How to Succeed in the Senior Civil Service

Part 4 - Leading and Managing

4.1 Introduction & Contents[1]

All Senior Civil Servants will have attended several leadership and management training courses and yet we have all found that 'managing' is far from easy, especially at more senior levels.

This supplementary advice draws on the combined experience of many excellent managers.

There is a list of contents below but, in brief, it focusses on tricky areas such as recruitment and appraisal; bullying and harassment; and strategy. It also offers some focussed leadership and management advice.

First, though ... a word of warning.

As you read this advice, and whenever you attend training programs, you will be told that good managers are reflective, organised, rational and plan-oriented. They are like good conductors: they orchestrate and plan everything in advance, they empower and they delegate. This sounds like great advice but **it is an aspiration. It is not the full story.**

All managers' work is in practice characterised by brevity, variety and discontinuity.   One study of CEOs found that half of their activities lasted less than nine minutes, whilst a study of British

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[1] This is a draft version of the fourth chapter of a book which might be published in 2025. I am very keen to know what you think of it. Is it clear, helpful? Could the tone be improved? And the contents, of course! Please drop me an email to ukcs68@gmail.com .

middle and top managers found that they worked uninterrupted for more than 30 minutes only about once every two days.

Managers also have a number of regular duties that cannot be delegated. Meeting important customers and stakeholders, attending retirement parties, meeting with government officials, and so much more, are a natural part of a manager's job.

So, as you read this advice, please bear in mind that although it is as practical as possible, it is to some extent idealistic and cannot reflect the unrelenting pace at which modern managers are expected to work. Modern management is a bit like driving. It's all about taking decisions, often every few seconds – how to react, what tone to adopt, when to change the subject. However hard we try, some of our judgements will be wrong, but hopefully inconsequentially so. Good managers, like good drivers, simply make fewer bad calls than others. Firm but fair managers can apologise and move on, as their colleagues recognise their worth and forgive the occasional blemish. Unpopular, unfair managers find that their mistakes are leapt upon as evidence of their inadequacy.

Be aware, too, that the following advice cannot help you find the right mixture of leadership, planning, empowerment, change management, time management and so on that will fit your particular circumstances. But it should certainly help reduce the number of mistakes that you make.

Contents

4.2.1 Recruitment

Let's begin by thinking about how best to recruit new members to your team.

Recruitment has to be taken enormously seriously. Get it wrong and you'll have nightmare months or years trying to correct your error. Get it right and your job becomes much easier.

But it is very hard to get recruitment right, partly because we are often reluctant to spell out, at least by implication, the attributes that we don't want, as well as those we do. There is, for instance, plenty of room for shy, retiring, academic individuals in some policy roles, but the same individuals would be disasters in other roles. You don't often want to recruit a genius - great at completing crosswords but quite incapable of making decisions, making a good impression on ministers, or managing fellow humans with all their faults and frailties.

It must be recognised, too, that recruitment is inevitably risky because you don't have a lot of time to get to know all the candidates before appointment. You must therefore be ready to accept that some appointments will not work through no fault on your part, or the appointee's.

Here are some thoughts that might help you cut the error rate.

General Advice

- You do not want 'the best' person for the job. You want the right person – one who fits the job requirement, whose strengths are those you need, and whose weaknesses won't be shown up.

- Take care to ensure that the job description and person specification are comprehensive. If you need the appointee to be friendly, approachable and flexible, then this needs to be spelt out in advance. Equally, if the job can be filled by a shy, backroom sort of person, then other attributes will need to be stressed.

- Similarly, do not demand sophisticated drafting skills from everyone. There is a marked waste of talent in many government departments because good managers, good networkers (especially with those in industry), good 'deliverers', and many professionals are deemed unsuited to working closely with Ministers.

- Do encourage genuine diversity. Your approach should <u>not</u> be "*Come in and we'll show you how to be like us*". It should be "*Come in … and now we are a new organisation*". This kind of attitude is reflected in the way women seeking promotion often feel the need to be 'the right sort of chap' in both background and behaviour. This needs to stop.

