as well as that the higher paying, better-quality jobs are often found in cities rather than rural areas. However, this is not to say that public sector employment in rural areas is of poorer quality when compared to the local labor market. In fact, the opposite is true. When public sector employment is established in rural areas or areas outside of cities, the public sector employment tends to be a better choice for stable income and steady work that helps to lift that region out of an economically depressed state when local public sector employees start to spend their money in the local economy (Colley & Brown, 2015). This phenomenon establishes one of the driving factors an individual may consider when seeking public sector employment; stewardship.

When one lives in an economically depressed area, and for whatever sociological/anthropological reasons people decide to stay in that area generation after generation, public sector employment has become a steady staple of good and reliable pay that helps people establish themselves firmly into

middle class when there are no other viable alternatives in a noncompetitive local labor market. However, there are other motives. One may also stay in those economically depressed areas and work in the public sector because they believe in the idealism of stewardship (Johnson, 2014). Stewardship is the belief of an individual who makes a promise to the public to carry out their business for the common good through the trust of the public (Johnson, 2014). Here, a public servant is one who forgoes the luxury of easy work and high pay because they are dedicated to the future of their community. This individual assumes the obligation of ensuring certain things occur in their community such as children learning to read, the safety of public transit, or even the defense of a nation (Johnson, 2014). One's dedication to public service goes beyond duty to country, and is rooted in a need to be stewards in communities.

### **Public Sector Pay**

Pay in the public sector varies greatly between local, state, and federal. Additionally, a gap exists between public sector and private sector pay. Within the public sector, specifically local and state, civil service statutes and collective bargaining agreements create rigidity and constraints to compensation, which creates the issue of attracting top talent (Schanzenbach, 2015). This means that compensation for performance is harder to achieve in the public sector rather than the private sector. There is also a disparity in laws and regulations where the private sector is free to set their employee policies as they see fit, so long as they stay within the confines of antidiscrimination laws, Fair Labor Standards Act, and general employment statutes (Schanzenbach, 2015).

The Federal government attempts to combat this issue by creating special pay charts specific to high-demand jobs such as Information Technology or Engineering, but they still pay less than the private sector in some instances (OPM, 2022). Because of this, there is an argument that individuals with lower skills or college degrees unrelated to the work they perform, tend to end up in public service, specifically at the state and local levels, thus creating a disparity in government performance and output (Schanzenbach, 2015). Schanzenbach (2015) clearly states that this research does not specifically address federal employee compensation, which is set at a premium and falls under very specific institutional structures. However, this research is important because it sets the precedent that private sector pay is free of certain constraints and is set higher than public sector pay, thus creating the issue for the public sector of attracting and retaining top talent.

When it comes to consumption and expenditures within the government, compensation is the largest portion with 60% representing the public sector wage bill (Gomes, 2015). According to Gomes (2015), statistically, 16% of all employees in the US work in the public sector, which drives the investigation into this research to find the links between public and private sectors in the labor market. With that, seeking optimal wages in the public sector has been a difficult task. Public sector wages need to mimic private sector wages because of fluctuations in the labor market, i.e. during a recession, people clamor for public sector employment due to the "job security" aspect, but during economic expansions, people clamor for private sector jobs because of the high pay (Gomes, 2015).

Gomes (2015) concludes that in order to reach optimal wages in the public sector, they should be reflective of wages in the private sector both in boom-and-bust cycles in the labor market. However, there is acknowledgment that public sector wages are far more rigid (Gomes, 2015). Public sector wages are set by political policy and law, thus making them more inflexible and difficult to change, especially

when the suggestion of fluidity with those wages would have them decrease during an economic crisis such as a recession in order to properly match the labor market and mirror the private sector (Gomes, 2015).

This research has alluded to several key aspects one needs to keep in mind when it comes to public sector wages. The first, is that wages are indeed set by laws and regulations. To be more specific, federal wages are set by several agencies within the Executive Branch and require presidential approval, for even just a cost-of-living adjustment. Second, federal wages are constantly competing with private sector wages. The labor market is a free-for-all when it comes to attracting top talent, and the government is not immune to losing potential applicants to private companies that pay double, even triple for the same exact work. Lastly, research indicates the reasons are political. There are politicians that favor federal workers and wish to give them the pay and perks equal to their private sector counterparts, and there are politicians that believe in less government and that half of the 2.1 million federal employees should be laid off and erase their jobs. Regardless, the government has become a business and needs to be competitive in the labor market so that it can provide top tier service to taxpayers and fellow citizens.

One way the Federal Government has compensated for the salary issue is by offering a level of stability and generous benefits (Guy and Ely, 2022). Where federal workers see the most bang for their buck is not when they start working or even throughout their career, but during retirement. The Federal Government offers its workers a blended retirement plan that consists of a pension, Thrift Savings Plan (TSP, more commonly understood as a civil servant 401(k) plan), and Social Security. Whereas their private sector counterparts often retire with just a 401(k) and maybe Social Security if they paid into it. The other benefit federal workers receive is that they can take their health insurance with them into retirement after having satisfied the five-year vesting requirements (Guy and Ely, 2022). Federal workers, if they so choose to retire early, can be free from worry when it comes to medical bills since they will have insurance at any age; whereas their private sector counterparts often cannot take their insurance with them when they leave the company, and only qualify for Medicare at age 65. The federal benefit plans are just one way that the government has attempted to compensate for the pay disparity in order to incentivize their workers into remaining in civil service for a life-long career (Guy and Ely, 2022).

