



MEET THE TRAINER

Richard Hillsdon | November 2020





RICHARD HILLSDON

Dods Associate and Lead on Success Profiles Training

I have been delivering workshops and speaking at other conference events for Dods for the past 10 years. In that time I have designed or delivered bespoke learning events with a range of government departments, many agencies and arms-length bodies. Many of those have been policy training reflecting my 14 years as a senior policy civil servant in MOD. That had followed time as an occupational psychologist researching and teaching at Birkbeck College and City University, and 10 years as a selection psychologist in the Civil Service. I have been asked to include a flavour of what I am bringing to the Civil Service as an ex-civil servant myself and consultant. In so doing, I have picked a theme from my current work to reflect on below: **how civil servants are selected and promoted in these times of change** as I have been leading on the training for the **introduction of Success Profiles** over the past two years.

But first, let me give another strand to my background which may seem unrelated, though very much relevant to what we have all been going through these past 7 months, but ironically has been such an important contribution to how I work. Some 15 years ago I decided to retrain part-time within my broad original field of psychology and become a psychotherapist. I had always had a strong interest in mental health. This took many years part-time and two more postgraduate degrees and then 8 years working part-time as a psychotherapist in a busy NHS mental health clinic in St Thomas' Hospital and in the Lambeth community. I do not believe I could have offered what I do now in my Dods and coaching work without that background.

First, because it taught me to see what's going on beneath the surface, so important when it comes to the motivation and concerns of civil servants, particularly perhaps with Covid, lock-downs and the effects of home working and isolation. It was the reason why very early on in the pandemic I recorded a short Dods video with my colleague, Jo Clift, anticipating the mental health effects of coping with all this. But, secondly, working in an inner south London community has given me such an insight into the effects of deprivation but most of all my weekly personal interaction within the BAME community. This latter has proved invaluable in my recent work on **BAME Diversity and Inclusion** amongst civil servants looking to advance their careers.

That brings me to where we all are right now, **in a period of what will surely be irreversible change** in how we have to learn to work. I am thinking here of society as a whole of course but more particularly of the civil service which was already facing calls for change. I was a panel member in a Dods-sponsored webinar a few weeks ago open to the whole SCS and Grades 6 and 7 on **"Building the CS Workforce of the Future"**. We had approaching 1000 signed up which reflects the concern all feel as to what a future civil service career now holds. Amongst anxieties over future automation's positive and negative impact on the service, headcount pressures, employment of consultants, and professional learning opportunities, were many concerning recruitment and selection – my territory.



Over the past two years, I have travelled the country running sessions with vacancy holders, panel interviewers and applicants adjusting to the introduction of Success Profiles. The change from the old competency system was popular and long overdue – it had become rigid and formulaic. SP, broadly, is liked. But, in my view we still have a way to go to fulfil SP's promise of a much more flexible and tailored approach based on greater transparency over the elements to be assessed and the inclusion of the “person” in the shape of “Strengths” and diversity.

Progress yes, but as one participant in the webinar put it “Roles have expanded through CV19...unfortunately recruitment never gets made a priority, it's a reactive process where they pluck an existing advert, randomly select behaviours and strengths”. Whilst this perhaps overstates something that is by no means true across the board I recognise it all too often in the way vacancy holders describe how they (have to?) approach a recruitment process under pressure. We have a way to go to ensure that recruitment starts with a thorough first principles examination of what the job has to deliver and how to attract as widely and diversely as possible.

I always ask vacancy holders the question “What might diversity look like for this job and how would we capture that in an advert that is attractive”. They recognise that as a hard question – after all, how could they plan to surprise themselves? I haven't found the answers coming that easily. But answer it we must. Moreover, CS recruitment adverts are often longwinded and confusing about the process, but unfortunately so often dull and uninviting.



There is a continuing lack of constructive feedback to those not succeeding at the sift stage which admittedly the SP system was never of itself designed to address. But my biggest concern is that recruiters and interviewers go forward into this new workforce world stuck with the entirely understandable and unconscious tendency to carry on recruiting and selecting in their own image.

In my view, this is the single biggest barrier to a more inclusive CS. Fully compliant with the Equalities Act of course, but the workforce culture challenge facing us goes well beyond that. It was captured so well by one SCS “I am increasingly convinced that inclusion will not be achieved by programmes to make people more like me, and that we need a much greater focus on making people, like me shift our thinking and change our behaviour”. If there was one thing I would want you to take away from this short introduction to my work it would be that as our next hurdle as we go forward in the Civil Service.



**Contact the Dods Training
team for more information**

Alice McDavid

Head of UK Training

+44 (0)20 7593 5714

alice.mcdavid@dodsgroup.com