- Take care not to be fooled by embellished and exaggerated CVs, and do take oral references in advance of discussion/interview. Having learned from bitter experience, I would not appoint to a middle-ranking or senior position without taking a quite deep prior reference. Some candidates cannot supply these for good reasons, but others cannot provide them because they have been dismissed for incompetence or worse. It is seldom worth taking the risk.

- Equally, do take a moment to think about the motivation of the referee. Some managers are trying to get rid of poor quality staff, and hope you will end up holding this particular damaged parcel. And some will bad mouth staff who do not fit their particular mould, although you might rather welcome a recruit who is a little out of the ordinary.

- Do not downplay the difficult aspects of the job for which you are recruiting. Many public-facing positions, for instance, and jobs in Ministers' offices, are very stressful, as are jobs (such as some regulatory jobs) whose outputs are subject to intense scrutiny, including by the courts. The need for these positions to be filled by robust personalities must be spelt out to all candidates as it is no kindness to them (or you) if they are appointed to a job in which they cannot succeed.

- Unless you feel that the candidate will be uncomfortable working for you, do not hesitate to recruit people who are more experienced than you - or have useful different experience.
- If the candidate needs a particular skill, make sure you thoroughly test them to ensure they have it.
- But don't require academic qualifications unless absolutely necessary. An experienced person who opted out of further or higher education will often out-perform those who studied longer.
- You sometimes need to find someone who will shake up an organisation. Private sector friends of mine - who often serve together on interview panels - ask each other "Is (s)he life threatening?" ! (The right answer is "yes'.)
- Psychometric testing is almost always a waste of time.

By the way – never, ever, let your HR department make decisions for you – even (indeed especially) at the preliminary sift stage. They will too readily sift out that unusual, left-field but exciting candidate, maybe without exactly the right qualifications, that would transform your team.

4.2.2 Interviews

Because it is hard to predict the likely future performance of prospective employees, employers tend to substitute other tests. Do I like this person? Do they interview well?

But many excellent candidates do not 'perform' very well in formal interviews. Others do not shine in groups. I myself strongly empathise with this comment by Nour Sadawi:

> I've noticed I'm terrible in large groups. I never come up with good thoughts on the hoof. My first thoughts are never my best ones. I need to go away, be quiet, and think things through to have an actual good reflection.

Do not, therefore, put significant weight on performance in the traditional 45-minute interview. Some candidates think much more quickly than others, and/or are more able to express their thoughts orally. These may be important attributes - but in many cases you will be better off appointing a deeper thinker, or someone who takes time to order their thoughts in a way that allows them to communicate more clearly - especially in writing.

The best interviews are conversations, not interrogations. Respond to, and if necessary challenge, what the candidate says. Make sure you understand why they have given an apparently odd answer to one of your questions.

Even better, why not send your initial questions in advance? You will get more thoughful responses, and a sense of how well candidate have prepared.

It is generally much better to arrange for short-listed candidates to have two discussions (not 'interviews') with two different halves of a four-person recruitment panel. These feel more relaxing for the candidate and can allow issues to be explored in greater depth. This facilitates a much deeper investigation of the candidates' interests, character, strengths and weaknesses. This

may seem time consuming, but it is a lot less time consuming than dealing with the aftermath of a sub-optimal appointment.

It is best to rank candidates in advance of final discussion/interview based on a careful (and sceptical/evidence based) review of their achievements in previous jobs. The discussions can then be used to test the accuracy of the ranking rather than as an event on which the whole process hinges.

There is no 'equal opportunities' need to ask all candidates the same questions. Interviews should be tailored so as to tests the candidate's likely strengths and weaknesses. Although the job specification is the same for all candidates, their experience and apparent strengths will vary, so your questions need to vary if you are to accurately assess their suitability for the job.

If an experienced manager with a good track record has a strong and negative hunch about a candidate, listen to that person and explore the concern in depth.