Another way the Federal Government has approached this competitiveness with the private sector is through contracting, i.e., rather than trying to privatize the government, the government federalizes the private sector (Johnson, 2014). Contracting with the private sector has become a preferable method by the government when attempting to be as efficient as possible. One of the main ways relevant to this research is through defense contracts. Here, the DOD can find companies like Lockheed Martin or General Dynamics and give them a multi-billion-dollar contract to produce weapons and other military goods in the quickest and most efficient manner possible with as little bureaucracy as possible in order to meet the nation's defense needs (Johnson, 2014). And, once the contract is over, the government can cut ties with that company or renew. There is no obligation to keep those contractors employed.

A key issue with this is accountability. Since these contractors are not public servants, they are not stewards of their community, nor do they hold the same values, and oversight needs to be a main effort of the government, in this case, the DOD (Johnson, 2014). Failure of the government to maintain accountability, especially of DOD contractors, can have devastating effects on the battlefield when the

motives of the private sector are profit, the financial bottom line, and shareholder dividends. After all, who does the private sector serve, if not themselves? Whereas a DOD civilian serves the Warfighter. This is where organizational culture plays a significant role.

An agency's organizational culture consists of three parts: 1) Its mission, priorities, and world view. 2) Its goals, strategies, and philosophical views. 3) And, its artifacts, which consist of the visible products that symbolize everything it is made of (Johnson, 2014). The employees of that specific agency can then derive their identity from the organizational culture in which they work. But more than that, the government has the task of investing in the right people that not only have the right skills for the job, but also the organizational motives required of them to serve in that specific agency, i.e., the "right fit" (Johnson, 2014). So, even if an individual has the right motivation to work in a specific agency, if they don't have the specific skillset that the agency requires to accomplish its mission, then that individual fails in that service. However, should their motivation for public service remain, reevaluation of their skills or professional self-development is a possible approach to public service.

For example, if an individual is highly motivated to work for the government and they want to be in the US Army Corps of Engineers, it would behoove them to invest in their education and go to school for engineering in order to fit better into the organization they desire to serve. Depending on the needs of that agency, the government can help foot the bill for that individual's education because the government recognizes that skills can be taught, but motivation is an innate characteristic that is becoming harder to find (Johnson, 2014).

### **Human Resources Management**

Within civil service and the inner workings of bureaucratic government, there is a high level of importance imposed on human resource management (HRM) that the most valuable commodity to the government is its people in the form of human capital (Berman, et al., 2022). However, the burden of HRM lies with the manager themselves. In fact, HR managers will spend the majority of their time managing people since they (the managers) are responsible for the recruiting, hiring, firing, training, pay setting, compensating, appraising, and placing of an organization's peoples (Berman, et al., 2022). After all, if modern day government's big focus is on the right person at the right time in the right job, then the HR manager is the gatekeeper that enables those actions.

Herein lies the first HRM Paradox. On one hand everyone within the government agrees that people are indeed essential and the most precious commodity, yet within those same organizations, people are taken for granted, and treated as just cogs in the machine that are easily replaceable (Berman, et al., 2022). Where then does the problem exist? This leads into the second HR Paradox, which is that the breakdown in government performance is the result of incompetent employees, versus the belief that the system itself is evil and corrupted, thus making the incompetent workers victims of their circumstance (Berman, et al., 2022). The solution to this paradox resides within the HR manager themselves. The answer is cyclical. In order for HRM to be effective, good people lead to a good system with good intentions, therefore, good HR managers can make the difference when managing employees by ensuring the system remains good by hiring good people (this defeats the incompetence problem) that will in turn keep the system operating in a respectable manner (this defeats the evil system problem; Berman, et al., 2022).

How do managers attract top talent? The manager has to look at the current workforce. HR managers need to take note that the workforce is changing. The younger generations that will populate future applicant pools differ in career aspirations when compared to older generations currently employed. The newer generations are likely to change jobs often, display less loyalty to a singular organization, operate more independently, be more comfortable with advancing technology, juggle multiple projects at once, and seek a better work/life balance (Berman, et al., 2022). In essence, the younger generation of workers are looking for a sense of purpose and belonging so that they can derive meaning out of their work; rather, they want the work they do to mean something and be important (Berman, et al., 2022).

The solution that HR managers can use is the needs and wants of the younger generation to attract them to their organization. Civil service and the work of a public servant has purpose and meaning, and HR managers need to sell that to new applicants. Additionally, if potential new hires value work/life balance, use that as a tool to attract them. As an organization and a HR manager, offering things like paid parental leave and telework/remote work are viable options, so long as the agency can effectively carryout its mission (Berman, et al., 2022).

