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Exploring gender differences among tax experts.

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Abstract

The gender balance of the tax field is changing, with an increasing number of women entering and moving into management roles. The impact of this change is as yet unclear, and comes at a time when other significant influences are changing the nature of tax work, notably relating to globalisation and digitisation. While previous work has explored gender differences at work, or among taxpayers, relatively little work has explored the way in which men and women working in tax may approach their work differently.

In this paper, we take a holistic approach and examine the personal qualities, which men and women working in the field value in their own work at different stages of their career. Drawing on an international survey of tax experts, we test for differences across gender in the workforce overall and find significant differences between men and women across a range of personal qualities relevant to different aspects of tax work, particularly in the context of global trends on digitisation and globalisation. To examine the moderating impact of working in a highly regulated field on these differences, we repeat the tests at different career stages and find that some differences become more marked over time and some develop only at a senior stage, perhaps reflecting the dominance of males in senior roles in the field.

We set this in the context of other trends affecting the tax field through a review of practice and professional publications. This allows us to raise questions on how these gender differences may affect tax work, and what they might mean for the field moving forward.

1. Introduction

There are now many more women working as tax consultants, lawyers, lobbyists, and in academia, both as professors and students of tax law. – Hoke (2018, p. 446)

Much like the rest of the financial services sector (Cihak & Sahay, 2018), the tax field is experiencing a changes in the gender composition of its workforce (EY, 2016; International Tax Review, 2017; Liddy, 2018; PwC, 2015). These changes mark a shift away from a traditionally male dominated workforce, towards one defined by its gender diversity (Broadbent, 1998; Haynes, 2017). At the same time as professional firms can be seen actively pursuing these ends, the nature of the tax work they are being called to work on is also changing rapidly. From the client side, globalisation is changing the way organisations do business, which impacts the type of tax planning services they call on experts to provide. Alternatively, from an operational perspective, digitisation is changing the way in which tax work is conceptualised as more traditional, routine, processes are increasingly automated.

“The tax function’s focus is consequently expanding from technical reporting compliance and tax planning, to technology and digital tax, tax-related risk management and business-enabled tax planning.” - Jay Nibbe, *PwC Global Vice Chair Tax*, editorial in EY (2016, p. 3)

Within the context of this ‘expanding’ role, the changing composition of the tax workforce surfaces questions around how experts are adapting, particularly around the way in which they approach their work.

Previous research has found women to be more compliant as taxpayers, although it is unclear how this may translate to women in a tax advising role (Kastlunger et al., 2010). There is also evidence of differences between men and women regarding financial decision-making (Croson & Gneezy, 2009) and unethical business behaviour (Betz & Skepard, 1989). Are differences of this kind identifiable amongst tax practitioners? The changing gender profile of the tax field makes it particularly important to explore how men and women working in tax may approach their work differently. Our focus is a holistic one, taking into consideration the professional qualities that men and women working in tax value in their own work, rather than on specific scenarios or vignettes. We are exploring how men and women regard their own contribution to the workplace differently in the context of their tax work. Because the culture of the firm as a site of professional socialisation may moderate the impact of gender difference, we also explore how these differences persist or become homogenised with increased experience. This has implications for the tax field and for professional firms as the balance of the workforce continues to change, in the context of wider trends noted above. Exploring these issues sheds light on ways in which the tax field is adapting to these changes, and can also help inform its broader efforts to foster a diversified pool of ‘talent’ within the workforce (EY, 2016; PwC, 2015). This aligns with the aims of this special issue by helping to develop our understanding of the impact of gender change on the tax field as a whole.

The paper is structured as follows: The next section reviews practitioner publications to understand the changing composition of the tax workforce and the type of tax work engaged in as the role of the tax field continues to evolve. We also explore prior research for insights into the types of gendered personal qualities that we might expect tax experts to exhibit and the personal qualities that men and women value in a professional context, with an emphasis on their

applicability to the tax field. Section three describes our methodological approach, giving details of our primary data, which derives from an international survey of 988 tax experts which explored eleven different personal qualities that practitioners' value in bringing to their tax work. Section four presents the findings based on a series of non-parametric tests across gender and career stage. Section five discusses the implications and concludes.

2. Tax: A field of change

In this section, we explore changes in the gender profile of the workforce in the context of what prior research has told us about how this might impact. We set this in the context of the evolving field of tax work. The nature of tax work is currently changing to reflect the demands of new technology, an internationalised set of client demands and shifts in global economic power (Dobell, 2017; PwC, 2015). Automation of routine tax work is becoming increasingly prevalent, and the tax field has moved rapidly to adapt. Data analytics, management and systems transition are all becoming increasing parts of the skills required as a tax expert.

