PERCEPTIONS OF DEIA, JOB SATISFACTION, AND LEADERSHIP AMONG U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	The quantitative comparative ex post facto research study covered in this paper aims to fill gaps in the literature by focusing on whether gender influences perceptions of leadership; diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA); and job satisfaction among federal employees within the Department of Justice using empirical data. The study also explores whether there are relationships between the perception of leadership and job satisfaction and the perception of DEIA and job satisfaction.
Background	Since 2002, the United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has administered the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), which measures employee perceptions of whether and to what extent successful organizational conditions exist in their agencies. Areas currently assessed within the FEVS include training, job satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, management effectiveness, work-life balance, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.
	The exploration of variations in perceptions of leadership, DEIA efforts, and job satisfaction among U.S. federal employees by gender and other criteria are crucial areas for research that are underrepresented in the literature. This is not only important for the United States federal government, which is grappling with high attrition rates, but also for public administrations around the world.

Methodology	A quantitative ex post facto research design was used to analyze data from responses of U.S. federal employees working for the Department of Justice. Leadership, job satisfaction, and DEIA were all measured using aggregate scores from pre-determined question sets. Differences based on gender were analyzed using t-tests. Additionally, chi-squares and Spearman's rank correlations were employed in order to explore whether there is a relationship between the perception of leadership and job satisfaction and the perception of DEIA efforts and job satisfaction among U.S. federal government workers.
Contribution	The findings of this study aid in providing empirical data to support the need for federal government leadership to understand the impact of employees' perceptions on their willingness to continue working in the federal government. The research study was grounded in Public Service Motivation Theory, which centers around factors that motivate individuals to pursue and maintain careers in the public service sector. More specifically, this study supported the public service motivation theory in that it looked at gender as a mitigating factor in public service motivation as well as explored the role of leadership and DEIA as a correlating factor to job satisfaction.
	The results of this research have practical implications for federal government leaders interested in increasing employee motivation and retention and who should be considering the range of sociocultural and demographic characteristics that have been found in the research to impact employee perceptions and experiences.
Findings	The analyses found differences in perceptions of leadership, DEIA, and job satisfaction among United States Federal Government employees based on gender. Additionally, perceptions of leadership and DEIA were both found to influence job satisfaction. The first research question explored in this study used a t-test to consider whether the perception of leadership among U.S. federal employees differed based on participant gender with significance found. The second research question examined whether the perceived job satisfaction of U.S. federal employees differed based on gender, with statistical significance detected. The third research question focused on whether perception of DEIA differed when gender was explored and the results of the t-test indicated a significant difference in perceptions of DEIA when gender was considered. The fourth research question considered the relationship between the perception of leadership and job satisfaction. A Chi-square and a Spearman Rank Correlation were performed, and a relationship was found to exist. Research question five explored whether a relationship exists between the perception of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives and job satisfaction, with significance found following a chi-square and a Spearman rank correlation.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Leadership behaviors of managers and the existence of DEIA policies play a critical role in employees' job satisfaction and commitment. The recommendations for organizational leadership in the public service sector include addressing gender inequality in work practices and environments and cultivating more inclusive organizational cultures.
Recommendations for Researchers	The lack of inclusion of socio-cultural norms in the research on public service motivation is a gap that has yet to be sufficiently addressed and is an area of research that should be explored.

Impact on Society	Research on public service motivation in local, state, national, and international government employment can aid organizations in developing strategies for improving recruitment, selection, and retention in public service organizations. This information can advance scientific knowledge on transforming management and leadership practices across sectors.
Future Research	Future research can expound on what has been done here by examining in more detail how various identities, and more specifically intersecting identities, within the LGBTQIA+ community as well as other historically marginalized groups, impact such factors as perceptions of leadership, job satisfaction, employee motivation and retention, and work-life balance. Perceptions of specific DEIA initiatives should also be further explored.
Keywords	employee motivation, FEVS, job satisfaction, public service employee satisfaction, DEI, DEIA, leadership, federal government, public service motivation, gender and job satisfaction, leadership and job satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Understanding how public administrations function and differ around the world is crucial for identifying the drivers of successful government organizations (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Schuster et al., 2023). Moreover, conducting post hoc analyses and sharing survey data across countries can enable scholars to understand how sociodemographic factors vary and impact motivation, job satisfaction, and/or perceptions of leadership (Schuster et al., 2023). Observing and comparing results can assist government organizations that have a pressing need to satisfy employee expectations and increase motivation and job satisfaction so they can recruit and maintain a diverse workforce (Bates, 2016).