HR managers need to also be cautious when looking at the younger generation applicant pool. The best way to evaluate an applicant is threefold. First, job fit, which is evaluating a candidate to see if they can handle stress, show decisiveness, and a level of friendliness. Second, is character fit, which is checking to see if candidates show traits such as motivation, initiative, resilience, and self-discipline. The third, is organizational fit, which is evaluating a candidate's personality to see if it aligns with the values of the organization and if the candidate has a high level of passion for the work (Berman, et al., 2022). Some of the answers to these questions can be gleaned from an applicant's resume, but HR managers can get the full picture from an interview that is tailored around asking probing behavioral questions centered on the three types of "fit."

If an organization is experiencing high levels of turnover, one way they can be proactive to gain a better understanding of why this is happening is by incorporating retention-oriented stay interviews, which can help limit the need for exit interviews into their out-processing procedures (Berman, et al., 2022). Exit interviews (while a valuable tool) are often turned to as a triage method when turnover is unusually high. Unfortunately, by that point it is too late, and organizations are relying on hindsight by being reactive as opposed to proactive (Berman, et al., 2022). However, by utilizing stay interviews or anonymous surveys with open ended questions throughout a person's career along with exit interviews, an organization can track the lifecycle of their employees and make course adjustments along the way, so long as they are within reason and legal bounds (Berman, et al., 2022). The key here is to actually use the comments and suggestions from these surveys and interviews to implement change or root out problems early on in order to maintain employee satisfaction, limit turnover, and improve organizational efficiency in a seamless manner.

## **Analysis**

### **Critical Labor Theory**

A theoretical framework from the perspective of the DOD civilian worker that helps explain the phenomenon that is the allure of the public sector is rooted in Critical Social Theory with the focus on Labor, more commonly referred to as "work" (Dejours, et al., 2018). The theoretical framework

is simply referred to as Critical Labor Theory (CLT) in order to simplify the various tiers of theoretical terms within Critical Social Theory. The reason for choosing CLT is because the focus is on finding what intrinsic and extrinsic motivations influence people who want to work in civil service, specifically in the Department of Defense.

One example are the general intrinsic motivations people desire from their work that in turn yields their level of performance in the work place, in this case, serving one's country or the sense of service beyond the self (Modica, 2007). While workplace performance is an integral part of understanding, individual motivating factors related to individual output, deeper meaning and understanding needs to be acquired to gain insight into how they got to the point in the first place. That is, the researcher sought to better understand the initial motivating factor(s) that galvanized the individual to aspire to that level of specific work.

Dejours et al. (2018), explain that work matters a great deal to people for many reasons, most important of which is that it helps the individual relate to the world, others, and themselves in such a way that it directly affects one's quality of life and standing in society. In a capitalistic society, one's work is how they define themselves. The work (or lack thereof) that one does directly affects their physical, mental, and spiritual states as it relates to humans being social creatures (Dejours, et al., 2018). Work by this operational definition is to not be confused with employment or gender standards.

According to Alfred Marshall (1961), "labor is the exertion of mind or body undergone partly or wholly with a view to some good other than pleasure derived directly from work." Therefore, employment is a means to an end, but work is performed for the reason of "some good" (Dejours, et al., 2018). With that, one should also note that work is free of gender. Work is work. The constructs of male and female work are a false narrative created by society to force people into predefined gender roles in order to maintain control within a patriarchal society (Glenn, 1990). Those gender roles have been challenged and drastically shattered during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century within the United States (Glenn, 1990).

### **Theory X Versus Theory Y Assumptions**

There are also several theories of research on PSM, one which focuses on what draws individuals into public service and another that focuses on what makes them stay. These two theories focus on the perspective of the Human Resources Manager. These theories about the motivations affecting worker performance were developed by Douglas McGregor (1960) called the Theory X versus Theory Y assumptions. Here, the Theory X manager has preconceived notions about their workers that they are indolent, require close supervision on a micro-managing scale, and are only motivated by money to work (Guy and Ely, 2022). This leads to a top-down managing style. Whereas, the Theory Y manager believes that their workers are self-motivated, engage in personal development, and derive personal satisfaction from the work they perform (Guy and Ely, 2022). This leads to a management style where workers are more autonomous and given opportunities for developmental training and self-directed goal-setting (Guy and Ely, 2022).

Based on these theories, one can surmise that PSM can be extrinsically affected by the management and leadership within an agency. Theory Y managers are more critical to recruit a highly motivated

workforce, and retain an already well-trained cohort. Understanding that as a manager having power-over their workers is not as effective as having power-with their workers by engaging them in dialogue in order to solve problems and thus maintaining high levels of worker motivation (Guy and Ely, 2022). This makes perfect sense in the matter that when workers are treated as equals in the problem-solving process and their managers are more apt for collaboration, workers are then empowered to have a stake in the agency.

