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DECODING THE DNA OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERS



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ABSTRACT

Comparisons are often made between the public and private sectors. Differences in culture, structure, environment and talent management are usually highlighted. In general, the private sector is used as a “benchmark” to evaluate to what extent the public sector has evolved towards practices in the commercial world. Questions that often arise are “to what extent can public sector organisations profit from the private sector leadership style?”, and “When public sector organisations hire private sector senior leaders, what value do they add?”

Given the current economic situation, and more specifically, the financial and economical crises, it is timely to question whether the private sector is the optimal benchmark. To the extent to which many private “reference” organisations are now (partly) publicly owned, one could not only question the validity of the comparison but also ask whether private sector leaders are better than public ones (as often been asserted).

In order to better understand what differentiates leaders from both sectors, we used Hudson's Business Attitudes Questionnaire (BAQ) to analyse the personality characteristics of 1,185 senior leaders in the public and private sectors in Europe. Of that number, 485 originated from the public sector and 700 from the private sector. Their results were compared to those of over 64,000 people from the global population.

It is clear that such differences between senior leaders in the private and public sectors that persist are relatively small. Private sector senior leaders tend to be more communicative and positive in their relationships with other people. They are clearly more result-oriented and persevering and are more optimistic when assessing risks. Public sector senior leaders on their end are more prudent, more conceptually and strategically oriented and more innovative. They make up their mind based on rules and regulations and less on networking and communication.

These findings have consequences for organisations wanting to formulate a proper strategy to acquire and develop their future senior leaders. The differences in organisational structure, culture and environment force organisations in public and private sectors to analyse thoroughly the type of leadership they need in order to guarantee an optimal organisational development in the future.

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In addition to a team of experienced psychologists, Hudson's European R&D Centre includes support and IT teams specialising in on-line and off-line software development. The Centre is under the expert leadership of Etienne Van Keer, Executive Director R&D Europe, who has over 30 years of experience in Selection, Test Development and Assessment Centre techniques. The R&D Centre specialises in developing HR models, processes and tools for internal Hudson use, and activities for clients (private and public sector) on a European and global level.

Some recent breakthroughs are:

- | Interview Manager: an online application to help HR professionals and line managers to increase their interviewing skills and to facilitate the creation of tailor-made interviewing guides. Because we believe that interviewing is an art that everyone should master.
- | Electronic Assessment Simulation Exercise for middle and top managers: EASE is a unique virtually interactive assessment exercise for high potentials and managers which uses the technique of artificial intelligence. The system enables careful selection of the relevant competencies to measure via a fully automated assessment exercise.
- | Talent Engagement Solution*: unlike traditional measures of job satisfaction that focus only on the employee perspective, Hudson Talent Engagement Solution utilises the psychological contract to provide more meaningful insight by combining both the employee and the employer perspectives. It also moves beyond "satisfaction" to measure and remedy the factors that drive retention, engagement and business performance.

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*Instrument developed in cooperation with Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School.



INTRODUCTION

The importance of leadership is rarely questioned, no matter what the setting. But are the leadership skills and business attitudes of managers the same throughout the working world?

How do leaders in the public and private sectors differ? Can and should government be more business-like? Is management generic? To the extent that leaders in public and private sectors show similar temperament and business attitudes, the extensive body of ideas and practices relating to corporate success can be applied to the problems of public management, and the public sector can in principle draw on the large pool of private sector managers to meet its own managerial needs. To the extent that they differ, the public sector must have access to sources of knowledge, techniques and skills suited to its unique character. Different leadership style and business attitudes may be required in order to fit with the different structure, culture & values in public organisations.

BEYOND PREJUDICES

When speaking with people about the public sector, it seems that nearly everyone has a strong opinion regarding how things are going. Public sector organisations show a clear lack of efficiency, they are dominated by rules and regulations that make it almost impossible to manage them properly and resistance

to change is so strong that it is virtually inconceivable to think of a public organisation as a modern structure that uses up-to-date technology and state of the art management methods.

Clearly, these common opinions result from generalisations based on incidents that occur from time to time. While these occasional occurrences appear in the press, they are probably in no way representative for the public services at large.

One of our interlocutors stated: "Unlike the private sector, the public sector will never manage to score. Irrespective of the efforts you do and the results you obtain, doing a good job in the public sector is never noticed by the public. People simply expect you to do a perfect job. The slightest mistake however is always a source of frustration, is commented on in the press and adds to the common prejudices people have about the public sector".

We therefore decided to throw all prejudices and stereotypes overboard when conducting this study and to look at the sector in an objective way, basing our hypotheses on data available in the abundant scientific literature and on as neutral observations as possible.

A NUMBER OF SOUND HYPOTHESES TO WORK WITH

Many researchers have investigated the differences between private and public sector organisations (for a recent overview see Rainy & Chun, 2005). Some researches have demonstrated differences in motivation, (Baldwin, 1987), job satisfaction and organisational commitment (e.g. Balfour & Wechler, 1991, 1996; Steinhaus & Perry, 1996) and efficiency and effectiveness (e.g. Savas, 1982; Solomon, 1986; Spann, 1977). Less attention has been paid to the differences in leadership behaviour and business attitudes of senior leadership.

As far as leadership behaviour is concerned it is probably important to note that, despite the differences observed, the similarities are greater. Both public sector organisations as well as private organisations are usually complex structures of people who work together in order to reach their objectives. These structures have to be organised and managed in order to guarantee an optimal operation.

Nevertheless differences have been observed and described in literature (Baldwin, 1987; Solomon, 1986; Robertson & Seneviratne, 1995; Hooiberg & Choi, 2001; Boyne, 2002; Dennis, Langley & Rouleau, 2005) and we can therefore safely assume that leadership behaviour and style in public sector organisations do not necessarily have to have resulted from theories developed in the private sector.

We summarise the most important similarities and differences, based on which we formulated our hypotheses and potential consequences for leadership in the public sector.

OUR HYPOTHESES

The global context:

Hypothesis 1: Public sector organisations are usually as complex as private sector organisations. In both cases a social arrangement, which pursues collective goals, controls its own performance, and a boundary separating it from its environment, can be observed.

As a consequence we can expect senior leaders in the public sector to have the same global business attitudes pattern as senior leaders in the private sector, showing the same dominant characteristics differentiating them from the global population.

The environment:

The environment of public sector organisations is different from the private sector in several ways.

Hypothesis 2: Public organisations operate in a less stable context with, for example, frequent changes in policy, which could create the need to constantly find new solutions and imagine alternative ways of doing things.

Therefore, we could expect senior leaders in the public sector to be more conceptual and innovative in their approach to dealing with this complex and rapidly changing environment.

Hypothesis 3: Public organisations operate in a more complex environment with a variety of stakeholders with conflicting demands (e.g. taxpayer and service recipient). This could create the pressure to achieve short-term results in order to get problems solved in a quick and efficient manner. It could, however, also give way to a more prudent, time-consuming process of decision-making, taking into consideration many different demands and expectations in order to strike a very difficult balance that guarantees the buy-in of the majority of stakeholders.

We could therefore expect senior leaders in the public sector not to be particularly result-oriented, aiming at achieving short-term results, but rather cautious and mindful when taking decisions.



Hypothesis 4: Senior leaders in the public sector are often involved in supporting political leaders in their policy-making activities. Policy-making is in most cases one of the key tasks of public organisations.

As a consequence, one could expect senior leaders in the public sector to aim for the longer term and to assure stability in their organisation, regardless of political changes and agenda. A conceptual and strategic focus seems essential for public sector senior leaders to allow them to make long-lasting policies.

The goals:

Hypothesis 5: Overall, the goals of the private sector can be seen as clear and unequivocal. They are easily measurable in terms of profit and loss and are published at the end of each quarter and each year. The objectives of public sector organisations are far more ambiguous. They are more complex, less concrete, not easily measurable and therefore more difficult to manage.