Diversity in public service is a topic of great concern across the globe as research shows that diversification of public organizations improves the capacity to deliver services to the increasingly disparate populations being aided (Sabharwal et al., 2018). The multi-national Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) explains that diversity in government – which they clarify as having a workforce comprised of people from a mixture of values, backgrounds, perspectives, and competencies – helps achieve social mobility, equity, and quality in service delivery and is dependent on strong and committed leadership (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). Further, the research shows that inclusive work environments are critical predictors of higher productivity and job commitment (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Sabharwal, 2014; Sabharwal et al., 2018) that improve decision quality and performance (Pitts & Towne, 2015; Sabharwal et al., 2018).

Government agencies in the United States are particularly motivated to recruit and maintain a more diverse workforce (Bates, 2016). The United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) explains "Diversity and inclusion increase an agency's capacity to serve and protect people who have different experiences or backgrounds and enhance its ability to be receptive to different traditions and ideas" (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2024). Furthermore, studies such as Moon and Christensen (2020) and Choi (2013) conducted on the U.S. government workforce have found that a diverse climate positively correlates with organizational performance.

It is well known that equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) individuals in the United States has advanced unevenly, with half of the states lacking inclusive anti-discrimination policies that protect employees based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Cech & Rothwell, 2020). Meanwhile, many LGBTQIA+ individuals seek employment in the United States Federal Government, which has issued a number of directives aimed at increasing LGBTQIA+ recruitment, retention, and representation that have resulted in the number of LGBTQIA+ identifying workers increasing from less than 2% in 2015 to over 7% in 2022 (McCullough, 2023). Further, research has shown that LGBTQIA+ inclusion is linked to stronger

economies; however, more research on the needs and perceptions of LGBTQIA+ workers is needed, with transgender populations commonly omitted from the research (Cech & Rothwell, 2020; Williams Institute, 2014).

As of September 2021, there were 2,021,972 United States federal employees (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2023), and the attrition rate for fiscal year 2021 was 6.1%, up from 5.5% in fiscal year 2020 (Friedman, 2022). Further, in 2021, the attrition rate was 14.5% for General Schedule (GS) 1-4 employees who fall at the bottom of the 15-grade GS system and 8.7% for GS 5-7 employees, both above the 6.1% government-wide average (Friedman, 2022). Finally, just 7% of the federal workforce is currently under the age of 30, while at the same time, 15% of federal employees are eligible to retire today, a number that will double to 30% in the next five years (Partnership for Public Service, 2022). Research also highlights that women, in particular, have been exiting the federal workforce in larger numbers and have cited reasons such as lack of employee engagement, low job satisfaction, and decreased work-life balance for leaving the government (Partnership for Public Service, 2022).

The United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) serves as the human capital management office for the United States federal government. Responsibilities include training and development, research, compensation and benefits, and recruitment and retention (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2020). Since 2002, the OPM has administered the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), which measures employee perceptions of whether and to what extent successful organizational conditions exist in their agencies. Areas assessed within the FEVS include training, job satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, management effectiveness, work-life balance, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2023). OPM releases the data files of the FEVS annually for public use so that researchers can identify the latest trends in the data and inform federal leaders on ways to improve the quality of work for employees.

