

H4 Consulting Brief

Truth in Publicising

Three major sectors of the economy—private, public, and not-for-profit—all draw from the same labour pool. Each sector appeals to workers for different reasons, like higher financial rewards in the private sector, or higher intrinsic rewards in not-for-profit organisations. The reality of work, especially in the public sector, has shifted away from the expectations of prospective workers, often to the point where public narratives no longer match the truth.

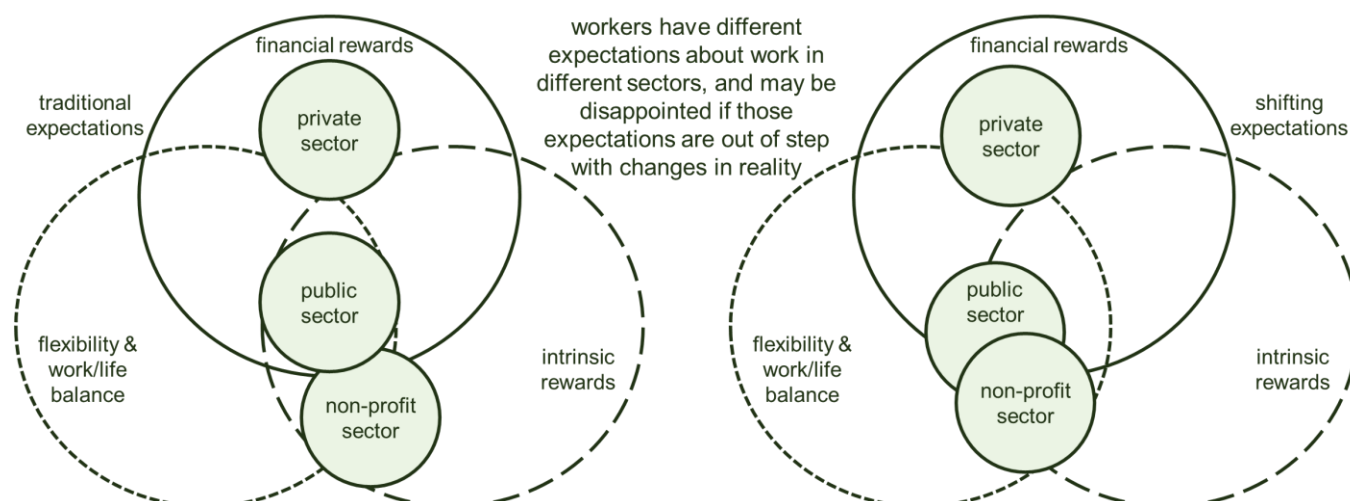
In the competition for skilled workers, each sector plays to its strengths. The private sector tends to pay higher salaries and offer more perks, bonuses, and training, but also expects longer hours of work, with limited job security. The non-profit sector suffers from constrained and uncertain funding, and tends to offer lower pay, few perks, and limited job security, but also offers significant intrinsic rewards for workers motivated by a strong sense of mission.

The public sector traditionally offered pay somewhere between the private and non-profit sectors, secure jobs with strong employee protections, superior work/life balance and job flexibility, and a commitment to creating public value. It offered an attractive balance between having a good job and doing good work.

As more work becomes more skilled, workers drive even more value – public or private. This is further intensifying competition within and between sectors.

The work in each sector is also changing, so that traditional narratives no longer match reality. In the public sector, a focus on efficiency and performance have pushed working hours higher, while reducing job security and capping wage growth. Higher proportions of public funds are also distributed to private or non-profit operators, who then compete with the public sector to attract intrinsically motivated workers.

Traditional public sector strengths, like flexibility and inclusiveness, are also being eroded. Accelerated by competition and the global pandemic, the private sector is catching up on these dimensions.



Potential workers need current information to replace outdated assumptions about the benefits of publicly funded work, especially in the public sector. Public service still offers a middle path between private sector income-maximisation and non-profit sector purpose-maximisation. Many mission-driven workers find satisfying public sector roles, and so do workers motivated by more abstract concepts of public service, or the intellectual challenge of addressing hard issues.

Today's public sector may not offer jobs as secure or conditions as generous as it once did, but it does offer unrivalled diversity of work within a vast network that recognises accrued benefits. The story of today's public sector remains persuasive for many workers who want to balance earning with meaning.

Having the best people for a job is just as important for creating public value as it is for creating private value. It is also becoming more important as work becomes more skilled and community expectations increase.

A narrative that emphasises the relative merits of a career in public service will do a better job of both attracting and retaining skilled workers than relying on outdated assumptions. Flexibility and work life balance remain important features of the public sector, but less clearly distinguish contemporary public sector careers from work in other sectors.

Values like independence, integrity, and truth should be intrinsic to publicising, as well as doing, work in the public sector.

To find out more about how you can use this approach in your organisation, contact us: info@h4consulting.com.au
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