As a result public sector senior leaders can be expected to be less confident about the outcome of their initiatives and the way they will be appreciated. We can also expect them to show less perseverance in the search for one particular goal and less determination in achieving (short-term) results.

The structure:

Hypothesis 6: In general, public sector organisations afford their leaders less discretion and less managerial autonomy. In most situations a senior leader in the public sector has little discretionary power since duties and responsibilities, available resources, pay rises, etc, are clearly documented in policies, rules and procedures.

As a result, senior leaders in the public sector may adopt different behaviours compared with senior leaders in the private sector. Their business attitudes are probably more oriented towards rule-following, monitoring compliance with the rules and detecting discrepancies. On the other hand, they are less oriented towards trusting people and dealing with issues in an informal way.

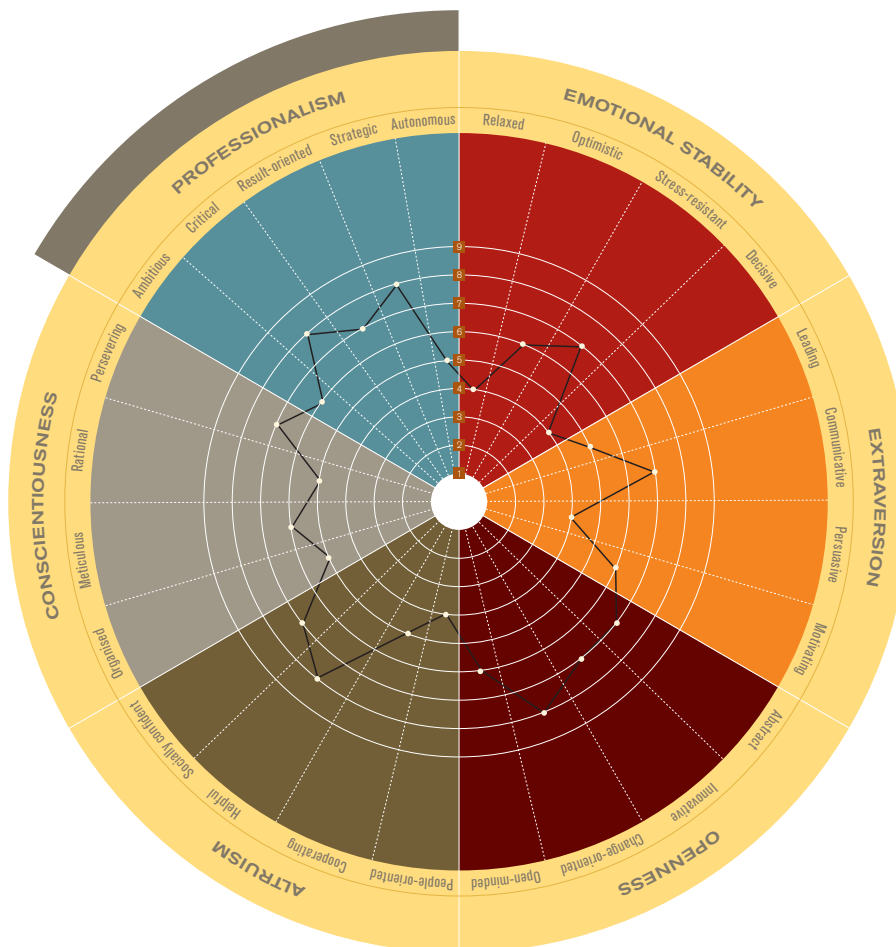
The relationship between business attitudes and effective leadership may differ significantly between both sectors. The differences in their environments in terms of market forces and exposure to legislation, legislatures and civil service rules, the differences in the goals they have to achieve, the differences in structure and the discretion afforded in these sectors, can and probably will affect how senior leaders act.

In this study we present the results of our research in order to evaluate which of these hypotheses can be confirmed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

HUDSON'S BUSINESS ATTITUDES QUESTIONNAIRE (BAQ) WAS USED AS A BASIS FOR THIS STUDY.

Hudson's European R&D Centre developed the BAQ based on the widely recognised "Big 5" personality model and applied it to the work environment (Bogaert, J., Trbovic, N. & Van Keer, E., 2008). This questionnaire is used by Hudson consultants and Hudson client organisations in Assessment and Development Centres worldwide. It measures 25 aspects of an individual's business attitudes which predict professional performance.



GRAPH 1
Business Attitudes Questionnaire: the big 5 (+1 professional domain)



The BAQ has been proven, through hundreds of selection and talent management programmes, to give valuable insights into career development and transition, coaching, conflict handling and team assembly. The unique combination of an absolute measurement (the “normative section” of the questionnaire) and a relative measurement (the “ipsative section” of the questionnaire) of the individual’s personality has proven especially valuable. In the normative section, the respondent’s personality characteristics are compared with those of a reference group of relevant people and indicate where they stand. In the ipsative section, respondents determine their relative strengths and weaknesses across the different personality dimensions. In the study, we use the normative section of the questionnaire and compare senior leaders of both the private and public sectors to the global population (over 64,000 individuals).

In 2008, Hudson R&D Centre conducted a widely recognised study on female leadership: “Could the right man for the job be a woman?” (Van Keer, E., Bogaert, J. & Trbovic, N., 2008). Given the sound scientific results uncovered in that study, we have used the same methodology to compare public sector senior leaders with private sector senior leaders.

SAMPLE POPULATION

Over 1,000 public and private sector senior leaders in Europe completed Hudson’s BAQ on a voluntary basis. An overview of the sample population is shown on the following page. Participants were selected according to strict criteria: only heads of organisations (N), those reporting directly to them (N-1) and those reporting directly to the latter (N-2), were categorised as senior leaders.

In order to clearly see how managers are prepared for future senior roles, we also asked middle managers to take Hudson’s BAQ. About 1,000 European middle managers volunteered to participate in the study. Participants at the levels N-3 and N-4 were accepted in the sample.

SAMPLE POPULATION

Private sector sample

Nationality	Senior leaders						
	Women	Men	Total		Age	Total	
Western Europe	103	362	465	66.4%	<30	16	2.3%
Central/Eastern Europe	4	32	36	5.1%	30 – 39	182	26.0%
Northern Europe	31	12	43	6.1%	40 – 50	255	36.4%
Southern Europe	10	83	93	13.3%	>50	64	9.1%
Non-European	20	22	42	6.0%	Unknown	183	26.1%
Unknown	21	0	21	3.0%			
Total	189	511	700	100.0%	Total	700	100.0%

Public sector sample

Nationality	Senior leaders						
	Women	Men	Total		Age	Total	
Western Europe	90	212	304	62.7%	<30	2	0.4%
Central/Eastern Europe	23	70	92	19.0%	30 – 39	46	9.5%
Northern Europe	15	14	38	7.8%	40 – 50	181	37.3%
Southern Europe	11	38	47	9.7%	>50	212	43.7%
Non-European	1	2	3	0.6%	Unknown	44	9.1%
Unknown	0	1	1	0.2%			
Total	140	337	485	100.0%	Total	485	100.0%

Nationality	Middle Managers						
	Women	Men	Total		Age	Total	
Western Europe	170	353	523	54.8%	<30	25	2.6%
Central/Eastern Europe	101	227	328	34.3%	30 – 39	330	34.6%
Northern Europe	5	3	8	0.8%	40 – 50	318	33.3%
Southern Europe	11	19	30	3.1%	>50	125	13.1%
Non-European	2	2	4	0.4%	Unknown	157	16.4%
Unknown	26	36	62	6.5%			
Total	315	640	955	100.0%	Total	955	100%



This research enables us to compare average scores on the different dimensions of the BAQ for different types of groups:

- Public sector senior leaders and private sector senior leaders
- Within the public sector: men and women in senior leadership positions
- Within the public sector: senior leaders and middle managers
- Within the public sector: senior leaders below 40 and senior leaders above 40

Comparing these groups allows us to see whether significant differences exist. Investigating these differences provides a better understanding of what differentiates managers in senior leadership positions in the public sector from other managers.