The exploration of variations in perceptions of leadership, DEI efforts, and job satisfaction among U.S. federal employees by gender and other criteria are crucial areas for research that are underrepresented in the literature (Moon & Jung, 2018). This is important not only for the United States federal government, which is grappling with high attrition rates but also for public administrations around the world (Schuster et al., 2023). The quantitative comparative ex post facto research study covered in this paper aims to fill gaps in the literature by focusing on gender perceptions of leadership, DEIA, and job satisfaction among federal employees within the Department of Justice using empirical data from the FEVS. It also explores whether there are relationships between the perception of leadership and job satisfaction and the perception of DEIA and job satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizations with effective leadership are more likely to recruit and retain high-quality employees, increasing job satisfaction and reducing employee turnover (DeLay & Clark, 2020). Accordingly, the relationship between leadership, supervisors, and subordinates can influence job satisfaction, employee motivation, and retention (Chen et al., 2020; Usman, 2019). Further, the leadership behaviors of managers play a critical role in employees job satisfaction and commitment (S. Miao et al., 2020; Mosadeghrad & Ferdosi, 2013; Wu et al., 2006) with a number of studies linking perception of leadership to employee job satisfaction (Mickson & Anlesinya, 2020). For example, Mosadeghrad and Ferdosi (2013) focused on the role of leadership and job satisfaction, whereas the researchers applied a cross-sectional study using self-administered questionnaires, finding a strong correlation between the two factors. Similarly, Q. Miao et al. (2017) examined job and leadership satisfaction in China, concluding that entrepreneurial leadership focused on promoting innovation positively influences public service employees' feelings of motivation and empowerment.

Demircioglu's (2021) research addressed the mediating effect of autonomy and innovation and employee satisfaction in Australia using self-determination theory as a framework. The researcher analyzed empirical data from the 2010–2011 Australian State of the Service Report by applying structural equation modeling and finding a positive relationship between bottom-up innovation and job and employee satisfaction.

Mallinson and Burns' (2019) research on employee motivation focused on the theory of self-efficacy and employee motivation in the public service sector. The authors analyzed career efficacy and decision confidence related to career counseling and training to prepare individuals for careers in public service. They concluded that developing a collaborative environment with training and preparation opportunities can increase career efficacy and the likelihood of pursuing a career in public service, thus transferring the training into a real, substantive career opportunity (Mallinson & Burns, 2019).

Examinations that have focused on gender have concluded that there are gender differences in how workplaces are assessed, with women placing more value on social factors than on skill utilization and career prospects (García-Bernal et al., 2005; Masa'deh et al., 2019; Oshagbemi, 2000). A Spanish study (García-Bernal et al., 2005) found that job satisfaction is determined by four factors: economic aspects, interpersonal relations, working conditions, and personal fulfillment; however, gender influences the degree to which each dimension has an impact on perception. Further, a 2019 paper published in the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management* (Masa'deh et al., 2019) based on research conducted in Malaysia found significant gender differences in perception of the impact of knowledge management on job satisfaction more so than by age, experience, and rank. The authors postulated that their findings may be due to the fact that the gender of employees is related to the way in which information is processed as well as how employees interact with each other, which in turn influences the perception of the work environment.

Moon and Jung (2018) analyzed the role of gender and racial representation of management on employee job satisfaction within the United States federal government. The authors hypothesized that demographic relationships between organizational leaders and their direct reports positively predict organizational operations. Data from the 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 FEVS were analyzed to conduct a longitudinal analysis of specific survey response categories. According to the findings, gender has a positive effect on job satisfaction and employee turnover intention. The authors recommended future research, including using a more recent data set, limiting the scope of the study to specific agencies, and using more survey questionnaire items to encompass more dimensions of job satisfaction (Moon & Jung, 2018).

Kim (2005) used data from a survey of 5,128 public employees in the Seoul Metropolitan Government to indicate that women are more satisfied with their jobs than men. Among demographic variables, gender was the only significant predictor of job satisfaction. Puente and Sánchez-Sánchez (2020) had similar findings following a study that explored differences in job satisfaction between men and women in the public and private sectors. Their results found that women are more satisfied than men in aggregate terms, with their higher satisfaction amplified heavily by public sector workers. When gender variations in leadership perceptions were considered, Lee and Park's (2021) findings demonstrate a clear gender gap in perceptions of leadership styles among public employees, which is further unpacked with variations in gender representation. Similarly, Stoker et al. (2012) found that although the general stereotype of a manager is masculine and although most prefer a man as a manager, female employees, employees with a female manager, and employees working in an organization with a high percentage of female managers, indicate a measurably stronger preference for feminine characteristics of managers. Finally, a study administering an online survey on a sample of 132 middle managers working in six public administrations in Lebanon found a significant relationship between public servant gender and the perceived quality of relationship with leadership (Bissane et al., 2020).