And please try to avoid silly application forms. Can it be true (I fear it was) that judges - applying for high office - must provide an example of how they behaved with integrity?

Remember, too, that recruitment needs to be followed by effective, targeted **induction**. This is too often neglected, especially in the case of senior appointments; this is one of the reasons why I created my Understanding the Civil Service and Understand Regulation websites.

> (It is particularly important that new entrants to the civil service are introduced to the Civil Service Code, and come to understand its importance and implications. There should be no question of local mission statements or departmental core values overriding the provisions of the code.)

The next challenge is appraisal, much of which (the formal part) is a waste of time.

4.3.1 Performance Management & Appraisal

None of us like to give difficult feedback, but it must be done, and it is almost always easier to give tough feedback in the moment, rather than let the moment pass. If you don't say something immediately then your colleague is likely to repeat the error. Do you criticise them then? - in which case they will wonder why this time was different. It's even worse to save all the problems up until you have a formal meeting.

Informal appraisal is therefore very important. Blanchard & Spencer's *The One Minute Manager* suggests that managers should give immediate feedback whenever they see good or bad work. In the real world, unfortunately, too many managers give immediate feedback that is either always positive (and therefore dishonest) or always negative (which is debilitating). Colleagues quickly learn to appreciate the honesty of the few managers who give both sorts of feedback.

Praise is highly motivating. Pilita Clark:

> It is hard to think of anything else that costs so little, take such a piffling amount of time, and yet achieves so much as a short e-mail or a brief chat to praise someone's work. For employees whose work is largely unseen, or only noticed when they muck up, this recognition can be seriously significant.

Negative feedback should be delivered carefully, taking great account of your relationship with the person whose performance you hope to improve.

First of all, try to frame negative feedback as friendly advice. You should also encourage your staff to ask for 'advice' rather than 'feedback'. Requests for advice tend to prompt more useful comments: actionable and focussed of the potential for improvement.

Also, if you don't know the person too well, perhaps because they haven't worked for you for very long, you should generally – if possible - start by offering a compliment about work done well, or simply an acknowledgement that you haven't yet seen much of their work but … something concerns you. Some experienced managers recommend bookending or sandwich criticism – both starting and finishing with something positive. The reason for both these approaches is that, if you start with a negative, your colleague's defences will go up and they won't properly hear what you are saying.

But the positive comments required by the above approaches can sometimes be seen as insincere window dressing. So – if you can – try instead to engage in a tactful, honest and mature conversation which shows that you are sensitive to the other person's feelings and genuinely want them to change/improve.

Formal Appraisal Systems

It has been known for decades that formal appraisal can do more harm than good. Academic researchers in this area generally conclude that ratings don't reveal much about the ratee, but instead reveal rather a lot about the rater.

Douglas McGregor pointed out as long ago as 1957 that managers are uncomfortable when they are put in the position of 'playing God'. Here are a couple of insights from his *Harvard Business Review* article.

> There is always some discomfort involved in telling a subordinate they are not doing well. The individual who is "coasting" … after serving their company competently for many years presents a special dilemma to the boss who is preparing to interview them.
>
> The conventional approach … constitutes something dangerously close to a violation of the integrity of the personality. Managers are uncomfortable when they are put in the position of "playing God." The respect we hold for the inherent value of the individual leaves us distressed when we must take responsibility for judging the personal worth of a fellow. Yet the conventional approach to performance appraisal forces us not only to make such judgments and to see them acted upon but also to communicate them to those we have judged.
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> The modern emphasis upon the manager as a leader who strives to *help* their subordinates achieve both their own and the company's objectives is hardly consistent with the judicial role demanded by most appraisal plans. If the manager must put on their judicial hat occasionally, they do so reluctantly and with understandable qualms. Under such conditions, it is unlikely that the subordinate will be any happier with the results than will the boss. It will not be surprising, either, if they fail to recognize that they have been told where they stand.
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> Of course, managers cannot escape making judgments about subordinates. Without such evaluations, salary and promotion policies cannot be administered sensibly. But are subordinates like products on an assembly line, to be accepted or rejected as a result of an inspection process?