When comparing populations of the size of this study, nearly every difference becomes statistically significant. The main problem reported in literature is that the p-value depends essentially on two variables: the size of the effect and the size of the sample (Thompson, 1999; Cohen, 1994; Harlow et al., 1997).

We therefore decided to use the effect size methodology (Robert Coe, 2002) in order to determine differences between groups. J. Cohen (1988) defines an effect size of .20 as a small difference, .50 as an average difference and .80 as an important difference. In the following graphs we will classify effect sizes of .20 to .39 as small differences (*), effect sizes of .40 to .59 as average differences (**) and effect sizes of .60 to .80+ as important differences (***).



PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE SECTOR SENIOR LEADERS: SMALL DIFFERENCES, BIG IMPACT

THE GRAPH ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE SHOWS THE RESULTS OF THE COMPARISON OF SENIOR LEADERS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR WITH SENIOR LEADERS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

The average of the general population (64,300 individuals) is set as a benchmark with a stanine score of 5. This same benchmark is also used in the analyses which follow¹.

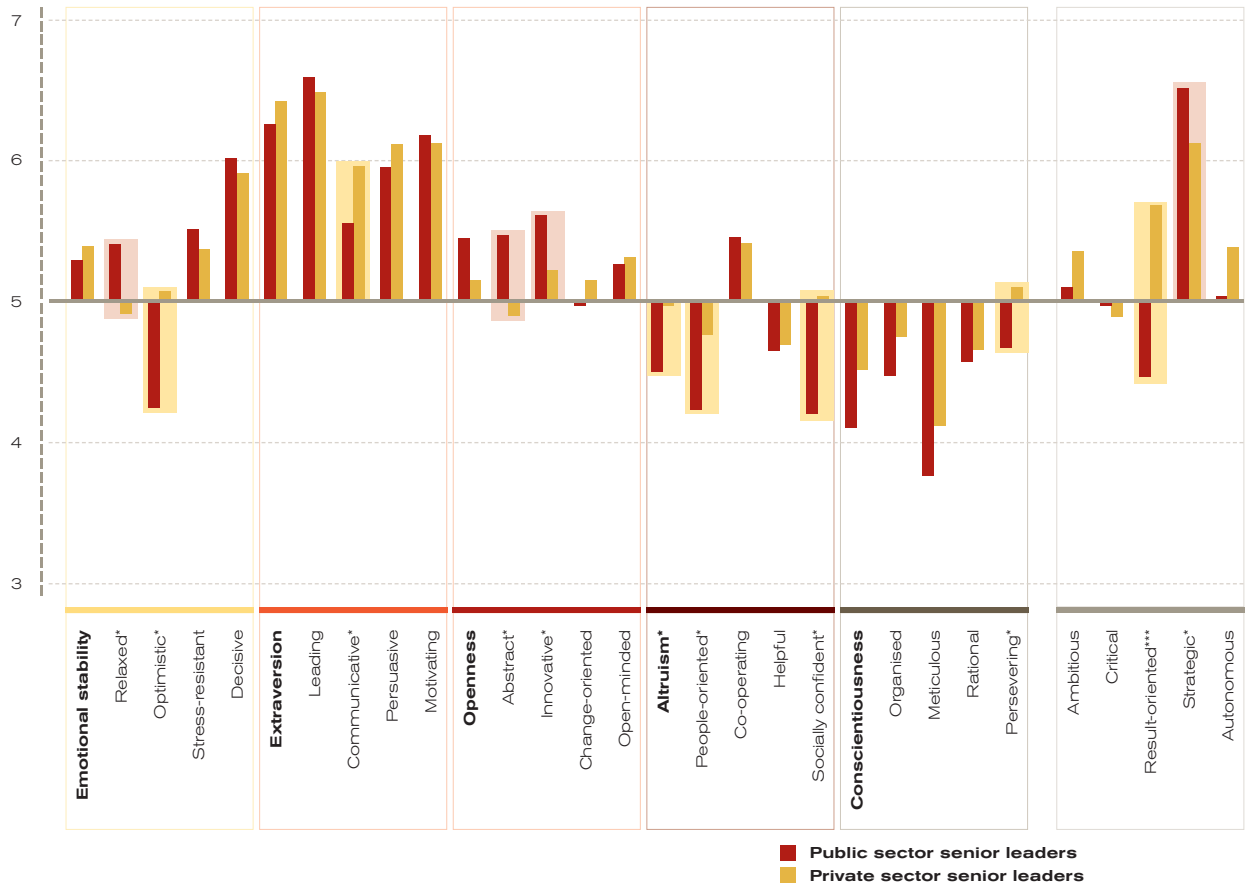
As we can see, senior leaders in both the public and private sectors show a similar leadership profile, although some differences appear.

Regarding Emotional Stability, leaders in the public sector are more relaxed when facing difficulties, but are less optimistic about the outcome of things. They are less inclined to openly communicate their plans before obtaining the correct approval from the authorities. On the other hand, these same leaders show thought leadership, clearly dealing with abstract concepts and processes and looking for continuous improvement and innovation. As far as Altruism and Conscientiousness are concerned, senior leaders in the public sector tend to score lower. They show less social confidence and are more focused on their objectives than on the people they have to work with. Finally, they are less focused on short-term results and pay more attention to policy-making and long-term strategic perspectives.

We could summarise these differences by stating that senior leaders in the public sector are more focused on monitoring rules and procedures and feel less freedom in the way they can manage (Optimistic, Autonomous). They are more focused on long-term policies and on finding innovative and conceptual solutions (Strategic, Abstract, Innovative) and less on short-term results (Strategic, Result-oriented). They act in a less competitive way and do not pay a lot of attention to relationships and networks (Result-oriented, People-oriented, Socially Confident). The results show that leaders in the public sector are more inclined to “monitor” and less inclined to “facilitate”. They are more inclined to “control” rather than to “believe and trust”. They are more focused on “creating a long-term strategy” than on “winning in the short-term”. Apparently speed is not the most important aspect for senior leaders in the public sector. They rather focus on the direction to follow and the way things are done. Public sector senior leaders are more mindful, private sector senior leaders are more result-oriented.



GRAPH 2
Difference between senior leaders in the public and private sectors





PUBLIC SECTOR: MEN VERSUS WOMEN IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

AS IN OUR 2008 STUDY ON FEMALE LEADERSHIP, WE WERE INTERESTED IN UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR.

It seems that men and women in senior leadership positions in the public sector show even more similarities than in the private sector. However, the small differences observed are in line with our earlier findings on female leadership.

What is most striking in the context of the public sector is that, compared to men, women clearly show a more outspoken profile. It is as if these women have to demonstrate more outspoken leadership characteristics in order to make it to the top. The advantage of this is that they probably excel in their leadership roles, but that they sometimes could be perceived as hard and inflexible in the way they address their responsibilities.