When the experiences of transgender workers (individuals whose gender does not align with their gender assigned at birth) have been considered, they were found to be 2.2 and 2.5 times more likely

to experience discrimination and workplace harassment than their cisgender counterparts (Waite, 2021) and to have low job satisfaction as a result of a number of unique stressors (Perales et al., 2022). As a result, many workplaces – especially public service employers – are taking action to train leadership and create more inclusive workspaces for gender-diverse employees with positive results (Huffman et al., 2021). More specifically, an inclusive work environment approach was found to have a substantial positive effect on gender-diverse employee job satisfaction and affective commitment to public service (Huffman et al., 2021; Hur, 2020; Perales et al., 2022).

Diversifying public service organizations can lead to a number of beneficial outcomes, including increased productivity, performance, and commitment (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009; Sabharwal, 2014; Sabharwal et al., 2018). Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) strategies are the initiatives purposed to produce and retain a more diverse workforce and are a multibillion-dollar enterprise that is projected to double in the next few years (McKinsey & Company, 2023). Diversity in the context of DEIA refers to the representation of people from many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, lifestyles, and beliefs, including those who may be historically excluded or underrepresented (Arsel et al., 2022). Equity refers to fairness in treatment and opportunities (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Inclusion refers to the degree to which all employees are recognized and able to use their talents, and accessibility refers to services provided so that people with disabilities can fully participate (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2023).

The Public Service Motivation theory (PSM) posits that the greater an individual's motivation to pursue or maintain a career in public service, the more likely they will be to seek jobs or membership in a public organization (Perry & Wise, 1990). PSM is important because it is related to interest in working in the public sector, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, and longevity (Harari et al., 2017; Paul, 2021). Additionally, the research finds that public service motivation can be increased and influenced by an organization's ability to provide growth and development opportunities, such as training, promotions, and job stability, as well as by such factors as effective and supportive leadership (Homberg & Vogel, 2016; Paul, 2021; Perry et al., 2010). Perry and Vandenabeele (2015) concluded that additional research on PSM can aid in developing strategies for improving recruitment, selection, and retention in public service organizations.

A study by Ugaddan and Park (2019) indicated a positive relationship between public service motivation and extrinsic motivation, as public service motivation theory explains that one of the motivations to serve is the reward and contributions one makes when pursuing a career in public service. Accordingly, individuals with high public service motivation will seek to maintain their positive internal and external perceptions and the perceived accolades that come with public service. These extrinsic motivators can positively influence job satisfaction and employee motivation.

Ertas' (2015) quantitative study investigated how PSM relates to the motivation and turnover intentions of millennials who work in the federal government using data from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). According to the findings, millennial federal employees have higher turnover intentions than older federal employees, and higher evaluations of work motivation factors are associated with lower turnover intentions.

Another trait that can influence public service motivation is Perceived Organizational Prestige (POP), which is an employee's understanding of how their organization is viewed by external individuals (Bright, 2021). A 2021 study of POP by Bright indicated a generally negative perception of government employment by most American citizens. These negative perceptions adversely impact employee motivation (and PSM), decreasing job satisfaction and increasing employee turnover. The study results indicate that employees within the public service sector are concerned about how the public perceives them. As such, it has been recommended that leadership within public service organiza-

tions take an integrated approach to implement branding strategies that can positively influence public perceptions of public service employees, thereby increasing their PSM and retention (Bright, 2021).

Recognizing the need to compile and compare survey data gathered by governments across the globe, the Global Survey of Public Servants (GSPS) brings together surveys based on responses from over 1,300,000 public servants in over 1,300 government institutions in 23 countries (Schuster et al., 2023). According to the findings, greater work motivation of public servants is positively correlated with both greater government effectiveness and better control of corruption with greater work motivation measured by whether public servants agree that they are willing to go the extra mile or perform tasks that are not really required from them, among others (Schuster et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

There were five research questions explored in this study.

RQ1: Do male and female perceptions of leadership differ among U.S. federal employees?

RQ2: Does job satisfaction differ among male and female U.S. federal employees?

RQ3: Do male and female perceptions of DEIA differ among U.S. federal employees?