“As the use of technology and data analytics tools becomes more prevalent within the Tax function, ridding Tax of tasks that previously were performed by humans, the function will be expected to add value in other ways. Tax will need to understand the nuances of the business and interact more closely with other functions, leveraging new insights into data that technologies provide, to solve the organisation's global problems.”
- PwC (2017b, p. 5)

As technology is increasingly used to automate routine tax work, professionals are being called upon to support their technical expertise with technological advancements so they can enhance their strategic value to clients (PwC, 2017a). Part of these new 'tax generalist' skill requirements involve a greater emphasis on the need for effective communication of complex tax issues to management and non-tax experts (EY, 2016, p. 37). This illustrates an effective way for practitioners to add value above and beyond the insights that automated processes can provide, as they simultaneously tailor the application of automation to the clients' needs. Furthermore, it facilitates a more authoritative role for tax experts within organisational decision-making.

“The effective use of digital information and the employment of analytics - including data and text mining and visualisation tools - are at the centre of modern tax administration. Optimising the potential of data can also help spur innovative thinking and new approaches.”
- D'Ascenzo (2015, p. 89)

These changes are important in the context of this study, as they may require new qualities to come to the fore among tax workers, with a particular focus on the need to be innovative and accurate. At the same time, there is an increased focus in the tax field on diversity:

“Diversity in all its forms – from gender, generation, ethnicity, sexuality and disability to people with a broader range of skills, experiences and industry backgrounds – is a vital element of the changing talent focus within [financial services].” - PwC (2015, p. 3)

Impacts from the broader push for diversity across the financial services industry is can be seen in the changing composition of the tax workforce. These changes reflect a variety of issues, but gender diversity has been particularly influential. Not only is gender equality tied to wider calls for equality in society, but the ample literature highlighting the profitability derived from the

inclusion of women in the boardroom illustrates just how pervasive these issues has become within the broader business community (Berger et al., 2013; Sila et al., 2016). This is not to say gender diversity is only a movement calling for change. More and more women can be seen entering and working their way into management roles within traditionally male-dominated fields and tax is no different.

“When I started, there is no question that there was a real old boys’ network of influential tax lobbyists, and the women in the field were younger and less experienced... Now there are a substantial number of outstanding women in the field who understand both the substance of the tax law as well as the policy implications to make them highly successful.”

– Rachelle Bernstein, in Hoke (2018, p. 447)

In 2016, more than half the people entering into the tax field were women, there was near parity between men and women in mid-level tax management positions, and nearly 70% of tax examiners, collectors and revenue agents at the Internal Revenue Service in the US were women (EY, 2016, p. 11). Implicit in the identification of these changes is the deviation from male-oriented norms. Furthermore, just as the inclusion of women into decision-making processes has been identified as producing higher quality, and more profitable, decisions, it is only logical to believe that the increase in women amongst the tax field might have an impact on the way experts approach their work to address clients’ needs.

While the tax field accommodates an increasing number of women entering the workforce, this is not the only major shift it is adjusting too. A new workforce means a new generation of workers, and there are a variety of signs that younger generations and newer recruits bring very different qualities to work. Aside from obvious differences in the type of knowledge they bring into the field, such as technological expertise, the relatively recent social pressure around gender diversity in the workplace could be seen to represent generational differences in awareness to these types of issues. Here, it is possible that gender differences may shift between individuals who were socialised at different points in time. The distinctness of these differences can also be seen in the demands that younger professionals are making from firms.

“Millennials are not motivated by the same incentives, such as promotions, more pay or different business opportunities, and so it’s harder for us to figure out how to incentivize them.”

-Lisa Wadlin (EY, 2016, p. 40)

The priorities of newer tax experts appear to represent a distinct shift within the tax workforce, and logically, this will inevitably have a major influence on employing firms. Given the rapidly changing nature of tax work, firms are placing a greater emphasis on training and recruitments to facilitate their adaptation. However, this often presents them with a somewhat paradoxical choice between either retraining their existing workforce or restructuring their systems and processes to accommodate new workforce demands. While retraining requires both time and money to adapt the knowledge and skillset of existing employees who may not be in the workforce, much longer, restructuring operations can require a paradigm shift in the existing culture of the firm. These efforts represent a substantial expenditure for firms, but there are still no guarantees the firm will reap their benefits.