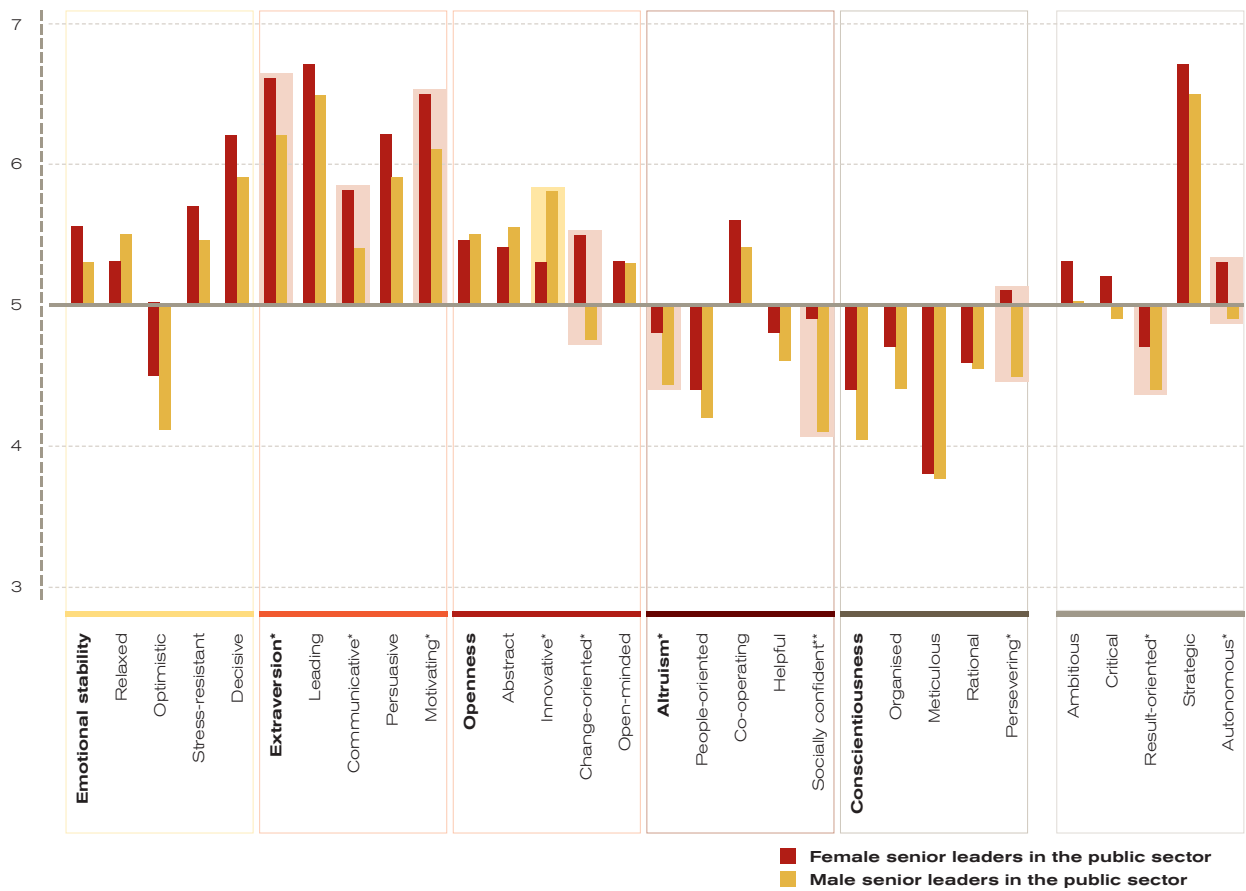
Compared to men, women in the public sector tend to focus more on Extraversion and especially on Motivating others and on adopting a more open communication style. They also tend to use a more human approach, paying more attention to social relationships (Socially Confident). Compared to average women however, their characteristics in the field of Altruism are clearly lower, which suggest that they abandon part of their typically female personality traits and adopt a somewhat cooler persona.

As far as Openness is concerned, both male and female senior leaders show a certain degree of thought leadership. Women are shown to be more open to change induced by the organisation, while men are keener on exploring innovative approaches. Women, however, show more perseverance in trying to reach their goals.

Women senior leaders in the public sector seem to use a mindful leadership style, combined with a warmer approach, when compared with men. However, they are not as warm as their female counterparts in the private sector (Kawakami, White, & Langer, 2000).



GRAPH 3
Difference between male and female senior leaders in the public sector





PUBLIC SECTOR: SENIOR LEADERS VERSUS MIDDLE MANAGERS

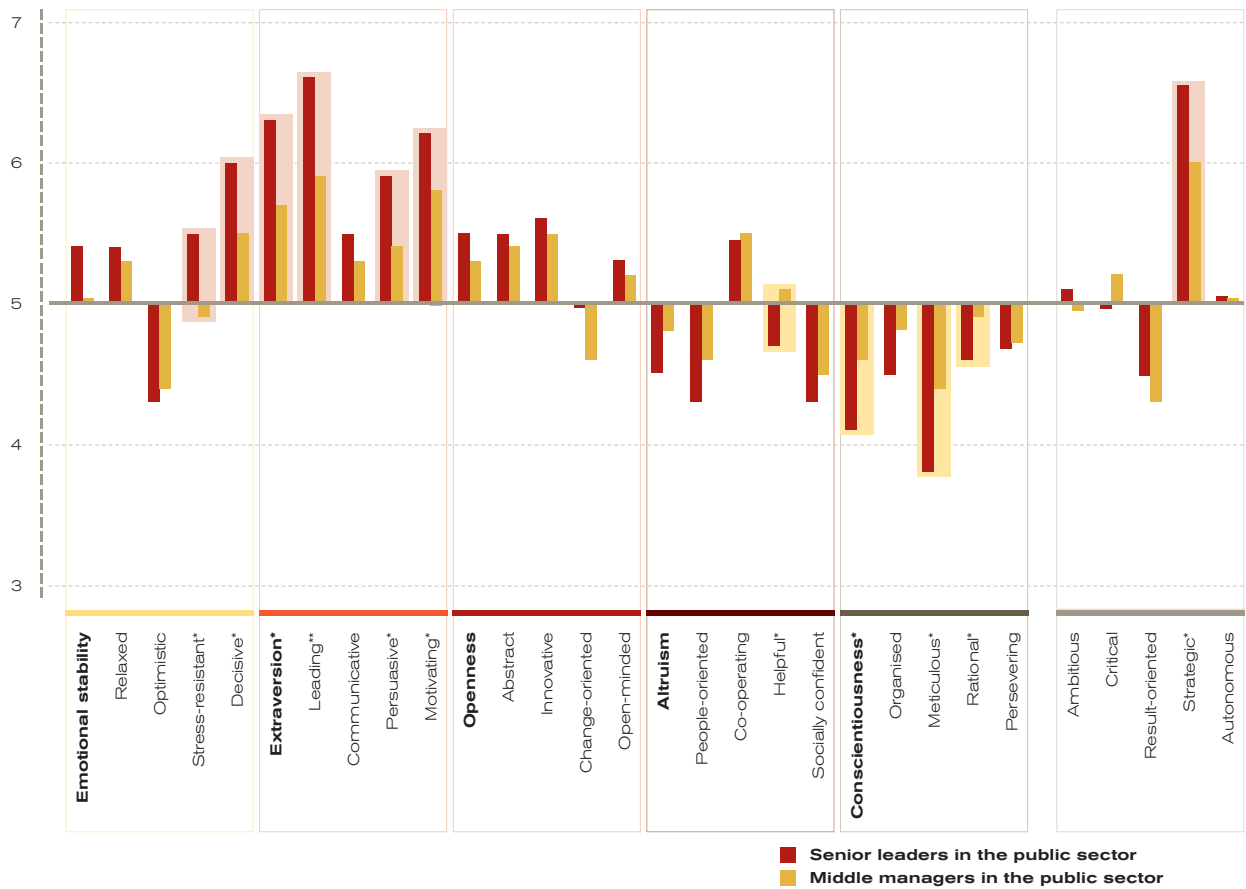
WE WONDERED HOW MANAGERS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ARE PREPARED TO EVOLVE PROGRESSIVELY TO LEADERSHIP ROLES .

To find out, we invited a large number of middle managers to take the BAQ in order to compare them to senior leaders. In the graph on the following page we provide the results of middle managers and senior leaders in the public sector.

The results clearly show that the middle managers have the same profile as the senior leaders, though this is somewhat less pronounced. It is striking to see to what extent the different scores follow the same pattern.