## **Two Factor Theory**

Everyone is not motivated by the same types of things (Guy and Ely, 2022). Frederick Herzberg's (1959) Two Factor Theory opposes hierarchical needs and assumes that job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are independent factors (Guy and Ely, 2022). This theory is composed of Hygiene Factors and Motivators. Hygiene Factors are the things in a work place that don't necessarily motivate a worker, but their absence is often grounds for workers to leave the job (Guy and Ely, 2022). Examples include pay, benefits, safe working conditions, and competent supervisors. Motivators are factors that get employees engaged to perform beyond the minimal expectations (Guy and Ely, 2022). Examples of this are awards, recognition, personal growth, and job advancement opportunities.

While the absence of Hygiene Factors is cause for employees to leave a job, absence of Motivators are not necessarily grounds for a worker to seek out new employment, but the lack of Motivators in a workplace tend to hinder productivity and efficiencies to detrimental effects (Guy and Ely, 2022). A lack of proper Motivators is often a contributing factor as to why an agency fails to meet the public's expectation of efficient government.

## **“Red Tape” in Public Administrative Theory**

Within Public Administrative Theory a hindrance to the attractiveness of public service from the perspective of the Millennial Generation is the concept of “red tape” (Bozeman and Feeney, 2015). The phrase “red tape” has become a catchall used by individuals to describe the pitfalls and archaic rules instilled by a bureaucratic institution when efficiency and common sense are hindered (Bozeman and Feeney, 2015). However, not all “red tape” is bad, in fact, it is sometimes necessary. These rules were put in place to balance efficiency and inflexibility. Too many rules, and the agency becomes rigid and slow, too few rules, and the agency spins out of control (Bozeman and Feeney, 2015). There is also the belief that “red tape” was designed as an accountability mechanism to check and balance the power of public officials when the voters cannot hold them accountable (Bozeman and Feeney, 2015).

The redundancies and inefficiency of “red tape” was a purposeful design. That's not to say that a rule that once made sense in a certain time and place has continued to be useful. In fact, if rules and regulations aren't regularly reviewed for effectiveness and purpose, they can grow into a hindrance. If they do become an issue, there are usually two paths an agency can follow. They can either sit down and revise, edit, or delete the rule, or they can simply ignore it depending on the severity of the outcome for doing so (Bozeman and Feeney, 2015). For example, if an agency has an old rule that says all conference notes need to be hand written on carbon paper so copies can be sent to directors and stored in the archives, but this rule was enacted prior to the invention of the

photocopier or even the laptop computer, the agency is capable of ignoring that rule in favor of using a laptop to take down the notes or even just writing the notes on regular paper and making a photocopy as needed (Bozeman and Feeney, 2015).

In contrast, the hiring process in most government agencies is slow when compared to the private sector. The reasoning is to protect employees and agencies from political interference, which is also in line with the firing of government employees and why it takes a long time in order to counteract political retribution (Bozeman and Feeney, 2015). “Red tape” also affects PSM and the citizenry that contemplate public service. People are often dissuaded from wanting to work for the government due to the bureaucratic nature of the work and the hindrance on creativity (Bozeman and Feeney, 2015). This could explain why so few Millennials are lining up for government work when compared to Baby Boomers and Gen Xers.

## Final Thoughts

It is clear that the public sector is a multifaceted conglomerate of agencies and institutions, each with their own unique mission, beliefs, and traditions. When it comes to trying to understand the public sector, the key is to know that civil service has become ingrained within US culture and the lives of its citizenry. While there are cries for smaller government, once it is acknowledged how vital the government is and exactly what it does, the citizenry can be inspired to join the ranks (Gates, 2016). If a private company fails, or can no longer attract top talent and must shutter its doors, 90% of the time the world will continue on with the impact being reduced and only being felt by a few (Guy and Ely, 2022). In this case, the employees of that private company and the people who either benefitted from or enjoyed their specific product or service.

However, when a government agency fails or is shut down because it fails to attract top talent, everyone is affected by it and feels the ramifications in some form or fashion (Guy and Ely, 2022). For example, if the DOD were to fail as an agency, millions beyond just the federal employees would be affected. The entire Armed Forces would fail to meet their commitments to defend and protect the United States from its enemies as well as millions of contract workers at private firms that rely on government contracts shutting down or drastically reducing staff (Gates, 2016). Unemployment would be rampant and the nation would be defenseless.

While that is an extreme outcome, the point is made that the DOD needs to continue to attract workers that not only can do the job, but want to do the job. While there is a generational shift in attitude away from the public service of previous generations, the want and need for some kind of service in general is just as strong if not stronger in the Millennial Generation (Ng, et al., 2016). One can make the argument that the DOD has a sort of branding issue when attracting talent. On average, the typical DOD worker is in their mid to late 40s, white, considered middle class, and may have a military background or familiarity with the military (i.e., a parent, sibling, or child has served; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Most DOD facilities operate on the fringes of cities or in very remote locations, which dictates a commute of some sort often not from public transit typically associated with inner cities (Colley and Brown, 2015). There is also a severe lack of minority representation amongst the greater DOD workforce, which can hinder recruitment efforts if the applicant pool is focused on primarily one ethnic



group (Laird, 2017). Rather, the culture of the organization only attracts one type of worker. This is a problem of exclusivity, which can be the result of unconscious bias.