“... (Loyalty) now has a shorter horizon. People want more variation over their careers, and you have to take this into account.”

-Ronald Hein (EY, 2016, p. 32)

Within the context of research on tax administration¹, our research is concerned with the personal qualities we might expect tax workers to bring to their tax work. Much of the prior academic work exploring how individuals approach taxes has been from the perspective of taxpayers, and this literature does also provide some insights on the motivations that underpin individuals' decision-making around tax issues. For example, in studying the motivations of taxpayers around the decision to self-correct errors to the tax authority, Farrar & Hausserman (2016) highlight the role of avoiding penalties and responsibility to pay what is owed as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations; respectively.² In the context of the tax field, these underlying motivations could manifest within the personal qualities of tax experts intrinsically as compliance and/or extrinsically as ethics.

The nature of tax is unique in that commonly the aim is to navigate issues in a way that minimises the tax liability of the client or the organisation, while also remaining compliant with an ever-changing array of regulations. This requires a range of personal qualities among tax workers, from being technically competent and compliant, to being able to execute nuanced and pragmatic decision-making in complex situations. Furthermore, all of this must be done without putting the firm or the client at risk of future litigation or fines (Fogarty & Jones, 2014). For tax experts, their work can vary significantly. From assessing whether a client has been completely forthcoming with information to accurately assess their tax liability, to assessing the implementation of a tax planning strategy within regulatory 'grey areas', brings an element of risk assessment into much of their day-to-day decision-making. Here, prior research on the intersection of gender and risk provide useful insights into differences between men and women (Croson & Gneezy, 2009; Eckel & Grossman, 2008; Harris, Jenkins, & Glaser, 2006). Although “women's risk taking is more complex than the common stereotype.” (Groysberg, 2008; Maxfield et al., 2010, p. 587), prior literature suggests that women are more risk-averse than men (Charness & Gneezy, 2012; Eagly, 1987), even from a biological approach (Coates & Herbert, 2008; White et al., 2007).³

Despite being a seemingly antiquated notion (Eagly, 1987), literature continues to portray women as – on average – more emotionally intelligent than men, allowing them to foster greater group collaboration (Kirkland et al., 2013; Woolley et al., 2015). This is important, as the changing nature of tax work in relation to globalisation is also placing a greater emphasis on collaborative skills. This brings a new focus on the importance of being loyal, ethical and confidential. At the same time, as organisations continue to adapt their operations to the modern globalised economy, they become exposed to a myriad of trans-jurisdictional tax authority issues. Considering location, production and/or operation within new markets and jurisdictions bring with them new tax, transparency and regulatory considerations for organisational managers. Much of the increasing concern of organisations in this area is embodied in the rapid development and desire for tax experts with a specialisation in transfer pricing or other specialist

¹ For example, see: Oats (2015)

² Farrar & Hausserman (2016) also provide a good review of taxpayer compliance literature.

³ The papers reviewed here have been selected for their applicability to the aims of this paper. For a review of this extensive body of prior research, see: Bertrand (2011), Croson & Gneezy (2009) and Eckel & Grossman (2008).

areas where overlapping and rapidly changing regulation needs to be assimilated into decision-making. This calls for tax workers to be knowledgeable, technically competent, and innovative and in more practical terms, speedy and accurate in their work, and at the same time, to place a high value on being compliant. This ‘high need’ area reflects organisations international operations and the usefulness of more broadly applicable knowledge.

“A strong technical orientation will remain important — and there will always be specialist roles — but tax professionals will also need a more rounded skill set. They must be able, for example, to assess the quality and meaning of data, to communicate complex tax principles in simple business terms and to work collaboratively with people outside their area.”

– Jay Nibbe (EY, 2016, p. 3)

As part of a global tax strategy, firms need to rely on the personal qualities of their tax workers, ensuring they have a workforce that allows them to adapt to these new imperatives. A global firm requires a balance to be struck between specialists in highly technical areas, and pragmatic and skills generalists with local tax knowledge. ‘Tax generalists’ may be needed to translate issues, but this does not mean they can deal with every problem they encounter. Here, collaboration enables the rapid development of teams that can effectively address clients’ tax issue, and the need for such teams is reflected in firms concerns over attracting, and retaining, the ‘tax talent’ needed to staff them. We have seen above the importance of personal qualities including being nuanced or pragmatic, having the ability assimilate complex legislation by being accurate, technically competent, knowledgeable, speedy and innovative in work, the importance of qualities relating to collaboration including being loyal and confidential, and in the wider context of concern about global tax evasion, the need to be compliant and ethical (O’Regan & Killian, 2014; Radcliffe et al., 2018).