This suggests that middle managers are clearly prepared to progressively take on leadership responsibilities. However, because they do not yet have full authority they score significantly lower on typical leadership characteristics (Decisive, Extraversion, Leading, Persuasive, Motivating and Strategic). But because they are more involved in operational activities, they score significantly higher on dimensions like Helpful, Meticulous and Rational.

What is most interesting about this result is the fact that our data provide empirical support for previous conclusions (for instance by Giberson, Resick, & Dickson, 2005) about leader-follower congruence. Other authors have suggested that a high leader-follower congruence based on personality would have a positive effect on satisfaction and performance (Ahmad, 2008).





PUBLIC SECTOR: THE NEW GENERATION OF SENIOR LEADERS, LESS IS MORE

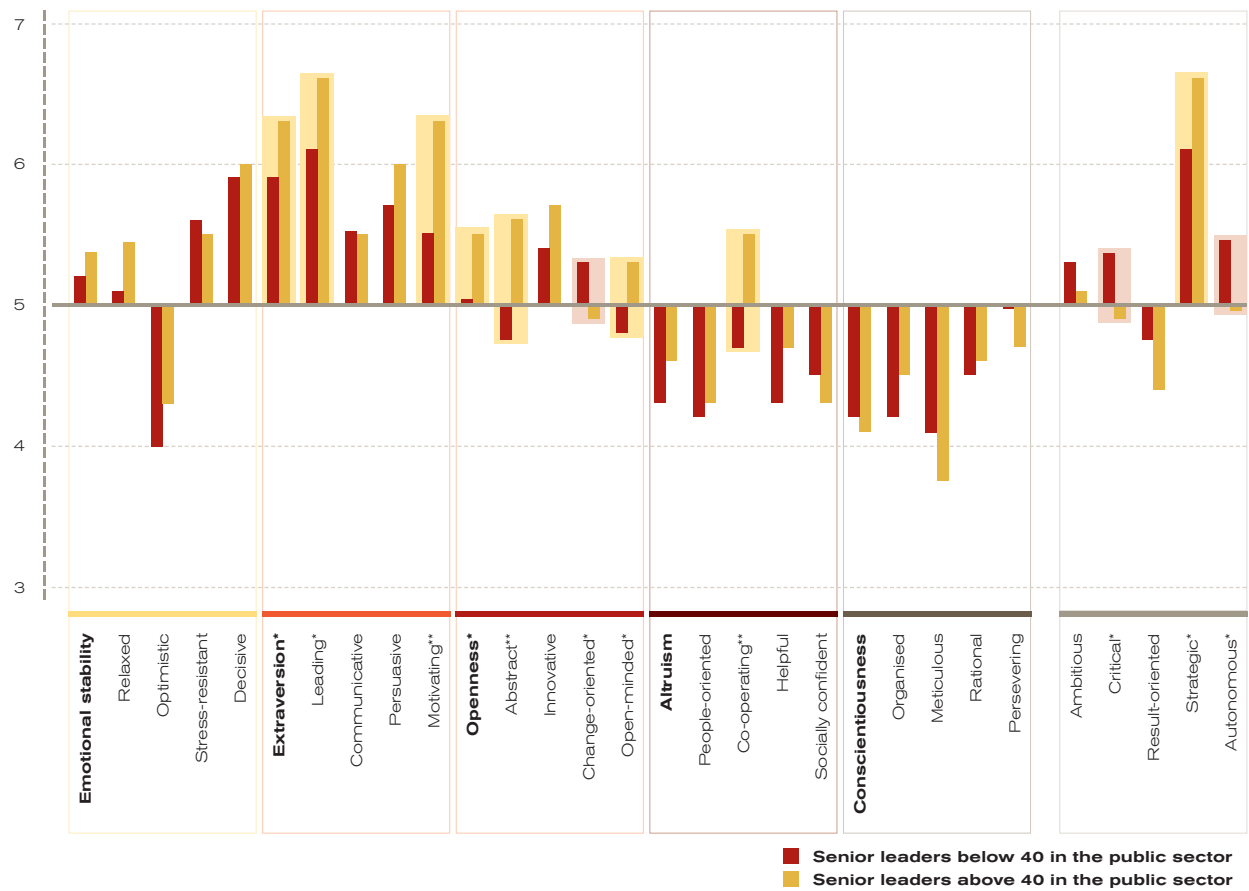
BASED ON OUR FINDINGS, IT SEEMED INTERESTING TO FIND OUT HOW SENIOR LEADERS GROW IN THEIR JOBS AS THEY ACQUIRE MORE EXPERIENCE. IN THE GRAPH ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE WE SHOW THE RESULTS OF SENIOR LEADERS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ACCORDING TO 2 CATEGORIES OF AGE: BELOW AND ABOVE 40 YEARS.

The results clearly show that younger senior leaders have a similar profile to their more experienced colleagues, although their profile is less pronounced. It looks as if these young leaders build on their experience as middle managers in order to grow into their new responsibilities. They have abandoned the more operational traits, but still have to further develop their typical leadership traits.

Senior leaders below 40 score lower on Leading and Motivating and as a consequence lower on Extraversion in general. Although not significantly, they tend to score lower on Optimistic. Senior leaders below 40 do not score as high as their colleagues above 40 on Abstract and Open-minded, which limits their Openness in general, although they are more open to change. They score lower on Co-operating. They are not as Strategic but are more Critical and Autonomous in the way they approach a situation.

Overall, one could say that compared with senior leaders above 40, young senior leaders show less autocratic or paternalistic leadership behaviour, but show a higher personal ambition to change things and to do things their way. They do not tend to spontaneously involve others in the decision making process and are not always very optimistic about the outcome, but they develop a personal opinion and are prepared to critically question ideas put forward by others.

It is important to mention here that in the public sector, only 10% of senior leaders are younger than 40. In the private sector, however 30% are under 40. It is also obvious that in the private sector, younger senior leaders show a much stronger personality profile compared to their colleagues in the public sector. It seems that they get more room for self-development and more opportunity to experiment with new procedures and methods. It could be suggested that a positive evolution for the public sector would be to adopt more dynamic career development processes, enabling young potentials to develop their talents more quickly and grow into more senior positions.





OUR HYPOTHESES CHALLENGED

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT, ENVIRONMENT, GOALS AND STRUCTURE INFLUENCE LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR.

We suggested that similarities and differences in the global context, environment, goals and structure would have an influence on the leadership style of senior leaders in the public sector.

Hypothesis 1: Public sector organisations are usually as complex as private sector organisations. In both cases, a social arrangement, which pursues collective goals, controls its own performance, and a boundary separating it from its environment, can be observed.

As a consequence we can expect leaders in the public sector to have the same global business attitudes pattern as senior leaders in the private sector, showing the same dominant characteristics differentiating them from the global population.

When comparing senior leaders from the public and private sectors, it turns out that both groups have a common profile on those characteristics differentiating most senior leaders from the average population. They both clearly show strengths on the different facets of the factor Extraversion (Leading, Persuasive and Motivating).

They are firm when it comes to making decisions and strategic when it comes to the long-term perspective of the organisation.

Senior leaders in the public sector score significantly lower on the personality characteristics Communicative and Orientation on short-term results, but their basic profile is still very similar to the basic profile of senior leaders in the private sector.

These findings are consistent with the findings of Boyne, Jenkins & Poole (1999): "Although our results show that HRM (Human Resources Management) varies significantly between the public and private sectors, it is possible that the distinctions have become less pronounced over time. In other words, the absence of homogeneity does not rule out a process of convergence that is not yet complete. A recent analysis of managerial reform in local government has shown that 'embedding new approaches and dislodging old ways of life (are) clearly long-term processes, with movements forward and backwards, and change at different levels' (Lowndes 1997, p. 90). Thus, further snapshots of HRM policies and practices may reveal that the two sectors are moving closer together".



