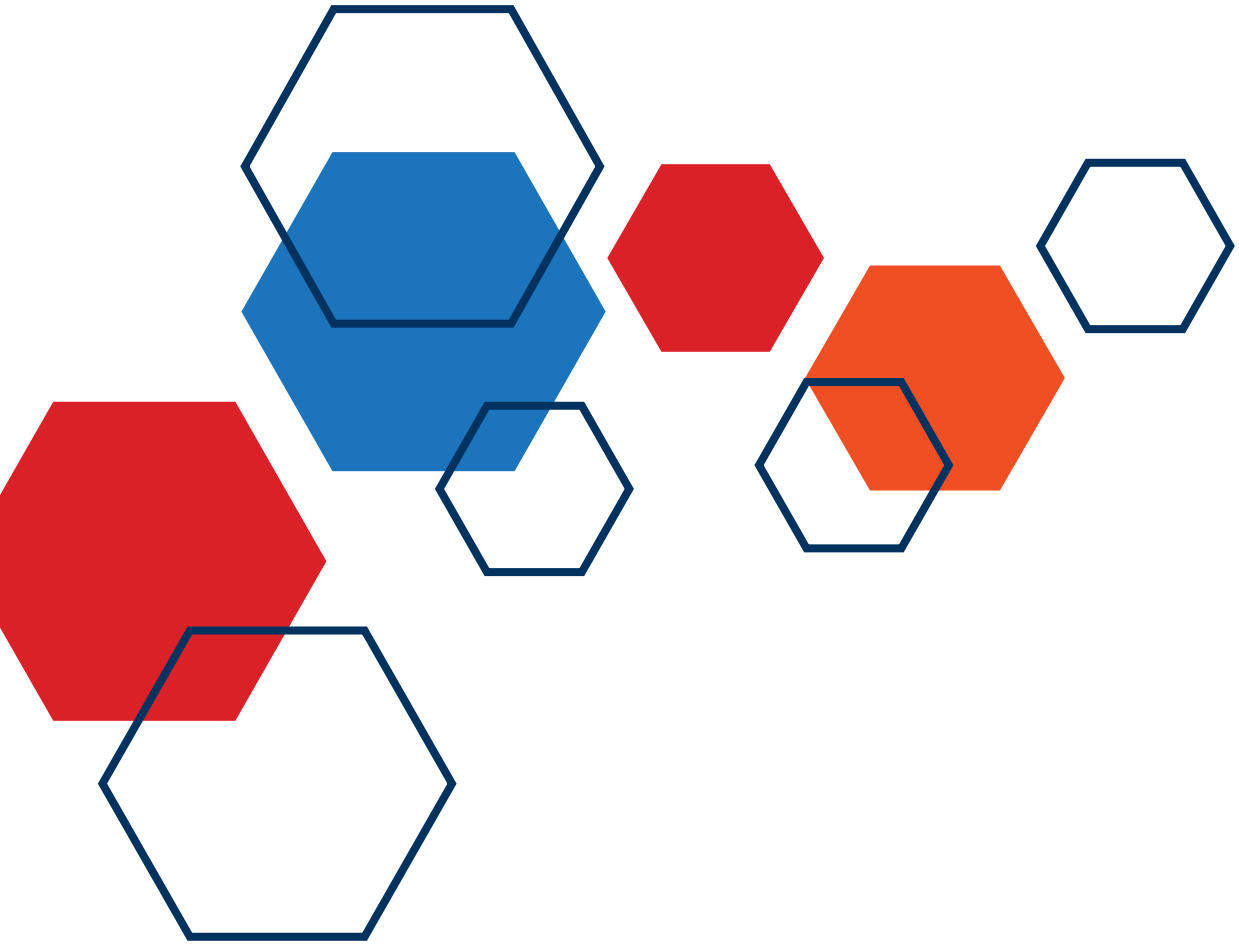
PBC HOGAN

Whitepaper

Personality Differences in the Public Versus Private Sector in New Zealand

Authored by: Elliot Phillips



Executive summary

Understanding what differentiates employees can be useful when it comes to their selection and development. An interesting avenue that has been explored is whether there are differences between workers in the public and private sectors. The following white paper summarises research that aimed to contribute insights into this area by examining similarities and differences in personality profiles within the New Zealand public and private sectors.

