

The Perceptions of Public and Private Sector Managers: a comparison

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Abstract

The paper is based on a five year, UMIST-Institute of Management study into the changing nature of the Quality of Working Life and seeks to uncover differences in the incidence and impact of organizational change on the perceptions and experiences of managers in the public sector, the private sector and the (former public) utilities. The research indicates that there are significant differences in the impact of organizational change on managers in the three sectors with public sector managers and managers from the utilities having been more adversely affected. An analysis of managers' perceptions of their 'organization as a place to work', prevailing managerial styles in their organization and managers' perceptions of the 'changing nature of their job' also reveals wide differences between managers in the three different sectors.

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The Perception of Public and Private Sector Managers: a comparison

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, the public sector in the UK has undergone a series of massive transformations. There have been outright privatisations transforming the former public utilities into PLCs. In the National Health Service, markets and quasi-markets have replaced planning as the means of allocating resources^{i ii}. Local government has been subjected to a raft of legislationⁱⁱⁱ which has radically transformed education, housing and social services with the emergence of concepts such as the “mixed economy of care” substantially changing the basis of service provision^{iv}. Throughout the public sector, but particularly in local government, there has also been a trend away from a producer orientation towards customer sovereignty^{v vi}. Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) – now being superseded by “Best Value”^{vii} – has been introduced to expose local government services to market forces. In central government, market testing has been firmly established and many parts of central government have been transformed into arm’s length “Agencies” in a period of continual reform since 1979^{viii ix}.

Within the whole public sector, and parts of the economy which used to be within the public sector, there have been massive changes in structures^x, in styles of governance, in organisational culture, in everyday working relationships and, perhaps most important, in long term career structures and the nature of the relationship between employer and employee^{xi}. Many people who joined the public sector, either because they had a public service ethos or because they were prepared to sacrifice higher income for higher perceived long term job security, have been confronted by radical change. These changes have redefined the patterns of managers’ working lives and have changed career structures significantly. Several authors have commented that the public sector has been subjected to an unparalleled growth in managerialism^{xii xiii} and that the skills, competencies and behaviours required of managers in the public sector have changed considerably as a consequence of the growth of managerialism^{xiv}.

This paper has been developed out of a data set collected as part of a five year research programme to monitor the changing quality of working life of UK managers^{xv xvi}. In that research programme, we wish to contribute to the debate about how well the managerial human resource base of the UK is being managed and to the development of more informed human resource strategies. Our intention is to create a good quality evidential base that will allow us to comment on whether the human resource base of the UK is being wasted, whether it is being worn out, how well it is being developed, how well it is being managed as an asset through active and well informed investment and, in particular, what impact radical and persistent organisation change is having on managers’ perceptions, well-being and career/home-work decisions. In the conduct of that broader research, we have become aware of significant differences between the perceptions and experiences of managers in the public sector, the former utilities and in the private sector^{xvii}. In this paper, we will explore these differences in more detail.

The purposes of this paper are twofold. Our first objective is to measure the extent of organisational change affecting UK managers and then to explore if the scale and impact of organisational change varies for managers in the public sector, the (former public) utilities and the private sector. The second objective, is to explore if there are significant differences between the perceptions of public and private sector managers and managers in the utilities on a set of variables which have been developed to measure the quality of managerial working life in organisations and managers' perceptions of their organisation as a place to work.

The data source and the research design

The data source on which this study is based is the UMIST-Institute of Management Quality of Working Life Survey which is described in detail elsewhere^{xviii}. The survey is conducted annually in March/April and uses the Institute of Management's membership database as a sampling frame. A questionnaire was sent to the same cohort of 5,000 members of the Institute in both 1997 and 1998. The exercise generated 1,362 valid responses in 1997 and 1,313 valid responses in 1998 which represented a response rate of 27 per cent and 26 per cent respectively. It is important to emphasise that the sample reflects the structure of the membership of the Institute of Management and not the hierarchical structure of managers in the UK. Essentially, our panel of respondents tends to under-represent middle and junior managers.

