

Are public and private sector managers really different?

t-three consulting recently completed a project with East Sussex County Council to explore the fundamental differences in personality profiles between public and private sector employees and the resulting learning that both sectors can take forward in order to manage talent into the future.

The research explores the differences in individual personality traits which can consequently influence employees' attitudes and behaviours towards their organisations and their consequent performance, specifically in organisational commitment.

How the data was collected

Facet5 is a modern and advanced measure of human personality. Used by global organisations, Facet5 is applied in people development, individual selection, team integration and organisational strategy.

Facet5 was created specifically for the work environment, providing a profile of a managers natural preferences and strengths and their potential risks at work. It is based on the currently prevailing "Big Five" theory of personality development.

The Big Five elements are:

1. **Will**
Goal-focused, self-willed and confrontational vs. adaptable, consensual and avoiding conflict
2. **Control**
Big-picture and unfocused vs. detail-conscious and reliable completer-finishers
3. **Affection**
Concern for others vs. self-interest
4. **Energy**
Extrovert vs. introvert
5. **Emotionality**
Anxiety and openness to stress vs. optimistic self-confidence

The Findings

The \$6 million question: is there **really** any difference between managers in the two sectors? The research suggests 'Yes, but....!'

Using a sample consisting of over 13,200 managers who completed the psychometric profiling tool Facet5 (approximately 8,700 private sector, and 4,500 public sector) the results give detail to the stereotype.

Public sector managers scored higher on how they behave towards others: they show higher concern and greater willingness to help other people. They put other peoples' needs first more often than their private sector counterparts. The private sector is managed by people who are more outcome-focused and self willed. They think more independently and are more comfortable with confrontation. Public sector managers, by contrast, prefer a consultative approach.

Private sector managers are also more outgoing, optimistic and enthusiastic than public sector managers who are less optimistic and prefer to build more longstanding relationships.

Managers help shape organisational culture, and these personality differences go some way to explain why public and private sector cultures seem different. The research, however, does not judge the effectiveness of these personality types. Recent thinking might support either approach: one focused on performance and outcomes, and a different one which values emotional intelligence and consultation – manager as policeman or social worker.

This is not the whole story. The research assumes - and goes some way to proving – that the two cultures are different. Can we continue assuming this in the future?

The Data

Data was presented from the Facet5 database and organised into SPSS (statistics package).

It is assumed the norm used was for UK managers with the standardised mean at 5.5 and a standard deviation of 2.0. Overall the scores are equivalent though the mean score for the factor *Affection* seems rather high with a smaller than normal standard deviation. This in part due to the fact that public sector managers score highly for the factor *Affection* and its 3 subscales.

Analysis was carried out comparing private sector and public sector mean scores the table below shows the results of this analysis:

	Private Sector Mean	Public Sector Mean
Will	5.34	4.97
Determination	5.33	5.04
Confrontation	5.36	5.09
Independence	5.32	4.78
Energy	5.60	5.12
Vitality	5.55	5.11
Sociability	5.69	5.00
Adaptability	5.59	5.28
Affection	5.91	6.57
Altruism	5.98	6.88
Support	5.90	6.39
Trust	5.85	6.44
Control	5.67	5.41
Discipline	5.65	5.27
Responsibility	5.71	5.54
Emotionality	5.42	5.67
Tension	5.27	5.51
Apprehension	5.56	5.81

Main Personality Factors

Statistical analysis demonstrated statistically significant differences between the private and public sector managers on all Facet5 factors and sub-factors.

Will

Private sector managers score **higher** on all *Will* sub-scales than public sector managers, indicating that private sector managers may have a tendency to be more determined, motivated and independent. Public sector managers scored lower on the subscale *Independence* than average (4.78), this could indicate that public sector managers have a tendency to more often seek advice and direction, may be more willing to work in teams and prefer a consultative approach.

Energy

Private sector managers score significantly **higher** on all *Energy* sub-scales than public sector managers, with the biggest difference being *Sociability* (0.69). Private sector managers may have a slight tendency to be more outgoing, optimistic, enthusiastic and participative, whereas public sector managers could be more reflective, less likely to mix with others, but build more longstanding relationships.