Gender differences in these qualities form the basis of our study. While gender differences may present at the time of recruitment to the field, prior work suggests that social norms may moderate these initial differences. Simply put, social norms can be thought of as the way ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are defined. Social and psychological aspects of tax compliance have long been a focus of tax research, and this thread naturally led to a focus on the relationship between social norms and tax compliance. Onu & Oats (2015) present a thorough review of this literature and expand on its implications, focusing on the more nuanced understanding of the drivers of compliance that is developed. In part, this understanding is developed by more recent work on social norms that drills down into the norms of subgroups in society, particularly occupational subgroups.⁴ Although the tax field is not one of the occupations that has been investigated, findings from this literature would appear to have some applicability to our research. For example, Ashby et al. (2009) explore the impact of group norms on taxpayer compliance across two different professional fields: hairdressers and taxi drivers. The authors’ present findings and discussion around the complex process by which group identity is constructed by each occupation subgroup and its influence on individuals, but it is the role of communication that was particularly insightful. Communication played a central role in the acculturation of norms within occupational groups, as it is the primary way in which norms and values are transmitted between different occupational group members. Recalling the increased role of communication

⁴ For a review of this literature, see: Onu & Oats (2015, p. 118).

and group collaboration in tax work, and the already substantial amount of workshops and seminars that cater to tax experts, and it is safe to say that the tax field has – at the very least – a comparable amount of occupational group communication as the occupations studied in Ashby et al. (2009). This overall body of work suggests that gender differences need to be examined not only in aggregate across the field, but also at different career stages to incorporate the norming impact of working in a distinctive expert environment.

3. Methods

Our primary data derives from a survey distributed using snowball sampling, which gained valid responses from 1,102 tax practitioners across 58 countries. The first part of the survey focused on collecting demographic information from respondents, where information was collected on their gender and professional qualification. For their gender, respondents were asked to indicate *male*, *female* or *prefer not to say*.⁵ As only seven respondents chose, *prefer not to say*, we confine our analysis to those who chose *male* or *female* to facilitate statistical identification of differences. For professional qualification, respondents were asked to identify as either *pursuing qualification*, *qualified since 2011*, *qualified before 2011* or *other*. Most respondents identified themselves with one of the first three categories (henceforth referred to as: *Studying*, *Recent* and *Established*), providing us with a good indicator of the different stages of career that were represented. The next table describes our data and summarizes the number of observations across gender within each career stage.

Table 1: Gender and Career Stage

	Females	Males	Total
Studying	99	64	163
Recent	139	108	247
Established	235	343	578
Total	473	515	988

On aggregate, we count for 988 observations. In particular, our sample consists of 473 female and 515 male respondents. Most of the respondents were at an established career stage (i.e. 578), while the least were at a studying career stage (i.e. 163). Respondents were provided with a 5-point Likert scale and asked to indicate the importance of a range of factors that are related to the personal qualities, that they bring to their tax work. More specifically tax experts in our sample are asked how important is for them to be: *Knowledgeable*, *Ethical*, *Speedy*, *Pragmatic*, *Compliant*, *Innovative*, *Accurate*, *Confidential*, *Technically competent*, *Nuanced*, and *Loyal*.

Non-parametric Mann Whitney U tests were then used to identify broad-relationships between male and female tax experts across the personal qualities they valued in their tax work. The test provides a rank table that indicates which group can be considered as having the highest score in each dependent variable, overall; namely the group with the highest mean rank (See: Table 2).

⁵ We recognise these categorisations do little to move gender beyond ‘binary’ consideration so as to represent the complexity behind sexual identity and its intersection with both the tax and accounting professions (Hardies & Khalifa, 2018; Haynes, 2017; Rumens, 2016), but we must also note that addressing this task is also beyond the purview of this paper.

To ensure that we are not inferring an effect from pattern differences, we developed a complementary ranking variables based on the Likert score replies. This identified how highly each respondent ranked each quality, relative to the other options available. Using the same non-parametric approach, we also explore the existence of differences between gender and the ranking of personal qualities to find whether gender has an impact on the ranking of personal qualities of tax experts in their day-to day tax work (See: Table 3).

Focusing on different career stages of tax experts, the previous non-parametric approach is also used to determine broad-relationships between gender, and personal qualities across our entire dataset (See: Table 4). Finally, we extend our analysis to consider the different career stages of tax experts, focusing on the existence of differences between gender and the ranking of personal qualities. Here, we explore whether gender has an impact on the ranking of personal qualities of tax experts that bring to their tax work, across different career stages (See: Table 5).