In the analysis presented below, we have weighted the 1998 survey to reflect slight differences in the management level profile of respondents between the two surveys. We have also classified respondents into three sectoral sub-groups: these are "public" (comprising managers from central government, local government, health, education etc.); "utilities" (comprising respondents from the privatised utilities); and, "private" (comprising respondents from PLCs, private limited companies, family run businesses, partnerships and sole traders). Respondents from charities and the "not for profit" sector have been excluded. The profile of the cohort of respondents used for subsequent analysis is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents profile by sector in 1997 and 1998

Sector	1997	1998
Public	349	372
Utilities	56	51
Private	790	790
All	1195	1213

The data set provides a very fertile ground for conducting research into the perceptions of UK managers and how these perceptions are being affected by organisational change and by broader changes in the UK and world economy. In earlier research^{xix}, we have identified that there are major differences in the experiences and perceptions of UK managers in different industrial sectors. In this paper, we propose to compare and contrast the impact of organisational change on managers in the public sector, the (former public) utilities and the private sector before seeking to establish differences in the perceptions of these three sub-group of managers in terms of their views about their organisation as a place to work, their views about prevailing management styles in their organisations and managers' satisfaction with various aspects of their current job.

The extent and dimensions of restructuring

Table 2 shows that 62 per cent of respondents had experienced some form of organisational change over the last year in 1997 and that in 1998 this had risen to 65 per cent. This simple measure reveals not only a considerable degree of dynamism in UK organisations but also an increasing pace of change and, perhaps, an increasing level of employment instability and insecurity. While there has been an overall increase in the number of managers affected by restructuring, neither the base position in 1997 nor the extent of change has been uniform across the three sectors we have defined.

In 1997 and 1998, the extent of restructuring was substantially higher in public sector organisations and the utilities than in private sector organisations. While the scale of change remained constant in public and private sector organisations between 1997 and 1998, the percentage of respondents in the utilities affected by organisational change increased by three percentage points to rise to 90 per cent in 1998. Our initial analysis has thus revealed that managers in the public and utilities sectors are far more likely to report that their organisations have restructured in the last year than managers in the private sector.

Table 2: Rates of organisational change by sector in 1997 and 1998

1997 Base 1195 1998 Base 1213	% Yes 1997	% Yes 1998
Public	73	73
Utilities	86	90
Private	56	56
All	62	65

Before continuing with an analysis at the three sector level, we analyse below how the extent of restructuring varied using a broader, twelve category sectoring scheme which is shown in Table 3. Our objective here is to show that the extent of change was consistently high across all the sub-sectors which together comprise the “public sector” as defined in this study.

Table 3: The extent of organisational restructuring by industrial sector in 1998

Base 1312	Respondents	Yes %	No %
All	1311	65	35
Construction/engineering	113	54	45
Consultancy	130	32	68
Manufacturing/production	229	72	28
Distribution/transport	34	56	41
Retail/wholesale	36	53	42
Banking/insurance/finance	47	74	26
Utilities	49	90	10
Public administration/government	132	72	27
Education/training	146	64	34
Health services	78	69	31
Uniformed services/emergency	60	75	25
Business services	63	44	56

While 65 per cent of all respondents reported that they had been affected by organisational restructuring, the extent of restructuring can be seen to have varied considerably across the twelve sectors. The level varied from a high of 90 per cent in the utilities to a low of 32 per cent among respondents working in consultancies. The extent of organisational restructuring is consistently high in the public sector with public administration, education, health and the emergency services all having restructuring rates over 64 per cent.

If we now return to the three sector level, Table 4 shows that the main forms of organisational change affecting UK organisations over the last year were cost reduction, redundancies and culture change programmes. The table reveals that there is a considerable emphasis on driving down costs (particularly in the utilities) and that the nature of change varied substantially across the three sectors used in our study.

Table 4: Organisational change by sector: percentage of managers reporting they had been affected by each type of change in 1998

Base = 758	All	Public	Utilities	Private
Cost reduction programme	60	65	75	55
Culture change programme	52	50	65	51
Redundancies	47	47	71	45
Use of temporary staff	33	37	50	29
Delaying	32	35	55	27
Expansion into new markets	32	13	36	43
Closure of sites	30	31	57	27
Use of contract staff	30	32	61	27
Outsourcing	19	17	41	18
Merger	14	10	7	17

Note: this was a multi-code question and respondents were asked to select all that applied. Hence, the column sums to more than 100 per cent.