– Significant differences were found in relation to day-to-day personality which may contribute to differences between the workplace behaviours of public and private sector workers in New Zealand. Specifically, those in the public sector were more likely, day-to-day, to be driven, goal-oriented, and focused on achieving results. They were also more likely to prefer a practical, hands-on approach to learning. By contrast, those in the private sector were more likely to be seen as good team players, and stay up to date with industry trends.

– There were significant differences in relation to derailment tendencies which may contribute to differences in professional development requirements for employees in the private and public sectors in New Zealand. Specifically, private sector employees were more likely to derail by displaying passive resistance and perfectionistic tendencies, as well as by being overly confident, assertive and dominant.

– Significant differences were also found in relation to motives and drivers for those in the public and private sectors which may contribute to the differences in preferred work environments and organisational cultures. Specifically, private sector workers were more likely to embody values related to competition, respecting authority, and financial transparency. On the other hand, those in the public sector were less likely to embrace these values and by association, are likely to value cooperation and democratic decision making.

Background

Being able to differentiate between individuals' strengths and shortcomings can be helpful when it comes to both selection and development processes. One area that has been explored is whether there are differences between those who work in the public and private sectors.

Previous research has found differences in the predominant values present in each sector, as well as prevailing leadership styles. In particular, the public sector was found to place a larger emphasis on contributing to society, meanwhile, the private sector was found to have stronger values around organisational commitment and taking on prestigious work (Lyons et al., 2006). There are also reported differences in behaviours across the public and private sectors, with leaders in the public sector displaying more participative leadership behaviours, and private sector leaders being found to display directive leadership styles (Hooijberg & Choi 2001).

As personality has an impact on our workplace behaviours and performance (Hogan & Holland, 2003; Oh & Mount, 2010; Le et al., 2011), differences in personality may account for some of the variations in the values and behaviours adopted in the public and private sectors. This research aims to provide greater insight into personality-related differences between the public and private sectors, specifically by looking at three aspects of personality; day-to-day tendencies, derailment tendencies, and motivators.

Methodology

Participants

Data was analysed for a sample of 1,946 subjects who completed the Hogan Assessments between 2018 and 2022 (HPI: N = 1,946, HDS: N = 1,530, MVPI: N = 1,409). The sample consisted of 730 subjects from the public sector, and a further 1,216 subjects from the private sector.

The sample consisted of subjects from a diverse range of industries including (but not limited to) banking and finance, construction, hospitality, IT and telecommunications, professional services, and government offices[1].

Measures

The following assessments were completed by the sample as an assessment of personality and values:

- Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI; Hogan & Hogan, 2007): measures day-to-day personality characteristics and provides information about an individual's typical behavioural tendencies and how they are likely to be perceived in the work environment.
- Hogan Development Survey (HDS; Hogan & Hogan, 2009): measures personality when under pressure or complacent, and describes an individual's strengths which, when overplayed, can potentially derail performance at work.
- Motives, Values, Preferences Inventory (MVPI; Hogan & Hogan, 2010): provides insight into an individual's core values that motivate and drive their behaviour.

