



TRAINING

BUILDING THE CIVIL SERVICE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

A foretaste of Richard Hillsdon's contribution to the
Panel contributions and discussion



As we know, today's Civil Service faces new and profound challenges not least because of the COVID pandemic both at a policy delivery level and as an employer struggling in very difficult times. But the writing is on the wall that the Service needs to develop its workforce even more fundamentally and rapidly to draw on a diverse pool of talent, skills and ability to respond and deliver more effectively than in the past.

Some essential groundwork has already been laid: the replacement of the old competency-based recruitment, selection and promotion system with Success Profiles (SP) 2 years ago was overdue. We urgently needed to attract those who want to bring new strengths and approaches and let them sell themselves to us. This in itself was welcomed by most existing civil servants who felt jaded by the formulaic rigidity of competences, and who had longed to be able to talk about themselves in the selection process even if it brought some anxiety at the loss of predictability.

But, even though 'so far so good', what has happened over those two years that bear on what the Civil Services needs to do now? I have been at the forefront of this, delivering SP workshops for all grades and coaching for SCS and Gs6/7. So many, whilst welcoming SP, have misread it as a translation process from the old rather than the blank page creative opportunities it offers. Only last week, a group of vacancy holders, in the second year of the system in their department, told me from the outset that they had had no real immersion in SP, did not understand it, and had not discussed at SCS level how they could use it to bring about wider inclusivity.



More than that, SP was never designed, of itself, to address the fairness, transparency and equity challenges of the old system especially around sifting standards and feedback (the most common criticism offered across the board at CS Live last year). And perhaps SP even added to those anxieties for applicants in the uncertainties experienced by many over how to write a Personal Statement in the absence of a list of competencies and in the methodology of matching Behaviours to Strengths. None of this detracts from the step forward and opportunity that Success Profiles offers. We just have to now use the system to its full potential and address not so many perceptions of unconscious bias as unconscious conformity to outworn stereotypes that we would rather not admit to.

Most SCS recognise and support the drive for inclusivity and the search for new skills and disciplines. But many have told me of their concerns about how to reconcile attracting genuine candidate individuality and innovation with the propensity for recruiters to resort to Behaviour and Strength predictability – unconsciously, therefore, selecting in their own image.

In the session on the 7 October, Richard Hillsdon shall expand on some of this in the discussion and talk about examples of how we can rise to this challenge.



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