The analysis reveals substantial differences in the form of restructuring by sector. The former public utilities stand out as being most affected by cost reduction, redundancies, delaying, site closure and culture change (though some of these are clearly inter-linked). Managers in the utilities are also much more likely to report the use of temporary and contract staff as a means of organisational restructuring than managers in both the other sectors. It is noticeable that the use of temporary and contract staff is also prevalent in the public sector and this indicates that the public sector and the utilities both are instrumental in changing the contractual relationship between the organisation and the manager leading to an increasing use of a more flexible “marginal” or “contingent” workforce^{xx}.

This finding implies that the utilities and the public sector have been most strongly affected by cost reduction and are both seeking to develop approaches geared to the far more flexible use of workers manifest in the move from a large core workforce to an increasingly marginal (temporary and contract) workforce. It is also noteworthy that respondents from the utilities sector are far more likely to cite the use of outsourcing than those from the other two sectors.

Our analysis has revealed that the utilities have undergone a major transformation over the last two years. However, this is to be expected given the movement of these organisations from the public sector into a market domain which is globally competitive. Our analysis also reveals that restructuring has been pursued more vigorously in the public sector than in the private sector implying that public sector organisations have been systematically, and perhaps uncritically, adopting the managerial models and approaches developed in the private sector despite some authors having argued that the existence of a “public service ethos” means that the wholesale adoption of these methods is inappropriate ^{xxi}. Other writers ^{xxii} have identified that the move away from the public service ethos to more market oriented forms of internal relationships have radically changed managerial behavioural patterns with, for example, the reported emergence of “macho purchasing” and confrontations between old cultures based on professionalism and new cultures based on managerialism particularly in the NHS ^{xxiii} and local government ^{xxiv}.

Our research has revealed that managers – particularly in the utilities – have had to cope with an accelerating pace of change in 1998 and that the pattern of restructuring and change in organisations is complex and multi-faceted. We have shown that change was most vigorously pursued in the utilities and the public sector with the scale of change being significantly greater in both these sectors than in the private sector. In the next two sections of this paper, we will pursue the issue of restructuring further and explore, first, what effect managers think these organisational changes have had on aspects of business performance and, second, what impact these changes have had on managers’ perceptions of their working environment.

Managers’ perceptions of the impact of restructuring on organisational performance

We have demonstrated the scale organisational change has been considerable in the last twelve months and that the scale of change has increased over the last year. Here, we will explore respondents’ perceptions of the impact of continued and accelerating change on aspects of the performance of their organisation. This, and the following section of the paper, refer only to the 758 respondents who reported that they had experienced any form of organisation restructuring in the last year. In Table 5, a “net agree” score is used to summarise responses on each of the factors tested. The net score is the percentage of respondents agreeing or agreeing strongly with each statement minus the percentage disagreeing or disagreeing strongly with each statement. “Net scores” have been used in other subsequent tables as a means of summarising managers’ responses in that they simply and effectively reveal both “directionality” and prevailing weight of opinion on a wide range of variables.

Table 5: The effects of organisational change on perceived business performance (net agree)

Performance factor	All	Public	Utilities	Private
Accountability has increased	52	47	60	55
Decision making is faster	-1	-13	14	4
Participation has increased	11	-5	8	19
Flexibility has increased	16	6	24	22
Key skills have been lost	26	51	70	7
Productivity has increased	21	2	21	30
Profitability has increased	26	0	39	38

The analysis reveals that there is most consensus across the three sectors about the impact of restructuring and organisational change having increased accountability. There are, however, some significant differences across the three sectors on several of the performance factors. In the utilities and the public sector, there is a clear view that a major effect of change has been to cause organisations to lose people with key skills and experience: this is particularly prevalent in the utilities. In the public sector, the perceived impact of change has been to make decision making slower and to reduce employee participation.

In the utilities and private sectors, it would appear that some of the harder benefits of restructuring have been won as there is a prevailing view that productivity, profitability and flexibility have all increased. However, it is noticeable, at the aggregate level, that the perceived gains on some of the softer factors are less clear cut. For example, there appears not to have been any improvement in the speed of decision making, and, while participation and flexibility have been perceived to have increased, the improvement of these factors is below that of the “harder factors” such as profitability, productivity and flexibility.