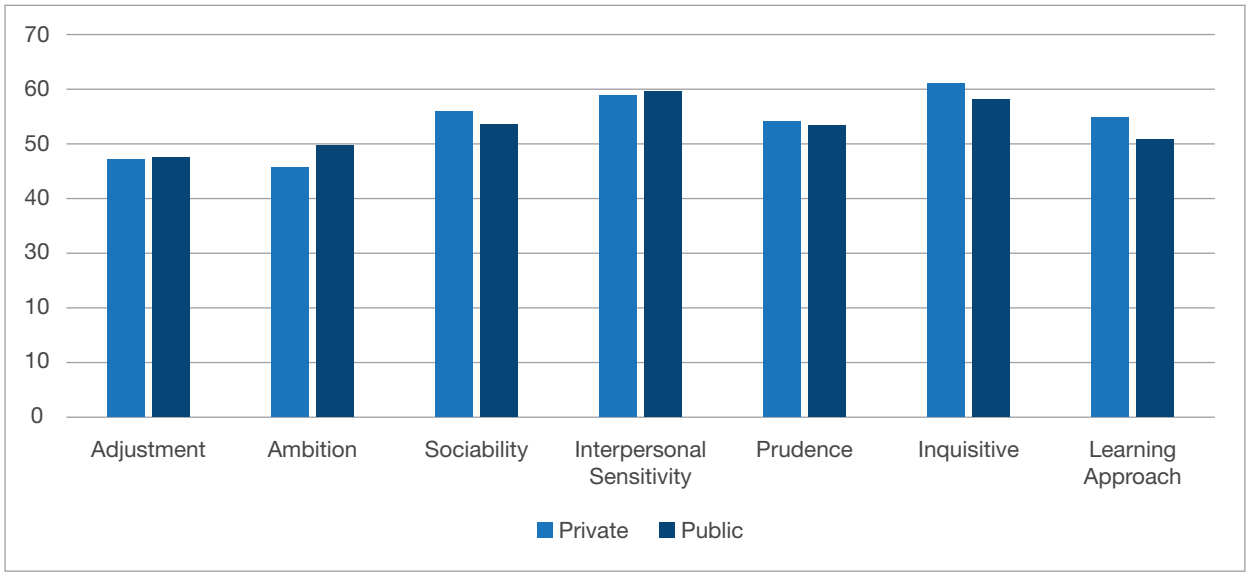
Statistical analysis

To assess whether there were differences between the public and private sectors, a series of independent samples t-tests were carried out. The level of statistical significance used to assess for differences was based on a p value set to .05, and Bonferroni correction was applied to ensure that only statistically valid and meaningful differences were identified.

[1] In the original sample that was collected, the number of cases where industry was coded as health care was much higher in the private sector (23%) than the public sector (2%). Similarly, the number of cases where industry was coded as defence was much higher in the public sector (49%) than the private sector (0%). Cases where industry was coded as either health care or defence from both the public and private sectors were excluded from the analysis to remove the disproportional representation of these two industries. This provided greater confidence that any differences observed would be due to differences between the two sectors rather than specific industries. The numbers listed in the participant section listed above relates to the final sample that was used in the analyses.

Results

Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI)



Significant differences were found for two of the seven HPI scales, with public sector employees scoring significantly higher on Ambition and private sector employees scoring significantly higher on Learning Approach.

When looking at Adjustment, people in the private sector were as likely to exhibit behaviours associated with resilience, stress tolerance, and emotional composure as those in the public sector.

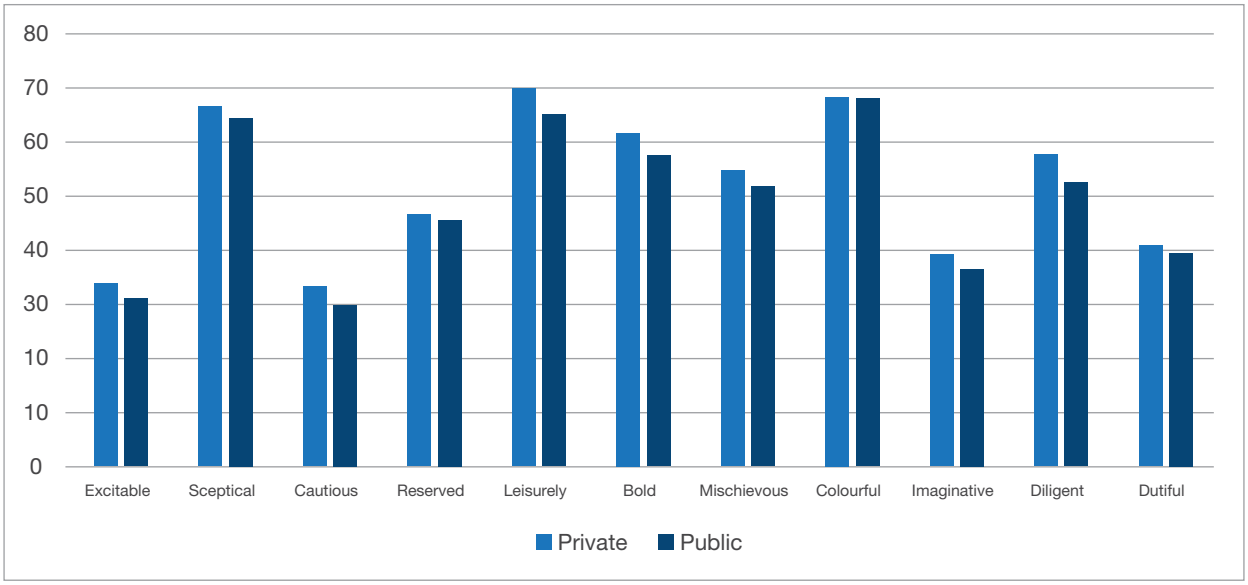
Public sector workers scored significantly higher when it came to Ambition, being more likely to display higher levels of drive, action orientation, and a focus on achieving results. By comparison, private sector employees were more likely to be generally less assertive, and be seen as good team players.