A later February 2015 Harvard Business Review article, by Marcus Buckingham, made similar points. Here are some extracts:

How good a rater do you think you are? If you were my manager and you watched my performance for an entire year, how accurate do you think your ratings of me would be on attributes such as my "promotability" or "potential?"

How about more specific attributes such as my customer focus or my learning agility? Do you think that you're one of those people who, with enough time spent observing me, could reliably rate these aspects of my performance on a 1-to-5 scale? And how about the people around you – your peers, direct reports, or your boss? Do you think that with enough training they could become reliable raters of you?

... The research record [unfortunately] reveals that neither you nor any of your peers are reliable raters of anyone. And as a result, virtually all of our people data is fatally flawed.

Over the last fifteen years a significant body of research has demonstrated that each of us is a disturbingly unreliable rater of other people's performance. The effect that ruins our ability to rate others has a name: *the Idiosyncratic Rater Effect*, which tells us that my rating of you on a quality such as "potential" is driven not by who *you* are, but instead by *my* own idiosyncrasies—how I define "potential," how much of it I think *I* have, how tough a rater I usually am. This effect is resilient — no amount of training seems able to lessen it. And it is large — on average, 61% of my rating of you is a reflection of me.

In other words, when I rate you, on anything, my rating reveals to the world far more about me than it does about you. In the world of psychometrics this effect has been well documented. The first large study was published in 1998 in *Personnel Psychology;* there was a second study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* in 2000; and a third confirmatory analysis appeared in 2010, again in *Personnel Psychology*. In each of the separate studies, the approach was the same: first ask peers, direct reports, and bosses to rate managers on a number of different performance competencies; and then examine the ratings (more than half a million of them across the three studies) to see what explained why the managers received the ratings they did. They found that more than half of the variation in a manager's ratings could be explained by the unique rating patterns of the individual doing the rating— in the first study it was 71%, the second 58%, the third 55%.

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And yet, is this really a surprise? You're sitting in a year-end meeting discussing a person and you look at their overall performance rating, and their ratings on various competencies, and you think to yourself "Really? Is this person really a '5 'on strategic thinking? Says who – and what did they mean by 'strategic thinking 'anyway?" You look at the behavioural definitions of strategic thinking and you see that a "5" means that the person displayed strategic thinking "constantly" whereas a "4" is only "frequently" but still, you ask yourself, "How much weight should I really put on one manager's ability to parse the difference between 'constantly 'and 'frequently'? Maybe this '5 'isn't really a '5'. Maybe this rating isn't real."

And so perhaps you begin to suspect that your people data can't be trusted. If so, these last fifteen years have proven you right. Your suspicions are well founded. And this finding must give us all pause. It means that all of the data we use to decide who should get promoted is bad data; that all of the performance appraisal data we use to determine people's bonus pay is imprecise; and that the links we try to show between our people strategy and our business strategy — expressed in various competency models — are

spurious. It means that, when it comes to our people within our organisations, we are all functionally blind. And it's the most dangerous sort of blindness, because we are unaware of it. We think we can see.

There are solutions, I'm sure. But I think, before we can even consider those, we must first stop, take stock, and admit to ourselves that the systems we currently use to reveal our people only obscure them. This admission will challenge us. We will have to redesign almost our entire suite of talent management practices. Many of our comfortable rituals — the year-end performance review, the nine-box grid, the consensus meeting, our use of 360's — will be forever changed. For those of us who want HR to be known as a purveyor of good data — data on which you can actually run a business — these changes cannot come soon enough.

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Commenting in 2019, Twitter's *Flip Chart Rick* pointed out:-

'Much of the design and re-design of performance management processes in the intervening 6 decades has been about trying to manage our discomfort. The more process and bureaucracy we put around it, the more we hope to shield ourselves from the emotional pain. Management fads and fashions come and go. Ten ratings or five? Or four? Competencies, capabilities, objectives, frameworks, all trying to do one thing. Make this whole thing look objective so we can hide our discomfort. None of it has really worked, though it has cost a lot!'