There is a very strong view in the utilities and public sectors that the outcome of restructuring has been to leave organisations lacking the right mix of skills and to deplete the pool of experienced workers. This reinforces our earlier finding that these two sectors have both been heavily engaged with redundancies and delayering, and have made increasing use of temporary and contract workers. The changes together would appear to be having a major effect on the “skills base” and workforce “structures” of organisations in these two sectors, perhaps indicating a greater willingness of organisations in these sectors to discard expensive workers through redundancy, and to buy in skills from a contingent work force often on a contractual basis.

There is, however, another explanation. If it is assumed that the public sector and the former public utilities are being reinvented to operate under radically different market and quasi-market conditions, then it may be seen as inevitable and in the long term interest of the reinvented public sector that managers who have mindsets determined by their past experiences in the public sector are being discarded to be replaced by a new breed of manager with a world view more fitting to the changed circumstances in which the public sector is now required to operate.

Managers' perceptions of the impact of restructuring on aspects of their working life

The ineffective management of change can have serious and negative impacts on managers particularly if consultation and communications strategies are either non-existent or flawed. Consequently, respondents were asked to identify what effect the restructuring that their organisations had undergone had had on their sense of loyalty, morale, motivation and job security. (Again the analysis presented here refers only to the 758 respondents who had experienced some form of restructuring in the last year).

Table 6: The perceived impact of change on loyalty, morale, motivation and sense of job security by sector

Effect on loyalty	All	Public	Utilities	Private
Increased	9	5	7	12
Unchanged	42	35	29	48
Decreased	48	61	63	40
Effect on morale				
Increased	16	7	4	22
Unchanged	20	12	20	25
Decreased	64	81	76	53
Effect on motivation				
Increased	20	13	11	26
Unchanged	31	22	28	36
Decreased	49	65	61	39
Effect on sense of job security				
Increased	11	5	5	15
Unchanged	24	18	11	29
Decreased	65	78	84	56

From Table 6, it is evident that the impact of the considerable amount of restructuring that had taken place in UK business organisations over the year prior to the survey had had a substantially negative effect on employee loyalty, morale, motivation and, particularly, perception of job security in each of the three sectors. It is also noticeable that respondents from the utilities and public sector organisations were much more likely to think that change had reduced their loyalty, motivation, morale and sense of job security than those in the private sector. This latter point may indicate that the management of change in the private sector had been more effectively conducted than in the utilities and in the public sector or that cultures in the utilities and the public sector were more resistant to change.

In all three sectors the largest negative impact of restructuring had been on reduced morale and a reduced sense of job security. Over 80 per cent of public sector respondents reported that organisational change had reduced morale and over 80 per cent of respondents from the utilities reported a reduced sense of job security. In this latter case, this is hardly surprising given the extent of redundancies and outsourcing in the utilities reported in Table 4.

The analysis presented in Table 6 shows that change has had differential impacts on managers in different sectors. In addition, we have shown elsewhere^{xxv} that perceptions of the business and human impacts of organisational change varies massively with the respondent's location in the management hierarchy with Directors and above having a much more benign view of the impact of restructuring compared to senior, middle and junior managers.

In summary, we have identified some important outcomes of the processes of restructuring affecting UK based organisations. First, there is a clear view that restructuring is leaving many UK organisations – particularly the utilities and public sector organisations – with a depleted skills and experience base as expensive, experienced workers are being replaced by contract and temporary workers. Second, we have found that while there is a consensus that the impact of restructuring has lowered morale, loyalty, motivation and managers' sense of job security that the negative perceptions of change are particularly pronounced in public sector organisations and in the former public utilities.

Our findings pose major questions about how well change is being managed in organisations, about the mix of stakeholder interests being reflected in the nature of these restructuring decisions and about the effectiveness of organisational consultation and communications strategies. While change is inevitable in private sector organisations given global competitive pressures, the experiences of respondents in the utilities and the public sector pose questions about the need for such a high and quickening pace of change and, perhaps more important, about the way change is being managed and driven by the perceived political need to drive down public sector borrowing.