Another key issue is that someone may be ready and willing to join the public sector, and perhaps they have romanticized the DOD as a sort of dream job, but the issue becomes, do they have the right organizational fit (Johnson, 2014)? Just because someone dreams of being in this agency, doesn't necessarily mean they are qualified to work there. However, should someone do their due diligence and prepare for their role in public service, it'll be much easier for them to enter the workforce.

In this case, top talent comes with a variety of understanding. Top talent can be in the form of education (Gates, 2016). Perhaps the position or role that needs to be filled is that of a specific type of engineer that requires specialized schooling. Top talent can also be rare experiences (Gates, 2016). Within the DOD, this could be someone who studied and lived amongst a specific nation that is no longer friendly with the US. That life experience can be invaluable to the DOD because that individual has a unique insight into the culture and lifestyle of a new or old enemy. The experience can also be military training (Gates, 2016). Who better to help create, design, or implement a new weapon system, or defense system than someone who has seen combat or been in a unique situation where they dreamed about a weapon that could be useful in that specific instance. A perfect example is Israel's Iron Dome. Who better to design and implement an anti-air defense system other than people who face daily rocket attacks from their enemies and neighbors? When top talent is the topic of discussion, it has to be understood that it can come in many different forms.

### **Ethical Implication and Values of the Public Servant**

Regardless of which government agency one decides to work for, individuals have to have a set of values they either align with the agency they choose to work in, or that they will adopt from the agency and their peers. However, there is no clean-cut list of values within the public sector due to the fact that the list of values is just as vast as the number of agencies within the Federal Government, of which, each has their own unique set of values that are coherent with their mission (Box, 2015). Box (2015) has been able to group certain values together and created five broad values that encompass public service as a whole. Values that civil servants need in order to maintain the public trust between citizens and their government. He lists the values as *Neutrality*, *Efficiency*, *Accountability*, *Public Service (Personal Commitment)*, and *The Public Interest*.

*Neutrality* in public service is the idea that the nonelected members of governmental agencies are supposed to be neutral in their political beliefs and personal beliefs while in the service of the country (Box, 2015). Regardless of whether the President is a Democrat or a Republican, public servants carry out the orders of those appointment and elected above them without personal feelings or beliefs questioning their authority. Similarly, if one works in a government agency that serves the public, for example the Social Security Administration, then the public servant serves every citizen equally regardless of their race, sex, religion, creed, etc. even if they are in contrast to their own beliefs.

*Efficiency and Accountability* follow similar aspects, that as a public servant, one is charged with performing their duties in such a manner that they avoid fraud, waste, and abuse of both public tax dollars and the public trust (Box, 2015). *Public Service* and *The Public Interest* are one's personal commitment to the service of others and country, but also to the belief that as a public servant, one is

entrusted with the task of ensuring that they are selfless in their service and purposely trying to make their communities a better place for all rather than preserving the status quo (Box, 2015).

In contrast to this, Stahl (2023) argues that public servants need to show up with a predetermined list of attributes necessary to be successful in public service in the forms of: *idealism, altruism, pragmatism, receptivity, moral courage, perseverance, and resilience*. Generally speaking, public servants need to be *idealistic* about the services they provide; *altruistic* on how to deliver that service; *pragmatic* and *perseverant* on the most efficient way to get it to the intended beneficiary; the *moral courage* to resist doubts and oppositions to delivering that service; be *receptive* to new approaches and ideas that aid in problem solving; and have the *resilience* to overcome the obstacles that would otherwise prevent one's service to the public from occurring (Stahl, 2023). To sum it up, a public servant can have a myriad of values dependent upon the type of work they perform in public service, but if they don't already have these attributes in some manner, they will most likely fail being effective public servants, which can have dire consequences concerning their ethical implications.

The reason public servants are held to these high moral standards and levels of efficiency is because of the positions they hold. Civil servants have the authority to affect change within our society. If they do not possess the moral character necessary to be held to such high standards, the fear is that they will abuse the power entrusted to them by the people, and as such, could act in illegal or unethical ways that cause more harm than good to the community (Kennedy and Shultz, 2011). The United States is unique in this sense because we as a people have imbued our belief system into our laws directly from two documents that we as Americans hold most sacred; the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution (Kennedy and Shultz, 2011).

These documents are at their core the value system of the United States, and serve as the basis for all who answer the call to service whether military, elected, appointed, or civil in the government. Public servants (nonelected/non-appointed) are not in a position to make ethical judgements over the content or scope of policy nor are they to render judgement upon the citizenry they vow to serve (Kennedy and Schultz, 2011). The level of neutrality is meant to be maintained, ensuring that public servants render service in the guise of public interest through the policy created by their elected officials who are voted into power by the populace.