RQ4: Does a relationship exist between perception of leadership and job satisfaction among U.S. federal employees?

RQ5: Does a relationship exist between perception of DEIA and job satisfaction among U.S. federal employees?

Federal employees onboarded with their agency as of November 2022 were eligible to participate in the 2023 FEVS. Political appointees and contractors/non-Federal employees were not eligible to participate. Every eligible employee was invited to participate, so that invitations were sent to 1,609,839 employees. A total of 625,568 employees completed a survey for a final response rate of 39%. The 2023 FEVS included a total of 91 items plus 19 demographic items. A companion report was produced to coincide with the release of the study, which outlines the methodology in detail (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2023).

The research study's target population was federal employees of the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) eligible to participate in the 2023 FEVS. The DOJ is the agency tasked with the enforcement of federal law and the administration of justice in the United States. It is equivalent to the justice or interior ministries of other countries.

The independent variable in the research study for Questions 1-3 was gender, and it included two groups: male and female. There was no third gender option to include nonbinary, agender, and gender-flexible individuals. Additionally, while a question immediately after the gender question asked people if they were transgender, which represented 0.5% of respondents, that variable was not included in the downloadable data set and, therefore, could not be explored in this research study as an additional independent variable. The dependent variables in the research study were leadership, job satisfaction, and DEIA. The aggregate scores of the questions most closely aligned with the variables and most accurately addressed the research questions were used. Leadership was measured with questions from the Leaders Lead category of questions and reflects the employees' perceptions of the integrity and effectiveness of leadership, as well as leadership behaviors such as communication and workforce motivation, and included Questions 57, 58, 59, 61, and 62. Job satisfaction was measured using the Global Satisfaction Index of questions, which measures employees' satisfaction on four aspects related to their work: the job, pay, organization, and whether they would recommend their organization as a good place to work and included Questions 70, 71, 72, and 46. DEI was measured using the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Index which was created by the OPM in 2022.

In the DEIA Index, diversity is measured with Questions 73 and 74. Equity was explored through Questions 75, 76, and 77. Inclusion is represented by Questions 78, 79, 80, 81, and 82, and accessibility is measured by Questions 83, 84, and 85.

Following the filtering out of the DOJ, the data was moved into the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28 for data analysis. Average scores based on the selection of questions that most closely align with the dependent variables were calculated. The reliability of the data set was measured using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha measures internal consistency within a data set and is typically used to determine whether the survey or questionnaire scales are reliable.

A t-test was conducted to analyze the data for research questions one through three. A t-test is an inferential statistical test used to compare the means of two groups with results exploring the significance of the mean difference to determine whether the outcomes occur by chance. In order to explore research questions four and five, a Chi-square test was conducted examining the relationship between perceived satisfaction in leadership and job satisfaction and perception of DEIA and job satisfaction. A Chi-square is a common inferential statistical test used to examine the differences between categorical variables. This test aims to determine if a difference between observed data and expected data is due to chance or if it is due to a relationship between the variables (Buzzetto-Hollywood & Thomas-Banks, 2022). A Spearman's rank correlation was also conducted to determine whether there is a monotonic component of association between continuous or ordinal variables. Monotonic relationships occur when one thing goes up or down with the other (Buzzetto-Hollywood & Thomas-Banks, 2022).

FINDINGS

The total number of participants was 34,081, of which 14,088 were women and 15,732 were men. The demographic distribution by gender is represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants

Women	Men	Failed to respond	Total
14088	15732	4261	34081

A Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated for the items used to represent the variables of leadership, job satisfaction, and DEIA, respectively, and is represented in Table 2. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was evaluated using the guidelines suggested by George and Mallery (2018) where >.9 = excellent; >.8 = good; >.7 = acceptable. The data was highly reliable, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of >.85. The items representing the leadership variable had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .938, indicating excellent reliability. The items representing the variable of job satisfaction had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .875, indicating good reliability, and the thirteen items representing DEIA had a .959 Cronbach's alpha coefficient representing excellent reliability

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha

Question set	Cronbach's alpha	Number
Leadership	.938	5
Job satisfaction	.875	4
DEIA	.957	13

For Research Question 1, "do male and female perceptions of leadership differ among U.S. federal employees?" a t-test was performed, as shown in Table 3. The results showed a sig. value of <0.01, indicating that there is a statistically significant mean difference between the two groups.