We have identified that the significant restructuring occurring in organisations is having major implications on work patterns and career structures and that this is particularly pronounced in the former public utilities and public sector organisations. Our respondents from the utilities are clearly telling us that they now perceive work to be much less secure, that their loyalty, morale and motivation have been reduced and that they perceive that the skills and experience bases of organisations have been depleted as more flexible contract and temporary workers occupy a greater share of jobs in these sectors. In the following section, we will pursue these themes by seeking to identify differences in managers' views about their organisations as a place to work.

Managers' level of satisfaction with current job and perceptions of the prevailing management style

There are a host of factors which determine how satisfied employees with their current job ^{xxvi}. Consequently, respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with aspects of their current job on factors ranging from perceived career opportunities, recognition for performance and workload through to their views about training opportunities in their respective organisations. What follows is an attempt to identify if systematic differences existed between managers' assessment of satisfaction with their aspects of their job for the three sectors we are using in this research project. In this section, we have used a net satisfaction score (the percentage satisfied minus the percentage dissatisfied) as a summary measure for each of job dimension we are testing.

Table 7: Net satisfaction levels with aspects of current job by sector

Aspect of job	All	Public	Utilities	Private
Career opportunities	16	-8	-4	29
Downward communications	19	9	11	22
Feedback	11	-1	11	14
Job security	20	10	-3	27
Level of autonomy	48	32	32	56
Recognition for performance	17	-2	8	25
Relationship with boss	51	43	52	55
Relationship with peers	76	74	68	76
Reward and remuneration	20	-4	39	29
Training opportunities	27	27	24	26
Workload	-3	-19	-25	8

An examination of Table 7 reveals that managers in the public sector scored worst on several of the dimensions analysed: these included low levels of satisfaction with career opportunities, the feedback managers (do or do not) receive, recognition for performance and reward and remuneration. While managers in the utilities and the public sector both have low levels of satisfaction with their (high) workloads, managers in the utilities have a high level of satisfaction with their reward and remuneration. What is particularly noticeable here is that respondents from the private sector tend to have generally higher levels of satisfaction across the majority of dimensions we have explored.

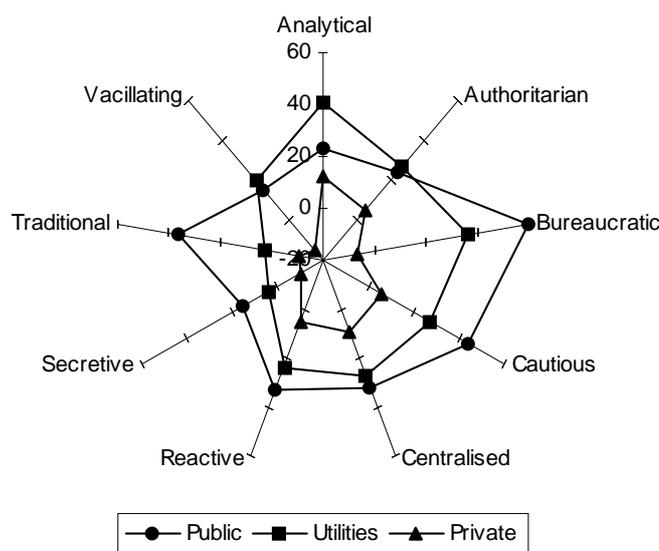
A second related issue we decided to explore was to assess managers' perceptions of the prevailing management styles in their organisations measured on nine dimensions. One of these dimensions, for example, was where managers thought the prevailing management style in their organisation was located on a scale ranging from bureaucratic to entrepreneurial. In order to summarise responses on each of these nine dimensions of managerial style, a net score for each dimension was calculated. Here the percentages tending towards, for example, bureaucratic were summed and from this, the percentages tending towards entrepreneurial were subtracted. Thus, in the third row of Table 8 a score of 60 for the public sector reveals a high "bureaucratic" score while a score of -7 indicates that managers in the private sector tended to consider the management style in their organisation to be "entrepreneurial".