Excellent but Not Promotable?

The rigid civil service grade structure and pay bands cause particular problems when it comes to appraising and rewarding otherwise excellent perfomers who, for one reason or another, would not thrive if promoted, and probably don't want to be promoted. This would include excellent policy analysts and other deep thinkers who would prefer not to manage significant numbers of staff. It would also include any technical and other experts whose specialist skills and knowledge would be wasted if promoted into a role with a much higher managerial content.

The key thing is to reassure such colleagues as often as possible that their talents are truly appreciated. They should also be given additional remuneration to match their contribution and to compensate them, so to speak, for you not being able to promote them.

This may result in those reporting to you earning as much or more than yourself. This does not matter!

Nevertheless ...

Despite what is said above, most readers will be forced to deliver or receive formal appraisals delivered within a flawed system over which they have only limited control. Here is some advice which might help limit the damage.

First, it is important to remember that **we all have different mixtures of strengths, experiences and weaknesses**. Managers should not make a big deal if the appraisal system forces them to mention weaknesses that may be quite irrelevant in the current job. Equally, the

person being appraised should not get too upset if a weakness is pointed out- or misunderstood - in an otherwise positive appraisal.

Second, it is often the case that **a single weakness can be a major problem**, and this needs to be spelt out and addressed. Too many senior officials have reached their current positions despite being inexperienced or poor managers, simply because they score well when it comes to analytical ability and the like. It would be much better for all concerned if such weaknesses were addressed early in such careers, and regarded as an absolute bar to further progress.

Third, the **formal annual appraisal** is essentially one-way communication. The process might begin with self-appraisal (although I have my doubts about the effectiveness of this approach) but it is essentially an opportunity for the appraiser to be honest about how the other person has appeared to them over the preceding period. The person being appraised might well feel that the appraiser is wrong, and it is fine to discuss this, but if the manager is unconvinced then it shouldn't lead to lengthy debate. Any difference of opinion can be resolved over the coming months as the staff member demonstrates their true ability to their manager. Reports do not need to be formally accepted by, or agreed with, the person being appraised, nor should they be subject to any form of formal appeal.

It is sensible, however, to show draft appraisals to the person on whom you are reporting, as you might well have forgotten some achievement, or you might have expressed something in an upsetting way. But the report should nevertheless remain your honest assessment of the other person, in comparison to others.

Fourth, (if you can) **keep it simple!** No-one remembers the detail of an appraisal more than a few hours after reading it. When I ran a small department, we categorised staff as very effective, effective or not effective, and this worked very well, especially if allowance was explicitly made for those who were in the process of gaining experience.

Finally, is it better if appraisals are supplemented by **'upward feedback'** or even **'360-degree feedback'**? TL:DR? No!

There may be good systems that facilitate these processes but it must be stressed that they need to be very carefully managed if they are not to do more harm than good. They should certainly never amount to 'upward appraisal'. Managers should want to know what messages their staff believe that they are receiving, in particular through the managers' behaviour. But it is not for staff to tell managers whether the messages are appropriate, or whether the manager is regarded as doing a good job. There may be some saints who would respond enthusiastically to criticism from inexperienced staff, but I fear that I and many others are not amongst them – at least until I have worked with my critics for a good long time.

Much the same applies to comment/feedback from peers. This can have some value as long as there is a reasonably close and effective working relationship between the reporter and reportee. But many of us work in compartments with only limited exposure to colleagues at the same level. Attendance at weekly management meetings is hardly sufficient for you to be able to make a sensible judgement on the performance of a colleague.

There is also the obvious point that even mildly negative feedback from colleagues can be very upsetting and can destroy personal relationships - and it is extremely difficult to ensure true anonymity. So - if you decide to proceed - take very great care to do it well.