This creates a cyclical effect within the community because public servants are also part of the constituency, and have every right to vote or even run for public office outside of their official duties while in the service of the public. If a public servant isn't happy with the policy that they are entrusted with carrying out, they can effect change by running for office themselves and influence the policy making. In fact, this is encouraged in order to bring diversity into the system. Diversity in the cognitive realm, such as diversity of opinions and attitudes, i.e., viewpoint diversity (Kennedy and Shultz, 2011). In fact, this type of diversity is what makes public service in the United States so unique and different from other systems around the world.

## Policy Recommendations

As it is, the DOD is already a behemoth within the Federal Government. However, the days of conventional warfare are quickly fading and future wars are going to be won through technology. Million-man armies with thousands of vehicles and other equipment that needs to be fielded and serviced are shrinking exponentially. Individual Soldiers wearing millions of dollars-worth of

technological equipment and unmanned vehicles that are remote controlled or piloted by artificial intelligence are the future (Cancian, 2021). Therefore, the DOD needs to prioritize its hiring, specifically in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. Scientists, engineers, software technicians, and mechanics of every kind are going to be the skill set necessary to keep the US ahead of everyone else in this evolving age of warfighting. How, then, does one attract these highly coveted professionals into public service when the private sector has become equally competitive in recruiting them with much more generous salaries and incentives?

The simple answer is that the DOD doesn't need to do much, at least in the creativity department. One of the simplest solutions is to recruit from the military. Recruiting veterans that have the knowledge, skills, and abilities from the training they receive in the service can lay the foundation for their post service careers (Carter, et al., 2017). They can continue to serve in the civilian capacity doing work they have already been trained to do on the uniformed services side. They can also bring in unique perspectives from their time in the field or combat situations that are invaluable lessons that many nonservice member civilians wouldn't be able to understand (Carter, et al., 2017).

Currently, the Federal Government already offers generous benefits packages and coveted retirement plans (OPM, 2022). Other incentives include student loan repayment programs (when available), paid parental leave, and certain tuition incentives for current workers that pursue higher education that is aligned with the agency's future goals (if offered). One solution can be to increase these incentives. While increasing wages is a herculean task within the Federal Government, incentive programs can be generous up front and pay dividends down the road. Unfortunately, the private sector has also caught on to this plan and is offering similar, if not more competitive, incentives (Berman, et al., 2022). Combine that with higher wages to start with in the private sector for these specialized positions and we can see part of the recruiting struggles that not only face the DOD, but the entire Federal Government as a whole (DBB, 2022).

To overcome the private sector hurdle, the DOD can focus on education. A bipartisan piece of legislation attached to a defense spending bill can be a viable option. Earmarking a specific dollar amount for education incentives based on the number of specialized workers they are looking to hire in that fiscal year could be a smart start. While the current Millennial Generation is already actively engaged in the workforce, they are also considered the most educated generation with also the largest amount of student debt (Ng, et al., 2016). Because of this, the younger generation, Gen Z, has been dissuaded from attending college as they have seen their parents and older siblings struggle with student loans and college degrees deemed useless in the job market (Berman, et al., 2022).

Gen Z is the audience the DOD needs to attract, and the Millennials are the ones they need to retain. By offering full tuition reimbursement for specific STEM degrees, they can hire in student workers that attend college, work part-time for the DOD, and never pay a penny for school but in fact receive a paycheck during the whole ordeal. This program exists and is called the Pathways Program, but it is limited (Gates, 2016). The program is limited by the number of vacancies and positions that are available to fill. Expansion of the program and prioritizing STEM vacancies is crucial to future success (Gates, 2016). Additionally, putting in a clause about a dedicated number

of years of service after completion of the program can ensure low turnover, essentially continued service education agreements.

Another avenue to consider is reskilling and upskilling current employees. Many DOD workers are happy to remain in a job for decades until retirement, but the relevance of positions over time can fade (DBB, 2022). For example, a mechanic that is trained on the maintenance and repair of a specific weapons system or series is relevant as long as that system remains relevant. To counteract irrelevance, the DOD needs to offer upskilling incentives to retrain that worker on company time and the company dime (DBB, 2022). Forcing a worker to upskill and reskill on their own time outside of working hours and out of their own pocket sends a message to current workers that they are not valued and signals to future workers that they need to already come into the DOD trained and educated, otherwise they serve no purpose (Berman, et al., 2022).

In addition to that, upskilling is also a prudent recommendation for the DOD to undertake, specifically in STEM. Investment in that field will keep the DOD relevant for generations. An example of why this is relevant was during the supply chain shortage between 2020-2022 that disrupted the microchip market. The CHIPS and Science ACT of 2022 was the first step to counteracting that disruption, but the DOD needs to also invest in its own infrastructure to make its own chips for military equipment and vehicles (Cancian, 2021). That level of internal compartmentalizing only makes sense when the alternative has been relying on foreign allies to manufacture the chips for us.