Hypothesis 2: Public organisations operate in a less stable context with, for example, frequent changes in policy, which could create the need to constantly find new solutions and imagine alternative ways of doing things.

Therefore, we could expect senior leaders in the public sector to be more conceptual and innovative in their approach to dealing with this complex and rapidly changing environment.

In looking at the global environment of public organisations, we wanted to investigate how senior leaders in the public sector deal with the rapidly changing environment they have to face on a daily basis. In line with our hypothesis, we observe that the senior leaders of our target group score significantly higher on Abstract and Innovative. They obviously use a creative and conceptual approach to find innovative solutions to deal with changes and challenges.

This is not exactly in line with findings in literature: Boyatzis (1982) found that managers in the private sector need higher levels of the competencies of conceptualisation, oral presentations, concern for impact, diagnostic use of concepts, efficiency orientation, and pro-activity. Our data clearly suggest that, while senior leaders in the private sector do appear to be more Communicative and Result-oriented, they are less focused on conceptual and abstract thinking than their counterparts in the public sector and are less inclined to go for a creative and innovative approach.

We can therefore argue that senior leaders in a public environment are more focused on thought leadership and on reflection before action. They keep more distance from the problems they have to deal with, imagine more alternatives and only come to conclusions if they feel they have a reasonable guarantee of a positive outcome. This, combined with their tendency to be less optimistic, makes them more risk-averse and more stable in their decision-making.

Hypothesis 3: Public organisations operate in a more complex environment with a variety of stakeholders with conflicting demands (e.g. taxpayer and service recipient). This could create the pressure to achieve short-term results in order to get problems solved in a quick and efficient manner. It could, however, also give way to a more prudent, time-consuming process of decision-making, taking into consideration all these different demands and expectations in order to strike a very difficult balance that guarantees the buy-in of the majority of stakeholders.

We could therefore expect senior leaders in the public sector not to be particularly result-oriented, aiming at achieving short-term results, but rather cautious and mindful when taking decisions.

The fact that senior leaders in the public sector are constantly confronted with a variety of stakeholders with conflicting demands could suggest that they would, depending on the particular circumstances they have to face, abandon their thoughtful approach and go for more short-term results.

In line with our hypothesis, our findings show that this drive is not as apparent as one might expect. It seems that the “sense of urgency” to deliver is not as high as suggested. Senior leaders in the public sector appear not to be tempted to go for quick results, and tend, regardless of the particular circumstances, to continue to maintain distance from the situation and look at problems in a thoughtful way. They obviously know that when they make decisions too quickly, without the necessary buy-in, they will fail.

The particular environment in which they have to operate, makes senior leaders in the public sector especially sensitive to the diversity of influences that can easily make the difference when it comes to the success or failure of any given project.

Their caution may also be down to the fact that the media and all kinds of pressure groups have a disproportionate impact on public sector “business” compared to the private sector. The disadvantage of this approach might lie in the impression that things take too long, while an advantage is that things move forward in a progressive, but efficient way.

Hypothesis 4: Senior leaders in the public sector are often involved in supporting political leaders in their policy-making activities. Policy-making is in most cases one of the key tasks of public organisations.

As a consequence, one could expect senior leaders in the public sector to aim at the longer term and to assure stability in their organisation, regardless of political changes or agenda. A conceptual and strategic focus seems essential for public sector senior leaders to allow them to make long-lasting policies.

Public sector senior leaders act in an environment that is essentially oriented around high level policy-making. They are obliged to consistently support political authorities in the development of new legislation and regulations. Therefore, they face more pressure than leaders in the private sector to adopt a long-term view when it comes to their field of responsibility. This becomes very clear in our findings, which show a significantly higher strategic orientation for senior leaders in the public sector compared to senior leaders in the private sector.

This more conceptual and strategic way of dealing with situations is probably what differentiates most senior leaders in the public sector from their counterparts in the private sector. The latter seem to focus essentially on short-term results in order to meet the requirements of the stock market, the former experience less stress when it comes to deadlines and act in a more strategic and thoughtful manner. This mindful approach has been described in literature as effective, instrumental leadership behaviour (Kawakami, White & Langer, 2000; Antonakis & House, 2004).





Hypothesis 5: Overall, the goals of the private sector can be seen as clear and unequivocal. They are easily measurable in terms of profit and loss and are published at the end of each quarter and each year. The objectives of public sector organisations are far more ambiguous. They are more complex, less concrete, not easily measurable and therefore more difficult to manage.

As a result, public sector senior leaders can be expected to be less confident about the outcome of their initiatives and the way they will be appreciated. We can also expect them to show less perseverance in the search for one particular goal and less determination in achieving (short-term) results.

According to Baldwin (1987), goals in private sector organisations are less ambiguous, because they can be evaluated in terms of economic outcomes. Public sector goals are less clear for the simple reason that senior leaders have to simultaneously pursue multiple and less tangible goals.

Our hypothesis was that senior leaders in the public sector would react by showing less confidence in the outcome of things and appreciation for their initiatives. This is clearly confirmed by the finding that senior leaders in the public sector are significantly less optimistic than their counterparts in the private sector. Also, the fact that they show less perseverance in the search for a particular goal is largely confirmed, as is their tendency to be less determined to consistently go for short-term results.

This finding is confirmed by Hooijberg R. & Choi J. (2001): "the fact that managers in the public sector have less stressed the goal-orientation role, suggests that they do not feel as much latitude of action on the goal-orientation role as their counterparts in the private sector. This shows us the tough realities facing public sector managers: despite strong role expectations, they feel their hands are tied".

Seen from the outside, one could argue that a more audacious attitude could lead to more efficiency in the operation of public services. Seen from the inside, this more cautious approach guarantees that rules and regulations are optimally followed and that unnecessary delays due to hasty and insufficiently thought-out decisions are avoided.

Hypothesis 6: In general public sector organisations afford their leaders less discretion and less managerial autonomy. In most situations a senior leader in the public sector has little discretionary power since duties and responsibilities, available resources, pay rises, etc, are clearly documented in policies, rules and procedures. *As a result, senior leaders in the public sector may adopt different behaviour compared with senior leaders in the private sector. Their business attitudes are probably more oriented towards rule-following, monitoring compliance with the rules and detecting discrepancies, and less towards trusting people and dealing with issues in an informal way.*

Our hypothesis 6 is related to the particular structure of public sector organisations. The study of Solomon (1986) underlines clear differences in policies between the public and private sectors. Robertson & Seneviratne (1995) confirm that senior leaders in the public sector have to comply with the civil service system; have more specialised and invariable job designs; and have stricter reporting relationships, higher levels of accountability, more rules, more regulations and more constraints.

The **structural limitations** regarding managerial autonomy are reflected in the personality of public sector senior leaders: they adopt a leadership style that is more based on rule-following and detecting discrepancies and is very consistent with the personality characteristics we have described under hypothesis 5. The structure of public organisations is clearly fully aligned to rather complex and intangible goals and aims at fully streamlining operations towards these goals. Senior leaders have obviously learned to deal with these constraints and have adjusted their business attitudes accordingly.

We see however an evolution with younger leaders in the public sector. They seem to use a more personal and autonomous approach and show the drive to change things in the organisation based on a critical appraisal of the current situation. More and more, they seem ready to test the limits and take more risks in order to enjoy more flexibility in the way they deal with their environment.

This is a challenging observation with consequences for Talent Management policies. In the private sector it is commonplace for leaders to be evaluated and rewarded based on the personal impact they have on the (financial) objectives they achieve. However, it seems difficult to evaluate and reward leaders in the public sector in the same way. Their lower levels of discretion in the way they can influence the organisation can lead to lower levels of motivation (Solomon, 1986; Khojasteh, 1993), less commitment (Boyne, 2002) and a less optimistic self perception, as we find in our study. This is even more challenging given the fact that, in their psychological contract, the search for recognition is more important to senior leaders in the public sector than to leaders in the private sector. (Khojastec, 1993).