Employees in the private sector scored similarly to public sector workers on Sociability, which suggests that they were equally likely to actively seek opportunities to engage other people, pursue collaborative projects, and enjoy networking. Additionally, the similarity in scores on Interpersonal Sensitivity suggests that they were equally as likely to nurture their relationships and navigate towards interpersonal harmony. In combination with Sociability, private and sector employees were likely to develop similar levels of both breadth and depth in their interpersonal network.

Prudence scores were similar for the public and private sectors, suggesting that they were as likely as each other to tackle tasks in a procedural manner, executing their work to high standards and having a strong detail focus. In addition to executing solutions, the public and private sectors were equally as likely to approach problem solving by suggesting innovative and novel solutions as indicated by their Inquisitive scores.

Private sector employees were significantly higher on Learning Approach, indicating that they may be more likely to actively seek opportunities to stay up to date with the latest trends and developments applicable to their profession. By contrast, those in the public sector were more likely to be just-in-time learners, preferring a practical, hands-on approach to learning.

Hogan Development Survey (HDS)



Looking at the comparison of scores between public and private workers across the HDS, there were significant differences for 3 of the 11 HDS scales. Specifically, private sector employees scored significantly higher on Leisurely Bold and Diligent.

There were no significant differences found for scores on Excitable, suggesting that employees in the public and private sectors were equally as likely to derail by overreacting to situations and expressing unregulated emotions. For both sectors, the risk of derailing in this manner was relatively low compared to other scales.

Public and private sector workers also scored similarly on Sceptical, and they were equally likely to derail by looking for agendas where they may not exist and showing signs of distrust in others. When under pressure they were equally likely to look for signs of betrayal and find it difficult to forgive and forget previous wrongdoings.

Additionally, the public and private sectors scored similarly on Cautious, suggesting that they were equally as likely to derail by being overly cautious or unassertive due to concerns about potential criticism or mistakes. Similarly to Excitable, the risk of derailing in this manner was relatively low for both sectors in comparison to other HDS scales.

When looking at Reserved, public sector and private sector workers scored similarly again. They were equally likely to derail by distancing themselves and being hard to reach during times of pressure. They were equally likely to seem indifferent to others' feelings and problems.

Employees in the private sector scored significantly higher on Leisurely, suggesting that they were more likely to derail by overvaluing their independence, being irritated by interruptions to their work schedule or agenda, and displaying passive resistance (e.g., procrastinating on requests from others). By contrast, public sector workers were less likely to exhibit these derailing behaviours.

Private sector workers scored significantly higher on Bold than those from the public sector. Private sector employees are more likely to derail by being overly self-confident and domineering than their public sector counterparts.

There were no significant differences found for scores on Mischievous, suggesting that workers in the public and private sectors were equally likely to derail by displaying behaviours of impulsive risk-taking and limit testing.