Taking that unknown out of the equation and having that technology manufactured inhouse helps keep the military operating independently and unabated during times of crisis and emergency. Thus, creating the opportunity for current DOD civilians to approach the opportunity for upskilling. Now, with this incentive, the DOD can build its own facilities that specialize in the manufacturing of this future technology. It can then invest in its current workforce (who are already DOD civilians with the dedication and organizational goals in mind) to go get trained and educated on this future technology and continue to provide relevant contributions to the future of the agency (DBB, 2022).

Making these investments now in the current workforce will also help the DOD project future requirements. Investing in the current staff is the first step, the second is projecting long-term fills. Turnover is an issue every employer needs to handle whether in the public or private sectors. One way to counteract this is to hire workers with potential (DBB, 2022). Rather than holding out for workers that already have five years of experience and two graduate degrees to fill a vacancy, the DOD can focus on hiring candidates who show potential and will fit the organizational culture (Johnson, 2014). As the agency is investing in reskilling and upskilling, other forms of training should be the priority that begin to focus on the upskilling and reskilling in current training.

Currently, the DOD invests more money for job related training for uniformed services than it does for civilian workers (DBB, 2022). This is a cultural shift that the DOD needs to consider in order to stay relevant. If the DOD hires candidates with potential, regardless of their skill set or background, they can make the investment into their education and training. In turn, the DOD can control for many unknowns. They can ensure that the education the employee is receiving is aligned with the agency's needs, and that the training they are receiving on the job is completely

relevant and vital to future success. They can educate and train them their way, or rather the way they need them trained.

Finally, one of the most important recommendations is shifting the agency culture into the Twenty-first Century. Much of the DOD culture, what many would deem the Military Industrial Complex, is an organization that was conceived from the second World War, and was forged during the 45 plus years of the Cold War (Gates, 2016). Organizational culture and military culture were focused on conventional warfare between two superpowers. However, after the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s and the shift towards the War on Terror post 9/11, the battlefield has changed, but the organization and its culture are still operating as in previous centuries (Gates, 2016).

The Twenty-first Century is a new era of unconventional warfare and rapidly expanding technological feats. The world has shrunk, and many enemies no longer wear a uniform or fly a nation's flag. The organization as a whole, needs to adjust now while the environment affords them the luxury of time to do so. The time for change is not after the next big global event occurs or the next war breaks out, the time for change is now so the agency can get ahead of it. The best way to do this is to invest in people (DBB, 2022). While the world of automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are here, people are still the greatest asset the DOD has when it comes to innovation. The DOD needs to break from the old mindset that workers are just cogs in a wheel and are replaceable, or only as valuable as the job they perform. Rather, the DOD needs to recognize that when its workers are well versed in STEM-related topics, the creativity and problem-solving skills they bring to the table are far more valuable than just being a worker drone (DBB, 2022).

## Summary

The Federal Government is the single largest employer within the United States, with the Department of Defense as the single largest agency (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). A 3.1 million combination of civilian workers, military personnel, and contractors along with an annual budget that averages 800 billion plus or minus, makes the DOD one of the most advanced places to work (DBB, 2022). The civilian workforce alone comprises roughly 750,000 individuals working alongside their military counterparts and fulfilling the DOD's mission of defending the homeland and supporting the warfighter abroad. On average, 1/3 of that civilian workforce are veterans, who transition from uniformed service right into civilian service in the same field (Carter, et al., 2017).

Demographically, the average DOD worker is in their 40s, white, middleclass, and has some level of collegiate or trade work education that provides a specific skillset or experience to overall function of an organization (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Most facilities are located either adjacent to a major metropolitan area or in a geographically rural part of the country, and the primary recruitment pool is the local populace (Colley and Brown, 2015).

Areas of concern come both from the economic state of the country, and the geographic areas where DOD facilities are located. The economic state of the country is important since defense is one of the largest bills the country foots. On average, the defense spending of the United States is ten times larger than that of our next closest ally (Gates, 2016). Recruiting and retention within the military are also

affected by the economy. Quite simply, when the economy is doing great and people are making money hand over fist in the private sector, the appeal of military service (and in this case public service) diminishes (Cancian, 2021). However, when the economy is in a bust cycle and people are desperate for work, military recruitment increases, triggering the need for DOD support to increase and funding to increase (Cancian, 2021). This phenomenon occurred during the Great Recession when it coincided with the troop surge of 2008.

A significant increase in military personnel, combined with a negative economic downturn, saw an increase in DOD civilian hiring in order to meet the demands of the war effort in Iraq and Afghanistan. When the war ends and troops are discharged, there are political calls to “trim the fat” so to speak, and that comes in the form of cutting excessive defense spending (Gates, 2016). This action creates a conundrum for the DOD because now more than ever they need to be highly selective about who they hire and when they hire, since they have to justify their budget every year before Congress.