The **structural limitations** regarding managerial autonomy also have other consequences for the way senior leaders in the public sector deal with their environment. Because they are more or less obliged to focus on rule-following and detecting discrepancies, they are less inclined to adopt informal relationships with others. This leads to significantly lower results on the Altruism factor and on the People-oriented and Socially Confident facets.

Once again, this is a challenging observation with consequences for Talent Management. Adopting this type of attitude could undermine trust in senior management, which, according to Albrecht, S. & Travaglione, A. (2003), could have a negative impact on the optimal functioning of the organisation. Their results suggest that effective organisational communication, procedural justice, organisational support and satisfaction with job security predict trust in public sector senior management. The results also show that trust in senior management influences affective commitment, continuance commitment, cynicism towards change and turnover intention.



OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

CHALLENGES FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR SENIOR LEADERS: THE RESULTS WE FIND ARE IN LINE WITH THE TYPICAL CHALLENGES A PUBLIC SENIOR LEADER HAS TO DEAL WITH (VAN WART, 2003).

Challenge 1: Public sector senior leaders are confronted with the challenge to deliver public services in an efficient and legal manner, in accordance with the authorised procedures, processes and rules. Therefore, public sector senior leaders are typically prone to follow and monitor rules and procedures, and give clear directions about the way things need to be done.

Challenge 2: Public sector senior leaders are confronted with the challenge to align the organisation with the changing environment, more importantly the macro-level changes in order to be able to deliver the public services in the long run. In this way public sector senior leaders are challenged to create a long-term vision based on their experience, innovation and conceptual thinking to prepare the organisation to deal with the necessary changes in the (near) future.

Challenge 3: Public sector senior leaders are challenged to motivate, develop and steer followers who provide those public services. It is a challenge for public sector senior leaders to motivate their employees and to establish a positive working atmosphere that inspires people to deliver good public services.

Looking at these challenges, we must ask to what extent those challenges for public sector senior leaders differ from the challenges private sector senior leaders have to deal with, especially if one were to replace “public services” with more typical private sector deliverables such as “products”, “goods” or “services”. There are undoubtedly differences between the public and the private sectors regarding the environment, the goals, and the structure which influences the leadership style and business attitudes of leaders. However, we must not be tempted to overestimate the difference in challenges senior leaders in both sectors have to face.



So the questions are not: to what extent can the public sector learn from the private sector? To what extent can the public sector senior leadership move into the direction of private sector leadership? Instead, the question is:

To what extent can both public and private sector senior leaders learn from each other in order to be able to deal with the challenges they have to face, given the fact that those challenges are at least partly the same, but also partly different?

WHAT PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERS CAN LEARN FROM PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERS: WIELDING INFLUENCE, NOT AUTHORITY

Many of the key actors in the strategic management process are external to the organisation. This implies that a skilful exercise of influence is likely to be more critical than the wielding of authority. Senior leaders must cope with confrontation without being confrontational. They must communicate effectively and quickly with large numbers of constituent groups to establish good working relationships with different kinds of people. This creates special challenges for senior leaders who lack authority over these groups.

Given the observed profile of public sector senior leaders, there is room for improvement when it comes to their capacity for building positive, motivating relationships with stakeholders. This would help meet the challenge of motivating, developing and guiding followers. One is not a leader because one has the authority to act like a leader or because one is appointed to it, but because one has followers. To a certain extent, public sector senior leaders could get more done by paying more attention to what and how they communicate, instead of focusing on what and how things need to be done.

WHAT PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERS CAN LEARN FROM PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERS: MINDFUL AND INSTRUMENTAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR

Public sector leaders are more focused on long-term strategy and the creative process involved in building a conceptual vision. These are important aspects of mindful behaviour, which is described as effective leadership behaviour (Kawakami, White, & Langer, 2000). It appears that public sector senior leaders are more oriented towards strategic leadership, one of the important aspects of instrumental leadership behaviour (Antonakis & House, 2004). Strategic leadership might facilitate the charismatic effect, because the identification of a deficiency in the status quo and the articulation of a vision that can project a better future is a function of a senior leader's ability to use strategic leadership skills.

Given the challenging economic situation we are facing, one could ask how the economy would look like if private leaders had focused more on the long-term rather than on the short-term and had created and monitored regulations and rules rather than taking high risks - two typical aspects of the public sector leaders.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR

Many researchers (Bass, 1997) have implicitly and explicitly assumed that theories of leadership apply to all different types of organisations. However, our study supports the call to explore the impact of organisational context variables. It shows that the organisational sector influences the leadership role which should be used by the management (Hooijberg & Choi, 2001). This is regardless of the fact that the leadership styles in public and private sectors share common ground. It is worthwhile investigating what is the most effective way to develop leaders, both in the private and public sector.

Given the perception of limited managerial discretion of public leaders, the institutional support system becomes more crucial in developing leadership. For private sector senior leaders, an intensive coaching programme to develop competencies like strategy and vision could be very useful. For public sector senior leaders, a coaching programme on communication, networking or establishing strategic partnerships is probably not sufficient. To be

more effective, the coaching programme should be in line with the necessary organisational support. External coaching should be provided by coaches with excellent experience within the public sector in order to install an effective learning curve.

The necessary support and coaching is especially crucial for younger public leaders who show the drive to change things according to their personal critical view. They should be guided and supported to implement change, and coached to build a community - an environment of mutual support, respect and collaboration which would facilitate change.

It is also important that public leaders feel rewarded for their efforts. Across decades, research shows that public leaders have a lower degree of satisfaction (Rhinehart et al, 1969; Buchanan, 1974; Lachman, 1985; Solomon, 1986; Khojasteh, 1993). The lower score on Optimistic we find in our study supports this finding. Motivation can be increased by intrinsic factors like achievement, advancement and the recognition they receive for the goals they achieve (Khojasteh, 1993).

Senior leaders are particularly prone to learn via challenging experiences. It is therefore worthwhile investigating the possibility of exchanging private and public sector senior leaders. This exchange of senior leaders across the public and private sector can be useful, especially if both types of leaders have the desired intention to learn from each other.

Our hope is that this study will not be read only by public sector senior leaders, who may just want to prove that "they are at least as good as private leaders". We are convinced that what has been revealed is at least as interesting for private sector senior leaders as for public sector senior leaders. After all, as we have shown, one type of senior leader is no better or worse than the other.

If we focus too long on the differences that do exist, we may forget to make a difference.