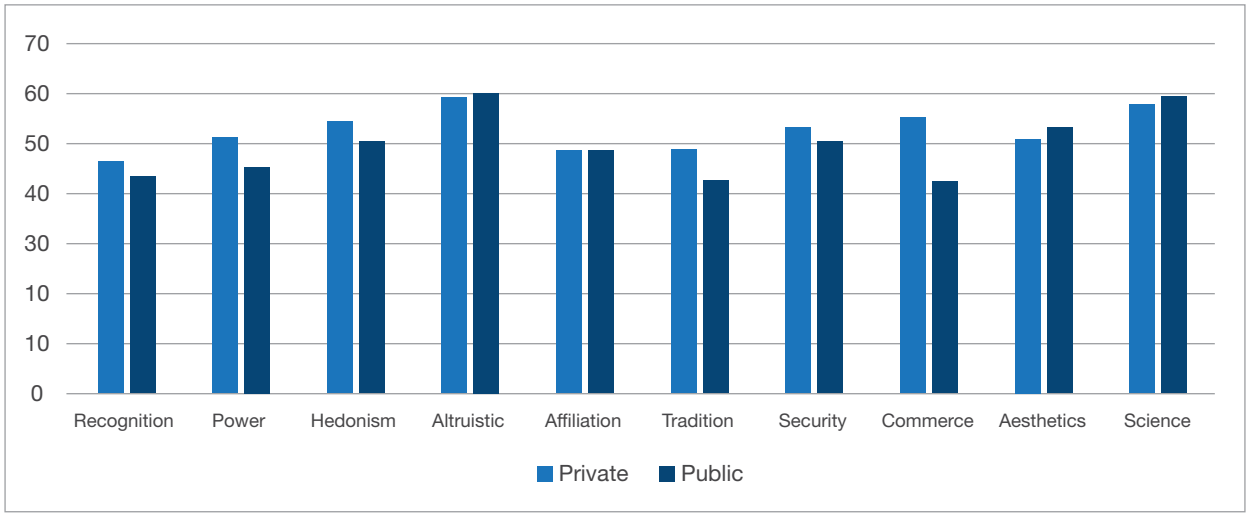
Looking at Colourful, public and private sector employees scored similarly again suggesting that they were equally as likely to dominate social situations, be distractible, and confuse social activity with productivity.

The private and public sectors also scored similarly for Imaginative, indicating an equal likelihood of derailing by communicating ideas in a manner that others find hard to follow and producing ideas that do not attend to practical considerations.

Employees in the private sector scored higher for Diligent which suggests that, when they were not self-managing, they were more likely to become perfectionistic, exacting in their expectations, and potentially micromanage others. Whereas their public sector counterparts were less likely to derail by being inflexible or overly controlling.

Public and private sector employees scored similarly on Dutiful. This indicates that workers in the private and public sectors were equally as likely to derail by being ingratiating to superiors and subverting their own opinions for the sake of harmony.

Motives, Values, Preferences Inventory (MVPI)



When looking at the MVPI results, there were significant differences for 3 of the 10 scales, with the private sector scoring significantly higher for Power, Tradition, and Commerce.

The public and private sectors scored similarly for Recognition. This suggests that they placed equal emphasis on visibility, being noticed, and being congratulated on a job well done. The private and public sectors also scored similarly for Hedonism indicating that the public and private sectors placed equal value on experiencing excitement, variety and fun within the workplace.

When looking at Power, employees in the private sector scored significantly higher, suggesting that they placed greater importance on the desire to get ahead, exert influence on decisions being made, and obtain a position of authority.

Looking at Altruistic, both public and private sectors scored similarly, suggesting that they had comparable levels of concern for helping others and fostering a climate that emphasises staff well-being and getting along. Additionally, the public and private sectors had similar scores for Affiliation. Both sectors were equally likely to value collaboration and sociable environments and were equally inclined to value opportunities to build their networks.

Private sector employees were higher on Tradition. This indicates that they were more inclined to place an emphasis on fair treatment, civil behaviour, and making sure that others are treated even-handedly and with respect. Meanwhile, those in the public sector were less likely to value adopting a formal structure or framework regarding personal conduct.

The public and private sectors scored similarly again for Security, suggesting that they are equally as likely to value consistency, predictability, and minimising risks. They were also equally as likely to foster a culture that is risk-averse and concerned about mitigating potential errors or mistakes.