4. Findings & Analysis

The following table presents the results from our statistical tests, indicating the significance of Mann Whitney U tests across male and female tax experts. Moreover, details of the test such as the mean rank (MR) for each group and the number of observations are provided, too.

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U test across females and males-Scoring

	Females	Males	Sig.	Higher score among
Knowledgeable	MR=513.64, n=469	MR=467.26, n=509	1%	Females
Ethical	MR=519.19, n=469	MR=460.11, n=507	1%	Females
Speedy	MR=500.68, n=468	MR=477.28, n=508	None	n/a
Pragmatic	MR=491.51, n=463	MR=477.10, n=504	None	n/a
Compliant	MR=523.89, n=468	MR=452.81, n=505	1%	Females
Innovative	MR=469.51, n=463	MR=500.10, n=507	10%	Males
Accurate	MR=509.87, n=467	MR=466.89, n=507	1%	Females
Confidential	MR=514.08, n=469	MR=463.83, n=506	1%	Females
Technically competent	MR=492.14, n=467	MR=483.23, n=507	None	n/a
Nuanced	MR=441.80, n=431	MR=476.07, n=488	5%	Males
Loyal	MR=493.45, n=460	MR=467.60, n=499	None	n/a

These results show significant differences on a range of key personal qualities. Females score higher across most of the personal qualities. More specifically, in comparison with males, we find that female tax experts consider it more important to be *knowledgeable*, *ethical*, *compliant*, *accurate* and *confidential*. Males, however, indicate that it is more important to be *innovative* and *nuanced*. We find *speedy*, *pragmatic*, *technically competent* and *loyal* are equally important for between genders.

Using the same approach, we also explore differences across gender in the ranking of personal qualities that bring to their day-to-day tax work. The next table shows us significant differences between male and female tax experts with respect to how they rank their personal qualities.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U test across females and males ranking

	Females	Males	Sig.	Higher rank among
Rank Knowledgeable	MR=468.58, n=469	MR=508.78, n=509	1%	Females
Rank Ethical	MR=461.20, n=469	MR=513.76, n=507	1%	Females
Rank Speedy	MR=484.23, n=468	MR=492.43, n=508	None	n/a
Rank Pragmatic	MR=488.30, n=463	MR=480.05, n=504	None	n/a
Rank Compliant	MR=455.51, n=468	MR=516.19, n=505	1%	Females
Rank Innovative	MR=516.30, n=463	MR=457.37, n=507	1%	Males
Rank Accurate	MR=470.58, n=467	MR=503.08, n=507	5%	Females
Rank Confidential	MR=467.05, n=469	MR=507.42, n=506	1%	Females
Rank Technically competent	MR=490.48, n=467	MR=484.75, n=507	None	n/a
Rank Nuanced	MR=488.15, n=431	MR=435.14, n=488	1%	Males
Rank Loyal	MR=468.29, n=460	MR=490.79, n=499	None	n/a

Again, we observe significant differences between males and females on how they rank their personal qualities, and the patterns are broadly in line with those observed using the score variables. This provides some assurance of the robustness of the finding, and eliminates spurious patterns in response.

Specifically, female tax experts rank being *knowledgeable*, *ethical*, *compliant*, *accurate* and *confidential* higher than male tax experts do, while males again place a higher rank on *innovative* and *nuanced*. The differences identified amongst men across both scoring and rank variables are interesting, particularly when they are contrasted with the changing demands of tax work as the field adapts to globalisation and digitisation discussed in Section Two, particularly in the context of the observations of Fogarty & Jones (2014) on the complexity of tax decision-making. Differences across gender on the rankings of *speedy*, *loyal*, *pragmatic* and *technically competent* are not statistically significant.

Gender differences within career stage

The analysis continues by focusing on different career stages of tax experts, exploring the existence of differences between gender and the personal qualities to find whether, for these different career stage groups, gender has an impact on personal qualities of tax experts that bring to their tax work. The next table presents the results, indicating the significance of Mann Whitney U tests across male and female tax experts at different career stage groups as defined and discussed in Section Three.