Affection

Public sector managers score significantly **higher** on all *Affection* sub-scales than private sector managers, with the biggest difference being *Altruism* (0.90). This indicates that public sector managers are more likely to put others first, and may have a tendency to be keener to help others, be more supportive, understanding and trusting.

Control

Private sector managers score **higher** on all *Control* sub-scales than public sector managers, though these differences remain very small and lead to no real and discernable differences.

Emotionality

Private sector managers score **lower** on all *Emotionality* sub-scales than public sector managers, though these differences remain very small and lead to no real and discernable differences.

The key question for personality research is whether these differences are a feature of individual personality or a feature of private versus public sector work. For example, are *altruistic* personalities drawn to the public sector because of the nature of the work? Or, are *altruistic* personalities favoured in public sector organisations and therefore more likely promoted to management positions? Or, does the public sector culture of public service affect the personality or response style of public sector managers? Or, a combination of all of the above?

Gender

Data were organised by gender using the variable 'given name'. Tests were conducted to explore gender differences in the Facet5 factors and sub-factors. Results show there are significant differences between males and females on the factor *Will* and each of the 3 sub-factors: *determination*, *confrontation*, *independence*, indicating that males score higher than females (differences between 0.4 and 0.8).

Families

The difference in personality also impacts on the distribution of families between public and private sector managers. The table below shows the percentage of each *family* in the sample of private and public sector managers:

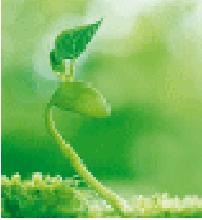
Family	Private %	Public %
Advocate	5.5	8.3
Architect	3.5	3.9
Chameleon	2.2	1.9
Coach	12.4	16.8
Controller	3.9	2.7
Developer	14.7	10.1
Entrepreneur	5.8	2.4
Explorer	3.0	1.9
Facilitator	7.2	9.2
Generalist	8.7	6.3
Idealist	2.2	4.7
Presenter	3.1	0.9
Producer	3.6	2.6
Promoter	6.7	5.3
Specialist	3.9	4.8
Supporter	6.2	13.8
Traditionalist	3.8	4.4

Results show that in both private and public sector samples there is a high proportion of *Coaches*, *Developers* and *Facilitators* (private sector 34.3%, and public 36.1%). Public sector also has a relatively high proportion of *Supporters* (13.8%).

Proportionally the private sector sample has 3 times more *Presenters* and 2.5 times more *Entrepreneurs*, whilst public sector sample has twice as many *Idealists* and twice as many *Supporters* than the private sector sample.

The research used the personality measure Facet5 (from t-three consulting consultants@t-three.co.uk or 01954 710780).

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Public v private

Public sector managers are soft-hearted, indecisive do-gooders who operate at a snail's pace and need consensus to do anything; private sector managers are ruthless, money driven and out to further their own careers. Stereotypes of business and public sector leaders abound — but how true are the caricatures?

A personality study of 13,200 managers in business and local government, conducted by East Sussex County Council and t-three consulting, aimed to find out what made leaders in the two sectors tick.

Responses indicated that local government managers are more altruistic and show greater concern towards others than their private sector counterparts. The latter, by contrast, were more outcome-focused and self-willed; more able to think independently. They were also more comfortable with confrontation, whereas local government managers prefer a consultative approach.

"If you are low on confrontation you have very good political skills, which are an advantage in local government," says Jennifer Shipside, a director at t-three consulting. But avoiding

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The bond of public service is an asset that the private sector cannot imitate

confrontation could mean managers failing to carry out robust performance reviews or failing to hold people to account for not delivering, she cautions.

The public sector could learn from private sector managers' superior networking skills, Shipside says. Business leaders tended to be more sociable, outgoing and optimistic at work than council managers, who were more cautious, preferring to build longstanding relationships with a few trusted colleagues.

But the bond of public service is an asset that the private sector cannot imitate, t-three found. "Public sector managers are passionate about what they do and have a real sense of service. Most business managers would give their eye teeth to have those common values."

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