Much the same applies to things like whistleblower hotlines, Chief Listening Officers and the rest. They may work well in safety critical environments - but elsewhere? They are supposed to foster psychological safety and speaking up but don't they in fact send a message that this environment is so unsafe that you had better not speak out when you see a problem.

Now, as an aside, here is some important advice ...

4.3.2 Bullying, Harassment & Performance Management

Dame Laura Cox QC published a report in 2018 into bullying and harassment in the Palace of Westminster. It contained some very helpful general advice and definitions, especially for managers (a) who receive complaints of bullying, or (b) who are concerned that they may be accused of bullying when trying to improve the performance of their staff. The following text is taken almost verbatim from Dame Laura's report.

What is Bullying?

Dame Laura defines bullying in this way:

- Bullying consists of behaviour that cannot be justified by a reasonable code of conduct and has the effect of threatening, undermining, constraining, humiliating and/or harming others or their property, self-worth and/or ability to perform.

- Bullying can take the form of the abuse or misuse of power intended to cause physical, psychological or reputational harm.

- Bullying can be seen in the form of offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour.

- Bullying might be done by an individual or groups, it might be obvious or insidious, and persistent or an isolated incident.

- Bullying isn't strictly a face-to-face phenomenon; it can also occur over the phone, by email and in other forms of writing.

- Whatever form it takes, bullying is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual.

Note, also, that the perpatrator does not need to be aware, or intend, that their behaviour is offensive, intimidating etc.

Performance Management

Performance management is a particularly sensitive area when it comes to bullying as staff facing criticism may feel that they are being bullied by their critical manager. To this end Dame laura's report offered this sensible advice, paraphrased as follows.

- When introducing new standards of performance, a good manager will usually involve all the members of the team in agreeing them, rather than seeking to impose them without discussion and threats of disciplinary action if they are not met.

- Positive contributions and improvements in performance will be monitored, acknowledged and rewarded openly, rather than dealt with arbitrarily, involving obvious acts of favouritism, or just ignored altogether.

- Failure to achieve the required standards will be dealt with initially as a performance-improvement issue, the employee being treated with civility throughout and with the provision of appropriate support, rather than pressure to conform being exerted using sarcasm, ridicule, threats or humiliation, often in the presence of others in the team.

- An under-performing employee should know from the start that their performance is under investigation, and why, rather than learning only after the event that it has been under investigation for some time, and that disciplinary action is now imminent.

This advice is sensible but I would add that I think it unfortunate that HR professionals generally refer to formal performance management warnings etc. as 'disciplinary action'. The word 'discipline implies serious fault and should, I think, be reserved for genuinely bad behaviour. Under-performing staff need to have their performance managed – if necessary to the point of dismissal - but they will often have found themselves in the wrong job for their skills and experience. I don't think that they should be 'disciplined'.

The Need for Full Records

Keeping records of staff behaviours, such as reports of harassment etc., is important when trying to combat bullying as they can give context that may vindicate one or the other side in such a case. As Dame Laura's report mentions:

> *Patterns of behaviour are extremely important in tackling bullying. It is always right to consider whether the "perpetrator" was under acute pressure and just having a bad day, for example, and whether this was just an isolated outburst with no lasting effects and the behaviour was out of character, or whether such incidents had happened before.*

It is therefore important for organisations to maintain reliable records and to log reported incidents and their outcomes accurately, and to have systems in place to enable patterns to be picked up and their historical and systemic significance understood.

Next ...

The next three sections look more generally at leadership and management.

Warning ! It is hard to avoid (and I have not avoided) listing unrealistic expectations when describing the ideal leader and manager.   So please remember that absolutely no-one lives up to the following pen pictures - but it's not a bad idea to aim in this general direction.

4.4 Leadership

Michael Bichard, a former Permanent Secretary, drew a clear distinction between managers and leaders:

> *Managers who control their organisations effectively may enable them to survive. But it is the leaders who create a sense of purpose and direction, and who analyse, anticipate and inspire.*

Strong leadership is essential if your team is to be innovative, efficient and successful. And yet one of the minor mysteries of the modern world is why there are so few effective leaders – in both the public and private sectors – when there is so much advice available in so many different books and courses. Indeed, they all say pretty much the same sort of thing which is that:

- **Leaders are different** from their followers. They are not their 'buddies'. They don't party with their staff (apart from at Christmas and farewell parties etc). They tell their people that they are different, and they behave as if they are different.