Table 8: Perceptions of prevailing managerial styles: net scores by sector

Base 1212	All	Public	Utilities	Private
Analytical – Intuitive	16	23	41	12
Authoritarian – Consensual	11	24	27	5
Bureaucratic-Entrepreneurial	16	60	36	-7
Cautious – Risk taking	18	44	27	5
Centralised – Decentralised	17	32	28	9
Reactive – Proactive	14	33	24	5
Secretive – Open	-2	15	4	-10
Traditional – Innovative	4	36	2	-11
Vacillating – Decisive	-5	15	20	-15

The analysis shows that significant differences exist in perceived managerial styles by sector. It is very noticeable that the public sector and the utilities differ considerably from the private sector. In the public sector, managerial styles are perceived to be strongly bureaucratic, cautious and traditional. In the public sector and the utilities managerial styles also tend to be perceived to be rather more authoritarian, centralised, reactive, secretive and vacillating than the prevailing managerial styles in the private sector. The differences between the three sectors are shown graphically in Figure 1. In particular, the figure shows very clearly the pronounced differences between the public sector and the private sector.

Figure 1: Radar diagram of perceived management styles by sector



We have demonstrated that there are substantial differences in the perceptions of managers in the public sector and the former public utilities and those in private sector organisations in terms of both satisfaction with aspects of the manager's current job and their perceptions of the managerial styles that prevail in their organisations. Managers in the public sector have significantly lower levels of satisfaction with many aspects of their present job particularly career opportunities, workload, downward communications, recognition for performance and reward and remuneration.

Managers in the public sector also tend to regard the prevailing management styles in their organisation to be far more authoritarian, bureaucratic, cautious, centralised, reactive, secretive, traditional and vacillating than managers in the private sector. In summary, the differences between managers' perceptions in the private and public sectors are pronounced and profound. In the following section, we analyse managers views across the three different sectors on a range of dimensions designed to assess how they perceive their organisation as a place to work.

Perceptions of the respondent's organisation as a place to work

Measuring managers perceptions about their organisation as “a place to work” is far from a trivial task. In the design of the basic questionnaire, use was made of our prior research^{xxvii}^{xxviii} ^{xxix} and earlier research conducted by the Institute of Management^{xxx} ^{xxxi} ^{xxxii} ^{xxxiii} to identify some of the key dimensions on which managers' perceptions were to be measured. However, after reviewing the 1997 questionnaire in the context of an open-ended question where respondents were asked to suggest managerial actions which would, if implemented, improve their quality of working life, we modified our original set of criteria to reflect the issues raised by respondents to the 1997 survey.

Table 9 contains an analysis of responses on our dimensions on which we assessed managers' views of their organisation as a place to work at the aggregate level and for each of the three sectors. This section, again, makes use of a net agree score (the percentage strongly agreeing or agreeing with the criteria minus the percentage disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the criteria) for each of the dimensions as a readily comprehensible summary measure. The dimensions (rows) in the table have been ranked using the net agree score for the public sector.