Table 4: Mann-Whitney U test across females and males-Career Stages-Scoring

Personal qualities	Significance level of difference			Higher score among
	Studying	Recent	Established	
Knowledgeable	None	1%	1%	Females
Ethical	None	1%	1%	Females
Speedy	None	None	None	n/a
Pragmatic	None	None	None	n/a
Compliant	5%	10%	1%	Females
Innovative	None	None	5%	Males
Accurate	5%	None	1%	Females
Confidential	None	1%	5%	Females
Technically competent	None	None	None	n/a
Nuanced	None	None	5%	Males

Loyal	10%	None	None	Females
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While overall these patterns align with those, which examine gender differences in aggregate, they do highlight some significant differences on a range of key personal qualities for different career stages, with females again scoring higher across most of the personal qualities. Interestingly, in general these differences become more significant for the established career stage compared to the previous early stages. This signals that gender differences may become more marked as experience increases. More specifically, in comparison to males, females at a studying career stage indicate that it is more important to be *compliant*, *accurate* and *loyal*. Similarly, expanding our analysis to tax experts at a recent career stage, the test indicates that females consider more important being *knowledgeable*, *ethical*, *compliant* and *loyal* than males. For the established career stage, we find that female tax experts consider more important being *knowledgeable*, *ethical*, *compliant*, *accurate* and *confidential* than male tax experts, while males indicate that it is more important to be *innovative* and *nuanced*. We also find that some key personal qualities are equally important for both genders at every career stage. Being *speedy*, *pragmatic* and *technically competent* is equally important for both female and male tax experts during each stage of their career.

Looking at the different career stage groups, the next table shows us significant differences between male and female tax experts with respect to how they rank their personal qualities, that bring to their day-to-day tax work.

Table 5: Mann-Whitney U test across females and males-Career Stages-Ranking

Rank of personal qualities	Significance level of difference			Higher rank among
	Studying	Recent	Established	
Rank Knowledgeable	None	1%	5%	Females
Rank Ethical	None	1%	5%	Females
Rank Speedy	None	None	None	n/a
Rank Pragmatic	None	None	None	n/a
Rank Compliant	10%	None	1%	Females
Rank Innovative	None	None	1%	Males
Rank Accurate	10%	None	5%	Females
Rank Confidential	None	1%	None	Females
Rank Technically competent	None	None	None	n/a
Rank Nuanced	None	None	1%	Males
Rank Loyal	10%	None	None	Females

As with the score variables, the rank variables also indicate that most of the significant differences across gender for tax experts are for those in an established career stage, while only a few differences take place for those at an early career stage (i.e. studying and recent). Female tax experts rank higher being *compliant*, *accurate* and *loyal* than male tax experts at a studying career stage do. Similarly, in comparison to males, we find that female tax experts at a recent career stage place a higher rank on *knowledgeable*, *ethical*, and *confidential*. Moreover, there are significant differences between males and females at an established career stage, with females to

place a higher rank on *knowledgeable*, *ethical*, *compliant* and *accurate* compared to males. At an established career stage, male tax experts, however, rank higher being *innovative* and *nuanced* than females. Finally, during each stage of their career, both female and male tax experts equally rank being *speedy*, *pragmatic* and *technically competent*.

5. Discussion

This explores gender differences in the tax field by focusing on those personal qualities that male and female respondents identify as being more or less important to their tax work, providing a sense of their priorities. In the group as a whole, eight statistically significant differences were identified between men and women across both forms of variable reflecting the traits: *knowledgeable*, *ethical*, *compliant*, *accurate*, *confidential*, *innovative* and *nuanced*. Women both scored and ranked *knowledgeable*, *ethical*, *compliant*, *accurate* and *confidential* higher than men, men scored and ranked *innovative* and *nuanced* higher than women.

At a broad level, qualities like *knowledgeable*, *compliant* and *accurate* would be expected to be important for most professionals working within an organisation, and there is no reason to believe the tax profession would be any different. However, when you being to consider some of these differences in relation to other variables, there are some insights that can begin to be teased out. Gender differences identified in relation to *knowledgeable* are difficult to interpret alone, but when contrasted with qualities such as *technically competent*, distinctions can begin to be identified. While we cannot specify how men or women conceptualised *these qualities*, we know they can be interpreted in relation to their tax work. For example, *knowledgeable* may be understood as indicating more a broad and general understanding that can be applied to a wide range of issues, compared to the more narrow *technically competent*. From this perspective, women's alignment with a broader approach to tax could be useful information for management as they seek to both adapt and develop the skillset of tax practitioners as the scope of their role broadens. Furthermore, *knowledgeable*, *compliant* and *accurate* are all skills required by the new demands confronting tax experts as the profession adapts to a changing operational landscape.