The largest difference was observed for Commerce. The private sector scored significantly higher indicating that they may place greater value on the economic health of organisations and will tend to encourage cultures of financial transparency and profitability.

Another MVPI scale where the public and private sectors scored similarly is Aesthetics. Both sectors were as likely to emphasise the visual appeal of their environment and work products, and they were equally as inclined to value innovation, self-expression and problem solving.

The last MVPI scale where the public and private sectors scored similarly is Science. Both sectors were equally as likely to value an analytical, evidence-based problem to decision making and foster an environment where rationality is the foundation of problem solving.

Implications

Understanding similarities and differences in the personality profiles of public and private sector workers can help support the selection and development of talent. The current research provided insights into the personality-related tendencies and values that are common across both sectors as well as those that are likely to differentiate between one sector and the other.

A number of significant differences were found when comparing public and private sector leaders on personality, including in relation to day-to-day tendencies, derailers and motivators.

In terms of day-to-day tendencies, workers in both sectors were as likely to be resilient and able to cope with high workloads. However, public sector workers were more likely to set stretching goals and pursue these with a level of tenacity, driving themselves and their teams to achieve challenging objectives. By contrast, those in the private sector were more likely to be seen as good team players and set goals that are realistic and attainable.

In terms of their social style, private and public sector employees were equally as likely to proactively socialise with others and strike up engagement with other people. When in these sociable environments, they were equally as likely to be comfortable talking and to do so with a degree of tact, diplomacy, and sensitivity towards how they are coming across to others.

Additionally, workers in both sectors were equally inclined to adopt high standards for performance, be procedurally driven and attentive to aspects such as ensuring compliance with rules and considering potential risks. They were also as likely as each other to take an innovative approach to problem-solving.

However, the private sector was more likely to actively seek information obtained through formal channels such as reading and staying up to date with trends and developments within their field. Meanwhile, the public sector was more likely to prefer on-the-job training, rather than learning new theories, methodologies, or abstract concepts.

Derailers (i.e., counterproductive work behaviours) can have a significant impact on the performance and reputation of individuals by impacting their interpersonal style, approach to leadership, and approach to task completion. These tendencies can emerge when an individual is not actively self-managing such as when they are under pressure or complacent and can hinder their overall effectiveness. As there were significant differences between workers in the public and private sectors in the likelihood of engaging in certain derailment tendencies, this suggests that there may be differences in their likelihood of having certain development opportunities.

Those who work in the private sector were more likely to derail by being perfectionistic, inflexible in their approach to tasks, and holding themselves and others to unnecessarily high standards. They were also more likely to derail by exhibiting behaviours associated with passive resistance and feeling resentful towards interruptions to their schedule or agenda. Another dynamic that was found to be greater in the private sector when not self-managing was around being overly confident, assertive, and domineering. This is in line with previous research, indicating the prevalence of directive leadership in the private sector (Hooijberg & Choi 2001).

These tendencies may have important implications for how effectively people in the private sector engage and motivate others, their level of influence, and perceived suitability for managing others during periods of change or crisis. As a result, workers in the private sector may benefit from developing their ability to be more candid and upfront about their agendas and schedules. They may also benefit from developing strategies around delegating more effectively, allowing others to complete tasks independently, and becoming comfortable with tasks that are completed to adequate standards rather than

meticulous and perfectionistic ones. Lastly, workers in the private sector may benefit from developing their ability to restrain their levels of confidence at times to ensure that others around them who are less confident do not feel overwhelmed and have the opportunity to contribute.

When looking at the derailment tendencies in the public sector, they are as likely as the private sector to derail by being; mistrusting of others' intentions, socially insensitive, impulsive in their decision making, melodramatic, eccentric, and ingratiating.

The public and private sectors were also equally as likely to derail by being emotionally erratic and easily frustrated and by being unassertive and indecisive. However, for both of these derailers (i.e., Excitable and Cautious), their likelihood of emerging was relatively lower compared to the other derailers examined for both sectors.