And for leaders in all sectors, making a difference is the real challenge.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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	EMOTIONAL STABILITY	
Feels anxious or guilty in the event of failure, worried, lacking calmness, nervous	Relaxed	Free from anxiety, maintains a calm attitude in the event of failure, calm and relaxed
Expects things to go wrong, worries about how things will turn out, pessimistic	Optimistic	Confident that things will turn out well, does not worry about how things will turn out, remains cheerful
Susceptible to stress, difficulties to cope with tension and pressure, quickly affected by situations	Stress-resistant	Not subjected to stress, not particularly bothered by tension and pressure, not easily affected by situations
Hesitates over decisions, needs time to reach conclusions	Decisive	Takes decisions quickly, draws conclusions quickly
	EXTRAVERSION	
Lets others take the lead, does not take initiative, does not like giving instructions	Leading	Likes to lead, takes initiative, gives others instructions
Does not like speaking, has difficulties to keep the conversation going, is inarticulate	Communicative	Likes speaking, keeps the conversation going, is articulate
A poor salesperson, not at ease in negotiations, non convincing	Persuasive	Able to sell, at ease in negotiations, convincing
Uninspiring, lacks a motivating influence, does not motivate others for the task	Motivating	Inspires others, has a motivating influence, fills others with enthusiasm for the task
	OPENNESS	
Concrete, both feet on the ground, practical-minded	Abstract	Theoretical, intellectually curious, likes complex, abstract things
Lacks inventiveness and creativity, rarely thinks of new ways of seeing things	Innovative	Is creative, generates new ideas and thinks of original ways of seeing things
Prefers routine, needs security, prefers regularity to variety	Change-oriented	Likes change, tries out new things, prefers variety to regularity
Does not see many possibilities, has trouble thinking up alternatives and options	Open-minded	Sees various possibilities, thinks up alternatives and options
	ALTRUISM	
Enjoys being alone, is not very fond of company, is focused on himself/herself, does not need company	People-oriented	Enjoys group situations, is fond of company, is focused on others, seeks out company
Rarely consults, rarely involves others, does not seek out cooperation, places own interests above those of the group	Co-operating	Consults others, involves others, seeks out cooperation, places group's interests above his/her own
Self-involved, lacks a helpful attitude, is not concerned about others, lacks considerateness, leaves others fend for themselves	Helpful	Helps when others face problems, gives advice, is considerate
Finds it hard to establish contacts, does not always get along with people, unfriendly, unpleasant	Socially confident	Establishes contacts easily, cheerful, gets along with people, friendly, pleasant, spontaneous
	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	
Does not work to a plan, pays insufficient attention to time limits, pays little attention to routine tasks	Organised	Plans carefully in the light of priorities, sets time limits, pays attention to routine tasks
Not very methodical or meticulous, has little eye for detail	Meticulous	Works methodically and meticulously, pays attention to details
Pays little attention to facts, relies on intuition, tends not to quantify, speaks or acts first and thinks afterwards	Rational	Sticks to the facts, evaluates and measures, quantifies, thinks twice before speaking or acting
Loses heart quickly, gives up when facing opposition, drops things quickly, rarely sees tasks through to a successful conclusion	Persevering	Does not give up when facing setbacks, keeps trying and perseveres, persists in the face of opposition, gets stuck into the task
Not very career-minded, lacks ambition, sets moderate objectives	Ambitious	Career-minded and ambitious, sets difficult objectives, wants to go far, wants to get ahead
Not very critical in his/her approach, accepts information or ideas from others without questioning them	Critical	Examines information critically, identifies potential drawbacks and limitations
Not very result-oriented, feels little need to achieve a great result, lacks competitiveness	Result-oriented	Likes to achieve results, wants to stand out, is competitive-minded
Sets short-term objectives, looks at things from an operational or short-term perspective	Strategic	Sets long-term objectives, looks at things from a strategic or long-term perspective
Adapts to the situation, takes account of the circumstances, does not show own approach or opinion	Autonomous	Influences the situation, makes his/her own mark, has his/her own approach and opinion

TESTIMONIALS



John Speed,

Director of Human Resources,
European Court of Auditors

"Generally, I find the report both interesting and timely. The serious failure of a significant section of private sector leadership in the banking and finance sector has highlighted the fallacious argument that it is the private sector that has all the benchmarks for best practice in leadership. I have never believed that, having worked myself in both the private and public sectors.

I was a bit surprised to read that public sector organisations operate in a less stable context. In my opinion, some public sector organisations operate in a stable context and have a tendency to be rather ossified. They can survive in a somewhat protected way, without challenge to what they are doing. At the same time, some private sector organisations operate in unstable contexts, subject to fluctuating market conditions and constantly needing to look for innovative solutions and change to survive. I have tended to think that the private sector faces more challenges here than the public sector, and responds to them. But the research seems to indicate that my perception is wrong.

Further on, I am not sure that it is the business attitudes of public sector leaders that are oriented towards rule-following, etc, it is that public sector leaders are required to operate within the framework of rules and regulations. De-regulation in the banking and financial sectors, with insufficient regulatory supervision, allowed the leaders of those organisations to take excessive risks while pursuing short-term goals. As the study shows, private leaders certainly have something here to learn from public leaders.

Some quotes in the study are really appealing and I will always remember them: "One is not a leader because one has the authority to act like a leader, or because one is appointed to it, but because one has followers". And "...a skilful exercise of influence is likely to be more critical than the wielding of authority." Both of those are important statements for public sector leaders."

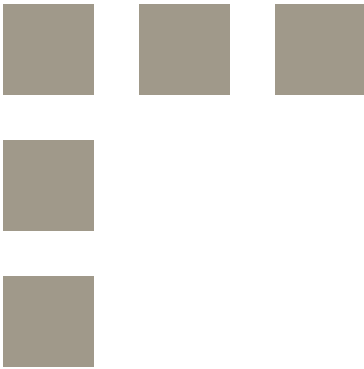


Ewart Wooldridge CBE,

Chief Executive,
Leadership Foundation for Higher Education
United Kingdom

"The results of Hudson's study 'ring true' for me. The main point that comes through to me is about younger leaders in the Public Sector. We have a responsibility in the Public Sector to encourage a sense of innovation at those levels otherwise they may adopt too early the 'risk averse' and more bureaucratic approaches of their senior counterparts. In higher education, where people come late to leadership in their careers, we are placing a high emphasis on developing a greater sense of leadership at a much earlier stage of the career and age."





Frank Van Massenhove,
Secretary General,
Ministry of Social Security
Belgian Federal Government
Public Leader of the Year 2007

"The study clearly reflects the reality I observe around me. It is also refreshing to find that it is not based on the usual stereotypes - those created by generalisations based on limited observations. Clearly highlighted is the fact that the differences between the private and public sectors which were previously very important are gradually diminishing.

We are evolving towards a new type of knowledge economy which will focus more and more on creativity and trust in people and their potential. This shift will require organisations from both public and private sectors to evolve and to change in order to be able to cope with the new challenges.

It is clear that leaders in both sectors can and should learn from one another, although in some cases, it might be more effective to learn from outliers with a proven track record, regardless of the sector in which they work.

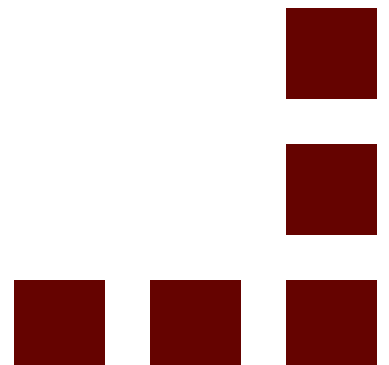
The time of doing things the same old way is over. The organisations that will survive are those that successfully adapt to new circumstances, new technological opportunities and new requirements from their talent pool. They will engage in dynamic change processes which will allow them to get the maximum out of their teams, and demonstrate a way of working based on trust, belief in self-management and in a proactive entrepreneurial culture.



The study highlights that today's public leaders are still driven by rules and regulations. It also shows that they develop innovative ideas and look at the long term rather than at short-term results. The future will teach them, however, that it is people who matter. They will have to pay more attention to their people, believe more in their capabilities and focus on their motivation. There is no doubt that they will have to overcome internal resistance and learn how to properly communicate their intentions and objectives in order to get things moving in the right direction.

But they will be surprised by the dynamism and potential of their young leaders and the associative thinking power of their female colleagues and the willingness of the workforce to move on if taken seriously in the way they want to do things.

The study makes it very clear that we must evolve towards a culture in which the leaders do not hold their positions simply because they have got the authority. Instead, they are leaders because they can guide people and add value by stimulating ideas from their teams. Real influence does not come with power, but through sharing knowledge in a positive way with others."





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ⁱ A stanine score puts (for every group) the average at 5 and the standard deviation at 2. This is a statistical technique permitting to compare groups, based on a standardised scale. The stanine indicates the position of a person in a group relative to the other people having been measured with the same instrument.

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