- Effective leaders are **authentic**. (Staff will quickly spot imposters.)

- Above all**,** good leaders can always answer the following questions from anyone at any time:

- Where are we going?

- Why are we going there?

- How will we get there?

In a little more detail, effective leaders often

- have a *remorseless* iron determination to make things happen;

- keep things simple even to the extent of being a little theatrical;

- are *committed* to their team;

- are *honest* and accept blame;

- are physically and mentally resilient; and

- take risks.

Most of the above is simple to understand if not easy to practise. But let me explain what I mean by *remorseless, committed, and honest*.

Remorselessness
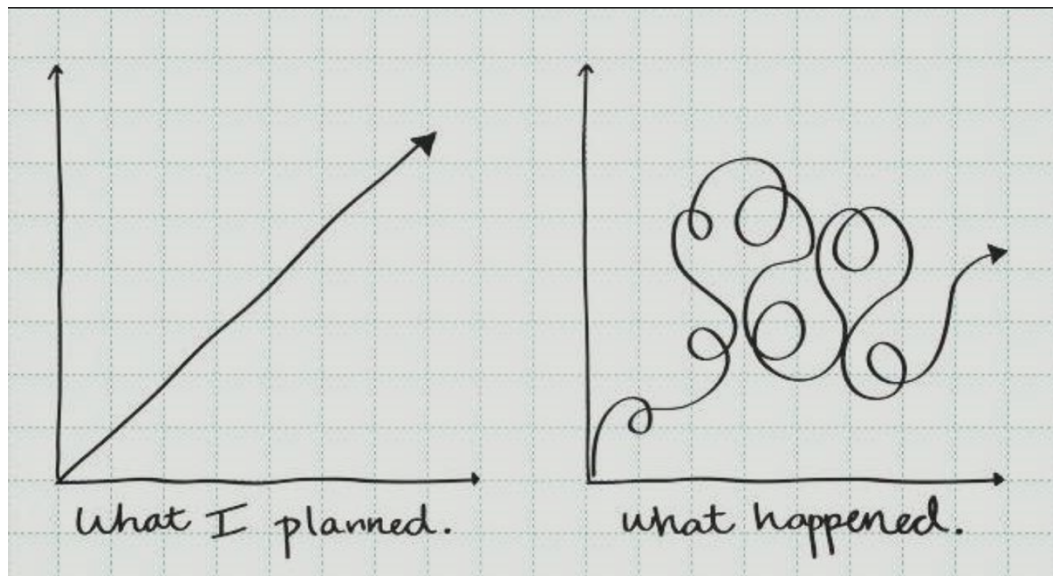
The first and most important characteristic of a leader is remorselessness. Not remorseless in the sense of never having remorse, but in the sense of cutting yourself some slack. This takes two forms.

First, leaders feel no remorse when they make mistakes, when things do not go according to plan, or when some innovation fails to work. They recognise that they are dealing with humans, not machines, and human behaviour is highly unpredictable. Remorse and guilt are understandable, but quite unnecessary, even if something does not work the way you expected.

Second, leaders are remorseless (in the sense of relentless) because they know that every improvement will take two or three times as long as they expect it to. But they don't let this stop them. Instead, they keep plugging away and eventually they and their teams achieve levels of performance that others can only dream of.

Commitment

Different situations call for different styles of leadership. Decisions sometimes need to be made very quickly and obeyed without question. But leaders nowadays almost always need the consent of those that they lead. Management consultants Kouzes and Posner describe leadership as 'a reciprocal relationship between those who choose to lead and those who decide to follow, '

Modern leaders therefore need to be a cross between an old-fashioned captain of a ship and someone who is running for office. It follows that newly appointed leaders should go out of their way to get themselves elected – i.e. respected by their teams – in the first few days after their appointment. This simple fact does not seem to be understood by many colleagues.