Values and drivers play an important role in the type of work environment and organisational culture that employees are likely to foster, as well as the kind of work environments that employees may find the most motivating and rewarding to work within. They can also impact on the kind of behaviours that leaders tend to encourage and discourage from their staff and influence the decisions made by staff at all levels.

When looking at differences in the values and drivers of the public and private sectors, the private sector scored significantly higher across three out of the ten scales in the MVPI.

The private sector was found to place a stronger emphasis on competition, influence, and attaining success such that one gains more control over influential decisions made. This is in line with previous research which found that the private sector placed a higher value on prestigious work (Lyons et al., 2006).

The private sector was also more likely to place an emphasis on upholding a social code of conduct and treating people with respect, as well as being more likely to place a high value on financial transparency and profitability within their organisations.

Both public and private sector workers were likely to place a high value on helping others and supporting causes that contribute to society. This partially contradicted previous research, as previously public sector employees had been found to place a higher value on societal needs and contributing to larger causes (Lyons et al., 2006), but in this data set the private and public sectors showed similar scores for the Altruistic value which is typically associated with these motivations.

Both sectors were also likely to place similar value on; visibility and public congratulation, integrating work and play, working in collaborative environments, and working with predictability. Lastly, the public and private sectors both placed a high value on approaching tasks with an analytical mindset, favouring rationality and evidence over intuition and gut feelings.

Concluding comments

For selection, it is important for organisations to select employees that align with the organisation's strategy and the key objectives of any given role. For individual development, while there are likely to be common opportunities regardless of sector, there may also be opportunities that are more unique to particular individuals and warrant attention. This includes particular derailers that may be more likely to impact the performance and reputation of some individuals relative to others.

It is worth noting that while significant differences have been reported between the public and private sectors in our analyses, there is also variance within each sector's scores on the Hogan assessments. The findings of this study provide a helpful perspective on individuals' varying strengths across New Zealand's public and private sectors. However, it is important to emphasise that we cannot assume an individual will have certain strengths or development areas because of the sector they work in. Everyone has their own unique combination of scale scores that need to be taken into consideration within selection and development processes.

References

Hogan, J., & Holland, B. (2003). Using theory to evaluate personality and job-performance relations: a socioanalytic perspective. Journal of applied psychology, 88(1), 100.

Hooijberg, R., & Choi, J. (2001). The impact of organizational characteristics on leadership effectiveness models: An examination of leadership in a private and a public sector organization. Administration & Society, 33(4), 403-431.

Le, H., Oh, I. S., Robbins, S. B., Ilies, R., Holland, E., & Westrick, P. (2011). Too much of a good thing: curvilinear relationships between personality traits and job performance. Journal of Applied Psychology, 96(1), 113.

Lyons, S. T., Duxbury, L. E., & Higgins, C. A. (2006). A comparison of the values and commitment of private sector, public sector, and parapublic sector employees. Public administration review, 66(4), 605-618.

Oh, I. S., Wang, G., & Mount, M. K. (2011). Validity of observer ratings of the five-factor model of personality traits: a meta-analysis. Journal of Applied Psychology, 96(4), 762.

About Peter Berry Consultancy (PBC)

PBC is a multidisciplinary global consulting firm with 30 years' experience in the delivery of solutions aimed at maximising the potential of individuals, teams, leaders and organisations. We undertake research to support our evidence-based solutions and have a network of partners and distributors globally.

PBC is the Australian and New Zealand distributor of Hogan Assessments and the authors of a range of diagnostics including the Hogan 360 suite, Agile suite, High Performing Team Assessment (HPTA), and co-authored the Hogan Safety Climate Survey.

Peter Berry Consultancy Pty Ltd
info@peterberry.com.au | www.peterberry.com.au
ABN 77007400606

Peter Berry Consultancy New Zealand LP
info@peterberry.co.nz | www.peterberry.co.nz
NZBN 94 2905 0294 0295

Sydney Office
T: +61 2 8918 0888
Level 8, 201 Miller Street North Sydney, NSW 2060

Melbourne Office
T: +61 3 8629 5100
Suite 303, 430 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000

Auckland Office
T: +64 9 941 9790
11 Britomart Place, Auckland CBD, Auckland 1010

WP0043