Table 3. t-Test results for perceptions of leadership

Leadership	Levenes test equality of variances		t-test equality of means			95% conf	
Leadership	F	Sig	One sided	Two sided	Mean diff	Lower	Upper
	286.442	<.001	<.001	<.001	-.17847	-.20664	-.15029

For Research Question 2, "do male and female perceptions of job satisfaction differ among U.S. federal employees?" a t-test was performed as shown in Table 4 and was used to compare the means by gender when it comes to the group of questions purposed to measure job satisfaction. The results showed a sig. value of <0.01 indicating that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Table 4. t-Test results for perceptions of job satisfaction

Leadership	Levenes test equality of variances		t-test equality of means			95% Conf	
Leadership	F	Sig	One sided	Two sided	Mean diff	Lower	Upper
	233.378	<.001	<.001	<.001	-.09656	-1.2072	-.07239

For Research Question 3, "do male and female perceptions of DEIA differ among U.S. federal employees?" a t-test was performed as shown in Table 5 and was used to compare the means by gender when it comes to the group of thirteen questions designed to measure perception of DEIA. The results showed a sig. value of <0.01 indicating that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Table 5. t-Test results for perceptions of DEIA

Leadership	Levenes test equality of variances		t-test equality of means			95 % Conf	
Leadership	F	Sig	One sided	Two sided	Mean diff	Lower	Upper
	10.858	<.001	<.001	<.001	.01915	-.00990	-.04820

For Research Question 4, "does a relationship exist between the perception of leadership and job satisfaction among U.S. federal employees?" a Chi-Square and a Spearman Rank correlation were conducted and are represented in Table 6. The results of a Chi-square p<.05 were significant at the <.000 level (2-sided), indicating that a relationship between perception of leadership and job satisfaction exists. The results of the Spearman Rank correlation were also significant with p<.05 and, more specifically, at <.000 (2-sided), indicating a monotonic relationship.

Table 6. Relationship between leadership and job satisfaction

Chi square	Value	df	Asymptotic significance 2-sided	
Pearson Chi Square	30932	320	.000	
Likelihood Ratio	26875	320	.000	
Linear by Linear Association	17202	1	.000	
Cases	28278			
Spearman Rho				
			Leadership	**Job satisfaction**
Leadership	Correlation Coefficient		1.00	.774
	Sig (2 tailed)			.000
	N		28841	28278

For Research Question 5, "does a relationship exist between the perception of DEIA and job satisfaction among U.S. federal employees?" a Chi-Square and a Spearman Rank correlation were conducted and are represented in Table 7. The results of a Chi-square p<.05 were significant at the <.000 level (2-sided), indicating that a relationship between perception of leadership and job satisfaction exists. The results of the Spearman Rank correlation were also significant with p<.05 and, more specifically, at <.000 (2-sided), indicating a monotonic relationship.

Table 7. Relationship between DEIA and job satisfaction

Chi Square	Value	df	Asymptotic significance 2-Sided	
Pearson Chi Square	20852	832	.000	
Likelihood Ratio	17014	832	.000	
Linear by Linear Association	9664	1	.000	
Cases	16044			
Spearman Rho				
			DEIA	**Job satisfaction**
DEIA	Correlation Coefficient		1.000	.783
	Sig (2 tailed)			.000
	N		16348	16044

DISCUSSION

The quantitative comparative ex post facto research study covered in this paper is purposed to determine if a difference exists in the perceptions of leadership, DEIA, and job satisfaction among the United States Federal Government employees when gender is explored and whether job satisfaction is influenced by perception of leadership or DEIA. The research study was grounded in Public Service Motivation Theory (PSM) and with data taken from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management 2023 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results. The study used descriptive statistics, t-tests, and correlation analyses, and the results indicated a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of male vs female U.S. federal employees regarding perceptions of leadership, DEIA, and job satisfaction. Additionally, correlation analyses conducted found relationships between the perception of leadership and job satisfaction and the perception of DEIA and job satisfaction.