The DOD stresses the need to be in a constant state of readiness, often equated to keeping the “spear sharp” or other analogies that equate to maintaining the highest levels of efficiency at all times, should the need for immediate action occur (Gates, 2016). This is partly because military buildup takes a significant amount of time, money, and energy to accomplish. The need to strike hard and fast combined with the need to equip troops with the latest and greatest military equipment, in both the name of safety and lethality, keeps the defense budget elevated. It also requires an army of civilian maintainers that work on that equipment throughout its lifespan, especially the more complicated the equipment and technology, the greater the need for highly educated and trained civilian employees to both create and sustain its use (Cancian, 2021).

The geographic areas that the DOD decides on for their offices and facilities are deliberately chosen for a list of reasons, but that can have a draw back when it comes to hiring top talent. Sometimes, DOD facilities will pick remote locations out of the way for safety and privacy reasons (Guy and Ely, 2022). Sometimes cities and towns will pop up around a facility over the natural course of time. Sometimes, facilities are co-located within or near a city or town because of its strategic position on the map or access to resources and infrastructure (Gates, 2016). Not every military facility performs the same function; some are training bases; some are research and test sites; others are hubs for global deployment. And others are strictly defensive positions within the nation or ally countries.

The type of facility will also dictate the talent required by the civilian corps it hires on to meet specific mission needs. For example, a military base that specializes in weapons research and development will most likely require engineers and scientists to be the bulk of their workforce. Other facilities such as depots serve a different function, usually in the form of maintenance, repair, and production. Thus, requiring different talent in the form of mechanics, technicians, and electronics workers.

The geographic area then becomes important because this is where the majority of the local applicant pool will come from when needing to fill positions (Colley and Brown, 2015). A typical military facility tends to be one of the largest single employers in a region providing thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars or more into the local economy (Guy and Ely, 2022). If a military facility is located near a well-developed city with an abundance of educational institutes, the chances of drawing in top talent is high, so long as local competition in similar fields is minimal (Gates, 2016).

However, if a military facility is on the fringes of society in remote locations, or in an area that is economically depressed, top talent becomes a scarce resource (Johnson, 2014). For example, if a town is struggling with its literacy rate and high school dropout numbers are at an all-time high with no prospects for post-secondary education, then the DOD is going to struggle to recruit highly trained and specialized workers from the local talent pool. Failure to attract top talent for a specific mission or project can have political ramifications (Johnson, 2014). If a DOD facility is failing to meet the high needs and demands put upon it, funding for that facility can easily be reallocated by Congress, thus leading to a Base Realignment And Closure (BRAC). If an already struggling geographic area was having a hard time, a military facility shuttering its doors and pulling out tends to worsen the socioeconomic environment of that area.

The final consideration is the type of talent an organization is attracting. Just because a candidate is a qualified engineer or technician, doesn't necessarily mean that they are the most qualified for the job if their identity doesn't fit the organizational culture (Johnson, 2014). The DOD tends to find civilian employees who have served in the military, with roughly 1/3 of the DOD workforce comprised of veterans (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

These individuals have already demonstrated through their service in the Armed Forces that they are prone to patriotism and display the necessary stewardship for public service (Johnson, 2014). On top of that, they are already familiar with the inner workings of the DOD, the culture, the mission, and the little idiosyncrasies that make it unique. Often, when they hang up their uniform and are discharged from service, they get right back into working for the DOD either as a civilian or contractor (Cancian, 2021). This is because they have firsthand experience and knowledge about the specific equipment, procedures, and processes as well as already having displayed their motivation for service that a hiring manager desires in a new hire. All of the puzzle pieces are present when trying to understand why someone prefers public service, but putting them in the right order seems to be a difficult task in some agencies.

The DOD is about to face a staffing crisis of sorts with the current Baby Boomer Generation and Gen Xers that predominate the middle and upper management positions, which teeter on the cusp of retiring en masse (Ng, et al., 2016). This will create a brain drain of decades worth of knowledge and experience. The Millennial Generation and Gen Z is on the forefront to replace the older generation and become the new leaders within the DOD. However, there is a recruiting shortfall when it comes to attracting top talent within these generations (DBB, 2022). Much of the younger generation have different values and demands of the organization that differ greatly from their predecessors (Berman, et al., 2022). Things like work/life balance, paid parental leave, and finding purpose or meaning in their work are at the top of the list. The DOD as an organization needs to adapt to the changing recruitment climate in order to attract the most talented workers; workers who are also being courted by the private sector and nonprofit organizations.

One way the DOD can stay competitive in the market for top talent is twofold. First, the DOD needs to invest in their current workforce through reskilling and upskilling their workers that serve in positions becoming quickly obsolete in the ever-evolving world of technology (DBB, 2022). Second, the DOD needs to offer on the job training and pay for the education of future recruits that have potential and fit well within the organization (Gates, 2016). Investing in STEM education and training is the way the DOD stays innovative, competitive, and relevant in the current market climate. Having a workforce that not only understands STEM, but can also innovate with it, will

attract some of the best talent the country has to offer. By investing early and leading with human capital, the DOD can compete with other countries that have already done the same (Berman, et al., 2022). This mindset will require a complete overhaul of the organization, both physically and philosophically.

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