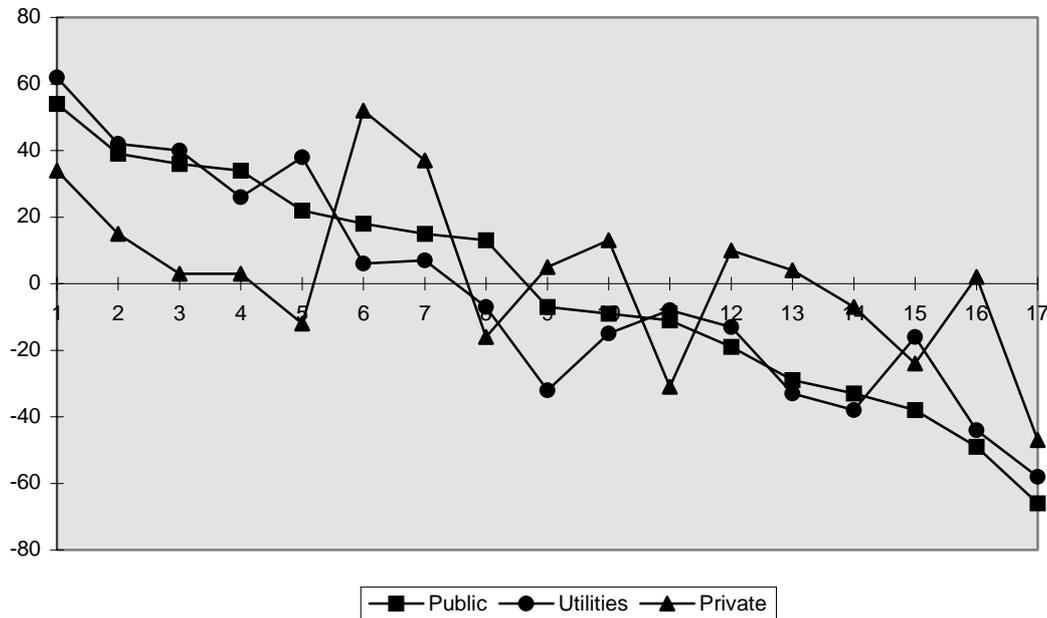
An examination of Table 9 reveals substantial differences between the three sectors, with the public sector and the utilities generally scoring significantly worse on the majority of the measures used. The public sector and the utilities appear to be characterised by relatively low organisational morale, a view that management does not practice what it preaches, suffering from information overload, a lack of resources, a feeling that employee health and well-being are not taken seriously by their employer and by the existence of a blame culture. Managers from the public sector and the utilities were also significantly more likely to consider that their organisation had become a worse place to work over the last year than the private sector. While managers in all three sectors tend to disagree with the statement that “Employees are treated as the most important asset in my organisation”, the negativity is far more pronounced in the public sector and the utilities than in the private sector. Managers in the utilities are much less likely to consider that their organisation will provide them with a secure job for the foreseeable future than managers in other sectors. Given the volume of downsizing, redundancies and outsourcing reported earlier, this latter observation is not surprising.

Table 9: The respondent's organisation as a place to work: response by sector

Base 1210	All	Public	Utilities	Private
Management exploits the willingness of employees in my organisation	42	54	62	34
I suffer from information overload	24	39	42	15
Management does not practice what it preaches	14	36	40	3
Lack of resources stops me from doing my job effectively	13	34	26	3
I often think about leaving my job	1	22	38	-12
Morale is good in my department	39	18	6	52
I look forward to going to work	29	15	7	37
There is a blame culture in my organisation	-8	13	-7	-16
My organisation will provide me with a secure job for the foreseeable future	0	-7	-32	5
I have fun at work these days	6	-9	-15	13
I feel a sense of powerlessness in my current job	-25	-11	-8	-31
My health and well being are taken seriously by my organisation	0	-19	-13	10
My organisation has become a better place to work in the past 12 months	-7	-29	-33	4
Employees are treated as the most important asset in my organisation	-15	-33	-38	-7
My organisation helps me balance my home and work commitments	-28	-38	-16	-24
Morale is good overall in my organisation	-15	-49	-44	2
I have enough time to get everything done in my job	-52	-66	-58	-47

In order to assist with the interpretation of the analysis of managers' views of their organisation as a place to work contained in Table 9, a trace diagram was produced and is included as Figure 2. This diagram shows clearly the strong similarity of views between managers in the public sector and the utilities manifest in the traces of both sub-groups having broadly similar profiles. While the curve for private sector managers is more erratic, it does vary consistently with the traces of two other sectors.

Figure 2: A trace diagram of responses on the “organisation as a place to work”: dimensions by sector



Code	Description of variables depicted on the x-axis
1	Management exploits the willingness of employees in my organisation
2	I suffer from information overload
3	Management does not practice what it preaches
4	Lack of resources stops me from doing my job effectively
5	I often think about leaving my job
6	Morale is good in my department
7	I look forward to going to work
8	There is a blame culture in my organisation
9	My organisation will provide me with a secure job for the foreseeable future
10	I have fun at work these days
11	I feel a sense of powerlessness in my current job
12	My health and well being are taken seriously by my organisation
13	My organisation has become a better place to work in the past 12 months
14	Employees are treated as the most important asset in my organisation
15	My organisation helps me balance my home and work commitments
16	Morale is good overall in my organisation
17	I have enough time to get everything done in my job

The analysis reveals that there are strong differences between managers’ assessments of their organisation as a place to work across the three sectors indicating radical differences in the experience of managerial work and the experience of organisational life between, on the one hand, public sector managers and managers in the (former public) utilities and, on the other hand, managers in private sector organisations. In the public sector and the utilities, managers are far more likely to feel that their goodwill is being exploited, that they have insufficient time and resources to do their jobs effectively, that employees are not treated as the organisation’s most important asset, that they suffer from information overload and that morale in their organisation is not good. They are also more likely than their counterparts in the private sector to think about leaving their job.