“The great skills of the tax professional going forward will be to carry their technical skill with them, but not let that dominate every conversation they have with a finance person or a business person.” – Chris Price, Leader of EY's Global People Advisory Services

Differences identified in relation to *ethical* are relevant to the decision-making literature that was reviewed in Section 2. Here, the differences identified align with the findings from prior behavioural literature (Betz & Skepard, 1989), suggesting women are more concerned with ethical business decision-making compared to men. These findings are also particularly interesting in relation to current issues around global tax evasion that are currently impacting the tax field. Here, the increased importance women place on ethics might be useful to professional firms concerned with staffing decisions around issues that might have substantial ethical ambiguity, or tax leaders looking for staff that will support their values. In any case, as tax work continues to become more complex, the value of ethics as a guide for decision-making is becoming increasingly important for the modern tax expert.

“In terms of leadership of a group, women tend to be collaborative. And in tax, because of the complexity, you really need some kind of moral compass guiding you. And maybe women project that in a particular way.” – Diane Dossin, Chief Tax Office - Ford Motor Company, interview in (EY, 2016)

Compliant and *accurate* touch on a similar characteristic, one that illustrates a concern for the quality of the job being well done. The underlying question here is why women score and rank this personal quality higher than men rank, while avoiding the conclusion that an identified difference implies that men do not care about these qualities. Here, the ranking variable differences in particular suggests a higher regard for the quality of work being done amongst women, but it should also be noted that the underlying sentiment of these qualities is to meet the standard of what needs to be done. From a different approach, consider what distinguishes work that is both compliant and accurate. Each suggests a standard quality of work that would be expected by clients and required by authorities. Furthermore, the higher importance that women place on *accuracy*, *compliance* and *ethics*, would appear to align with the motivations for self-correction of errors that we discussed in Section 2 (Farrar & Hausserman, 2016). Given that an error in either compliance or accuracy could result in fines or litigation, these differences may also indicate that women are more conscious of the implications that the quality of their work may have on the organisation. These considerations align with prior literature on risk aversion amongst women (Charness & Gneezy, 2012; Eagly, 1987), and are important for professional firms looking to service their clients while also mitigating potential fines or litigation (Fogarty & Jones, 2014), as well as those looking to rebuke the negative characterisations that have begun to plague the tax field as a result of highly publicised global tax evasion⁶.

As the nature of tax information is sensitive, *confidential* is another quality that makes sense in relation to the day-to-day work of tax experts. What is interesting here is that this quality is set in relation to acting on behalf of, or with respect to, another person or entity, and the underlying trust that is conveyed by its prioritisation. As such, the higher scoring and ranking of this quality amongst women aligns with a more externally oriented approach to their work in that it elevates the interests of others, or perhaps a client. In being more receptive to these external issues than men are, women once again can be seen to prioritise interests that are beyond themselves. Combined with the higher importance that women place on *ethics* in their work, and the higher levels of emotional intelligence they exhibit to foster group collaboration (Kirkland et al., 2013; Woolley et al., 2015), our findings suggest women promote qualities that are increasingly aligned with those of organisations seeking to adapt to, and thrive in, the rapidly changing tax field. Enabling such adaptation also reflects women's communication within their occupational field (Ashby et al., 2009), and the social norms they foster within their organisations (Onu & Oats, 2015) to facilitate their adaptation. Considering the increasing role of collaboration and data sharing in tax work that we discussed in Section 2, this is an important consideration for both professional firms and tax authorities.

Differences identified amongst men regarding *innovative* and *nuanced* appear to have a common thread to the qualities they promote. Again, it is important not to infer that women do not care about these qualities, while continuing to explore the gender differences. *Innovative* suggests a new development that is beyond the current approaches. In relation to personal qualities being applied to work, being *innovative* can lead to finding new solutions to old problems. As discussed in Section 2, as the tax work is impacted by digitisation, qualities like *innovation* are in demand amongst tax experts so they can add value beyond the routine tasks that are increasingly automated. On one hand, professional firms looking to compete for clients may interpret the importance men place on innovation as a means toward developing competitive advantage.

⁶ See: <https://www.icij.org/investigations/paradise-papers/>, and <https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/>

However, in relation to the lower importance that they place on *ethics* and *compliance* compared to women, questions can be raised around the sustainability of such *innovation*, particularly in a tax field that is struggling to address issues of tax evasion.