The perceptions of federal employees regarding leadership, DEIA initiatives, and job satisfaction are an important line of inquiry in the field of organizational development, as they influence employee recruitment, motivation, and retention, as well as organizational culture and performance (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; McKinsey & Company, 2023; Missildine, 2021; Sabharwal, 2014; Sabharwal et al., 2018; Settles, 2016). Employees with a more positive perception of leadership, DEIA, and job satisfaction are more likely to be engaged, have more confidence in senior leadership, and are less likely to leave the federal workforce, thereby reducing employee turnover (DeLay & Clark, 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2023). Most importantly, creating a culture of diversity, including gender, religion, and sexual orientation, fosters a more collaborative and supportive work environment, making recruiting top talent into federal careers easier (Moon & Christensen, 2020).

Research Question 1 considered whether the perception of leadership among U.S. federal employees differed when gender was considered. A t-test was conducted, and the results indicated a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of leadership among male and female U.S. federal employees. The results of research question one are consistent with what has been published in the literature, such as Bissane et al. (2020), Lee and Park (2021), Moon and Jung (2018), and Stoker et al. (2012).

Research Question 2 explored whether job satisfaction of U.S. federal employees differed when gender was considered. A t-test was conducted, and the results indicated a statistically significant difference in job satisfaction among male and female federal government workers. The results of research question two are also consistent with what has been published in the literature, such as Kim (2005), Moon and Jung (2018), and Puente and Sánchez-Sánchez (2020).

Research Question 3 focused on whether the perception of DEIA differed when gender was considered. Using a t-test to explore this research question, the findings indicate differing perceptions of DEIA when gender was considered. These results align with what has been reported in the literature, such as a 2023 Pew Research Center study that found that women are more likely than men to value DEI efforts and practices in the workplace (Minkin, 2023). Additionally, while this study did not explore gender differences through an additional intersectional lens, this is an area for potential future research as studies such as Hoang et al. (2022) have found that the impact of diversity and inclusion on employees' perceptions of organizations differs by gender and race.

Research Question 4 explored the relationship between the perception of leadership and job satisfaction among U.S. federal employees. A chi-square and a Spearman Rank Correlation were performed, and a relationship between perception of leadership and job satisfaction was found. These findings are similar to what has been reported in the literature, such as Chen et al. (2020; Q. Miao et al. (2017), S. Miao et al. (2020), Mosadeghrad and Ferdosi (2013), Tao and Campbell (2020), and Wu et al. (2006) confirm that the leadership behavior of managers plays a critical role in employees job satisfaction a better understanding of which can inform strategies for recruiting, promotion, and training of future leaders (DeLay & Clark, 2020).

Research Question 5 considered whether a relationship exists between the perception of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives and job satisfaction among U.S. federal employees using a chi-square and a Spearman Rank Correlation. According to the findings, a relationship does exist between DEIA and job satisfaction. While the research in this area is not yet robust, it does agree with the data comparison of the 2022-2023 FEVS by the United States Office of Personnel Management that noted a 2% increase in employee satisfaction that they attributed to DEIA (Jones, 2024) as well as studies such as one conducted by CNBC that found through a national poll and use of the Happiness Index that DEI efforts impact job satisfaction (Camiiniti, 2021). Further, Hoang et al. (2022) concluded that as workplace diversity increases and inclusive leadership practices are adopted there is a positive influence on the perception of the organization.

Previous research has been conducted to analyze various aspects of employee motivation using FEVS data, such as the work of Jansen (2022), which focused on turnover intentions, employee motivation, and employee work value. However, this study expands on this research by focusing on one specific agency, the United States Department of Justice, and on gender differences. Additionally, this study adds to the modest but growing body of work that is exploring the impact of DEIA on employee perceptions.

The findings of this study aid in providing empirical data to support the need for federal government leadership to understand the impact of employees' perceptions on their willingness to continue working in the federal government. The research study was grounded in Public Service Motivation Theory, which centers around factors that motivate individuals to pursue and maintain careers in the public service sector. More specifically, this study supported the public service motivation theory in that it looked at gender as a mitigating factor in public service motivation, as well as explored the role of leadership and DEIA as a correlating factor to job satisfaction. This study aligns with the theoretical framework by proving that there was a statistically significant difference in gender perceptions of leadership, DEI, and job satisfaction, as well as a direct correlation between perception of leadership and job satisfaction and DEI and job satisfaction.