Conclusions

The research objectives which underpin this paper were twofold. First, to measure the scale and extent of organisational change and to identify whether this varied between the public sector, the (former public) utilities sector and the private sector before identifying the form that change had taken and then assessing the impact this change had had on the perceptions and experiences of managers in the three sectors. The second objective was to explore if there were significant differences between the three groups of managers in their perceptions of the prevailing styles of management in their organisation, in their levels of satisfaction with aspects of their job and, finally, in their perceptions of their organisation as a place to work. Our research has shown that the scale of change is highest in the utilities followed by the public sector and then the private sector. We have also shown that the pattern of change varies by sector. Organisational change in the public sector and the utilities was found to have been more driven by a cost reduction ethos with redundancies, outsourcing, delaying, using contract and temporary staff and site closure being most often cited by both sets of managers but being particularly prevalent in the former public utilities. From these changes, it was implied that working patterns, career patterns and the nature of the employer-employee relations in the public sector and the utilities had changed considerably over the two year span of our research programme .

Managers were found to be less than convinced that the change management programmes they had been subjected to had achieved their business objectives though there was a consensus that the main outcome of restructuring had been to increase accountability. The impact of change on improving employee participation, on making decision making faster and increasing employee flexibility was less than clear cut. Managers in the public sector and the utilities were found to be strongly of the view that organisational change and restructuring had severely undermined the skills base of the organisation with experienced workers tending to have been replaced by temporary or contract staff.

The impact of organisational change was also seen to have radically reduced managers' sense of loyalty, motivation, morale and job security not only across the board but particularly in the public sector and the utilities with the most significant effect in these two sectors having been on reduced morale (in the public sector) and in bringing about a reduced sense of job security (in the utilities). The severity of the impact of change on these dimensions led us to pose questions about the change management skills of senior managers and the effectiveness of change management programmes, communications strategies and consultation strategies in the public sector and the utilities.

In addition to concerns about the impact of change on morale and job security, public sector managers were much less satisfied with aspects of their job than their public sector counterparts. Public sector managers were much less satisfied with career opportunities, reward and remuneration, recognition for performance and their level of autonomy than private sector managers. Public sector managers were far more likely to see the prevailing managerial styles in their organisations as bureaucratic, cautious, centralised, reactive, secretive and traditional than managers in the private sector.

In our exploration of managers' perceptions of their organisation as a place to work, the differences between public sector managers, managers in the utilities and private sector managers were again profound. Public sector managers were substantially more likely to feel exploited, overloaded with information, to lack the necessary resources to do their job properly, to consider organisational morale to be low and to feel subjected to a blame culture.

Our research has indicated that there appear to be significant problems with how public sector organisations are being managed and with the volume and impact of change. The impact of continuing cost reduction, delayering, outsourcing and the replacement of skilled and experienced staff with temporary and contract staff would appear to be particularly destabilising features of change^{xxxiv xxxv}. While many of these changes are explicable in the utilities sector given that these organisations have been unambiguously relocated from within the public into the private sector, the public-private schizophrenia that pervades the present public sector – particularly in local government, central government and the NHS – may well, with significant under-funding and under-resourcing, be at the root of the problems and dissatisfactions we have found in that sector.

Our research would seem to imply that we need to do two things: first, we need to re-educate politicians and senior managers in the public sector to be able to understand the broader human implications of their styles of management and their actions; second, perhaps managers need to be better trained to implement change without destroying their colleagues' morale, motivation, loyalty or sense of job security. If the public sector^{xxxvi} and public sector management^{xxxvii} have been “reinvented” in the last decade, this process of reinvention would seem to have had a major - and not particularly positive - effect on the working patterns, career structures, perceptions and experiences of the majority of public sector managers - particularly those at the lower levels of the managerial hierarchy.

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