Given the increasing complexity involved in engaging with international tax regimes, it is somewhat understandable that individuals might see the necessity of a *nuanced* approach to their work. As discussed in Section 2, it is becoming an increasingly necessary for paradoxical decision-making in the increasingly complex tax field (Fogarty & Jones, 2014). In this way, being *nuanced* also suggests an ability to navigate complexity in a way that is not only sufficient to complete the task at hand, but to do so in a way that is distinguished for its ability to operate within a complex environment. When considered in relation to being innovative, these qualities portray men as more individualist in the qualities they emphasise, particularly in comparison to the qualities that differentiate women

While differences between the personal qualities that men and women bring to their work can provide important insights, it is also important to consider those areas in which no differences were identified. Here, there were three variables that both men and women scored and ranked similarly on aggregate: *speedy*, *pragmatic*, *technically competent* and *loyal*. Individually, these first three characteristics represent distinctly different qualities, each of which signal different priorities. For example, given the high amount of respondents from professional practice and the corporate sector, there is a very good chance that many respondents derive their work from clients that would be billed for their time. In this regard, it is somewhat understandable that *speedy* would be a characteristic that tax professionals bring to their work, as pressure to reduce fees, particularly for recurring work, would in all likelihood pressure tax professionals to be as efficient in their work as possible. In much the same way, *pragmatism* can be seen as a characteristic needed daily in tax work in order to make progress on a tax issue, particularly given the time sensitivity of some tax decisions. That being said, *pragmatism* can also be seen as a means by which to make more expedient decisions, which aligns with similarities in respondents' views on *speedy*, but it also convey a sense of reductionism in decision-making. *Technically competent* rounds out a 'functionality' thread that appears to throughout these similarities, as the very nature of tax work requires foundation in technical knowledge. However, consideration of both *technically competent* and *speedy* is important, as they reflect the modern demands being placed on tax experts.

The similarity identified on *loyalty* is perhaps the most interesting in relation to the ways in which the tax field is changing. As discussed in Section 2, the impact of globalisation and digitalisation are changing the nature of tax work. Professional firms are having to confront these changes, through investment in retraining and recruiting programs to help adapt their workforce. Here, *loyalty* to the firm is a major issue. As discussed, professional publications can be seen lamenting a shorter 'loyalty horizon' amongst younger tax experts. Recognising these issues, the similarities between men and women suggests that a gendered approach to retraining and recruitment might not be the best path forward for professional firms looking to develop their 'tax talent'. That being said, there were differences identified for *loyalty* with regard to career stage that we now discuss along with the other differences identified across our study.

The second series of analyses presented in Tables 4 and 5 are intended to assess the degree to which overall gender differences are impacted by time spent as a tax expert. Given the current profile of the field, some of this could reflect the dominance of males in senior positions. Again

looking to the similarities between men and women, it appears that there is no difference in the way they value being *speedy, pragmatic* and *technically competent*. These findings suggest these qualities remain important amongst both genders irrespective of the experience that individuals have as tax experts.

Tests based on career stage suggest that differences between men and women become more pronounced in the later stage of their careers. At a more general level, this may suggest that tax experts become more aware of the importance of their own personal qualities as they develop more experience within the field, but our study is such that we cannot say this is developed over time. These differences are particularly apparent across *compliant, innovative, accurate* and *nuanced* on both variables analysed. While all the qualities assessed relate to respondents' tax work, it is interesting that each of these relate to the quality of tax work performed.

Of particular interest is the differences identified in relation to *loyalty* amongst those respondents who identified as *studying*. As discussed earlier in this section, there were no differences identified amongst men and women on aggregate regarding the importance they place on *loyalty*. Here, the higher importance of loyalty amongst women who were studying is a particularly important consideration for professional firms adapting to a changing tax field via investment in recruitment. It may be that the increasing proportion of women being recruited will provide with a more loyal pool of tax talent from which to build their workforce. Alternatively, it may be that this loyalty is eroded through time spent in the field. This is also an interesting consideration in relation to the increased role of part/flex time in professional firms, and efforts to accommodate women who choose to start families early in their careers (EY, 2016, p. 10). Professional firms that recognise the higher levels of loyalty expressed amongst women may be in a position to derive long-term benefits through fostering this sustainable pool of tax talent.

Our research sought to explore the changing gender profile of the tax field to assess the personal qualities that men and women bring to their tax work, and how these qualities are impacted by increased experience in the field. We find a series of differences, which vary by career stage, and relate directly to the changing nature of tax work. Future research could build on these initial findings using more qualitative, case-based research approaches, or survey methodology in particular sub-sectors of the tax field. At a more general level, these findings help develop a more intricate understanding of the way in which the tax field is adapting to changes to both its workforce composition and the nature of tax work.

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