Within human capital management, this study can be applied to people operations and support in several ways. First, public service leaders can tailor their recruitment and retention initiatives to be more inclusive to marginalized demographic groups, such as individuals who identify as female, those who are gender diverse, and/or those with intersecting identities. The analysis process used in the study can be replicated with additional OPM FEVS data and can include other agencies who may benefit from understanding this information. Lappin's (2021) study on predicting federal employee work engagement supports this implication. The results of that quantitative correlational study established a correlation between intrinsic work experience and work engagement. Missildine (2021) used FEVS data from the 2017 administration year to predict federal employee turnover retention. He concluded that employers should identify and focus on job satisfaction as it significantly predicts turnover intention. Settles' (2016) study on supervisor-subordinate relationships indicated a significant relationship between relationship quality with leadership and turnover intention. That mixed method study included 2015 FEVS data and interviews from employees of large U.S. federal agencies. The study concluded that developing models and frameworks based on FEVS data analysis and results can help federal leadership retain the existing federal workforce.

LIMITATIONS

The most significant limitation of this study is that gender was explored only in terms of the gender binary, whereas the 2023 FEVS did not include a third gender option to be inclusive of individuals who are non-binary, agender, or gender flexible. It was the authors' hope to be able to look specifically at how the experiences of transgender employees compare to their cisgender counterparts, yet that data remains unavailable. It is the authors' hope that this limitation will be remedied in future iterations of the FEVS.

CONCLUSION

The quantitative comparative ex post facto research study covered in this paper found differences in perceptions of leadership, DEIA, and job satisfaction among the United States Federal Government employees based on gender. Additionally, perceptions of leadership and DEIA were found to influence job satisfaction. This research is significant because while the FEVS has been a valuable resource for analyzing turnover intentions, employee motivation, and work value across the entire United States federal government, there is a clear need for more focused research (Jansen, 2022). Future research is needed that expounds on what has been done here by examining in more detail how various identities, and more specifically intersecting identities, within the LGBTQIA+ community as

well as other historically marginalized groups, impact such factors as perceptions of leadership, job satisfaction, DEIA, employee motivation and retention, and work-life balance (Moon & Jung, 2018). Additional federal agencies, both large and small, can be included, as well as international public sector organizations. This information is important not only for the United States federal government, which is grappling with high attrition rates but also for public administrations around the world (Bates, 2016; Schuster et al., 2023).

Diversity in public service is an important topic, as research shows that the diversification of public organizations improves the capacity to deliver services to the increasingly disparate populations being aided (Sabharwal et al., 2018). Additionally, studies find that more inclusive work environments are critical predictors of higher productivity and job commitment (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Sabharwal, 2014; Sabharwal et al., 2018) that improve decision quality and performance (Pitts & Towne, 2015; Sabharwal et al., 2018). More specifically, the research has found that DEIA efforts in the workplace are positively associated with psychological safety and authenticity at work, as well as work engagement and job satisfaction (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023; Huffman et al., 2021; Hur, 2020; Perales et al., 2022).

While the literature on the experiences of transgender workers is not as robust as the literature that focuses solely on the gender binary, there is some research that finds that transgender employees are more likely to have negative workplace experiences (Waite, 2021) and express lower job satisfaction (Perales et al., 2022) and be more impacted by DEIA efforts (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023). Nevertheless, there remain gaps in our understanding of the experiences of gender-diverse people when it comes to perceptions of leadership, job satisfaction, and DEIA initiatives in the public sector. Emphasizing the need for more work in this research space, in January 2023, the Biden-Harris administration released the Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQIA+ Equity report, emphasizing data collection, research, policy development, program evaluation, and collaboration through partnerships. The report tasked federal government leaders to use empirical evidence to inform policies that promote equality, inclusion, and support for the LGBTQIA+ community. These practices are purposed to help advance gender diversity, equity, and inclusion in the federal government and increase job satisfaction and retention (National Science and Technology Council, 2023).

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