If you are to be elected leader then you must commit to the team, with all its strengths and weaknesses. This is particularly important in the civil service if only because you are unlikely to be around long enough to replace them. And the civil service is anyway so large that, by definition, it has to employ a cross-section of the population. Of course, you do not need put up with mediocrity or laziness. But you cannot insist on surrounding yourself with energetic geniuses. Your task is to get the best out of those who work for you, without forever wishing yourself somewhere else.

How do you show your commitment? You should:

• be very visible, in particular by walking about;

- set a good example, including by complying with rules and standards that have been set for your team;

- champion the team e.g. by defending them against unfair criticism, but also

- respond to fair criticism, whether of you or your team, in particular by putting matters right and by ensuring that the problem does not recur.

More generally, good managers and leaders tend to spend more time with their direct reports than do other managers - and bad managers spend very little time with their staff. Good managers tell their staff what is going on, and sek their opinions. Poor managers just hand out tasks and then disappear.

This all seems very obvious but a middle manager friend of mine told me that three weeks passed before her newly appointed Senior Civil Servant (Deputy Director) boss got round to meeting her, and she had yet to meet her Director after six months in the job. So some colleagues still have something to learn about visibility, commitment and leadership.

Honesty

According to Lucy Kellaway, writing in *the Financial Times*, a good leader knows exactly when to be straight, when to be economical with the truth, when to lay it on with a trowel, and when to dissemble. This is absolutely right, but most of us spend too much time dissembling and too little time being honest with our staff. We treat them as grown-ups when discussing their work, but not necessarily when it comes to talking about their jobs. If we don't know something, or we are unsure, or we have made a mistake, we should tell them.

In particular, we have to be honest in making it clear to staff that they are employed for no other reason than to help the leader achieve his or her objectives. However much they enjoy working together, the team must be directed to achieving a common goal. Those who skirt round this fundamental truth simply waste time and create confused expectations.

Effective leaders also give clear and honest feedback to their staff – not all the time, but frequently enough to change behaviour. Any sustained failure to give honest feedback to colleagues – and of course we have all failed to some extent, and regretted it – can only end in disappointment, confusion and demoralisation. Honest appraisal is also a necessary companion to empowerment. Once the manager has defined the job that is to be done, they should aim to keep out of the way and let their staff do what is expected of them, subject, of course, to informal and formal reviews to ensure that the work stays on track.

And finally...

Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to be tall and handsome to be seen by others as a natural leader. But strength, or resilience, certainly helps.

The best leaders know that they are most likely to achieve 80% of their impact in 20% of their time. It is of course difficult to identify that 20%, but don't fool yourself into thinking that very long hours will make a great deal of difference. They are much more likely to blunt your effectiveness.

4.5.1 Values

The problem with my pen picture of an effective leader is that it equally well describes Winston Churchill and Adolf Hitler; Nelson Mandela and Stalin. So some leaders are qualitatively better than others. What marks them out? It is clearly the **values** that they promote, and the boundaries that they set.

We are perhaps lucky that the UK Civil Service also has strong values which in effect form part of our constitution. These are described in some detail in my book *Civil Servants, Ministers and Parliament.*

Values are, however, of little use if they are merely written down – and swiftly ignored or forgotten. Good leaders lead by example, rather than by coercion. I like the quote attributed to St Francis of Assisi:

> "*Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words".*

4.5.2 Chronic Unease

One essential leadership trait, in today's increasingly complex world, is chronic unease; the best leaders are constantly on the alert for vulnerabilities in their organisation and systems.

You cannot rely on your deputies and on formal reports to warn you what might be going wrong deep in your organisation. You also can't really understand the pressures on front line staff if you don't visit them and watch them work when they are at their most vulnerable. You need to spend time with staff at all levels if you are to pick up on negative changes in mood and engagement. If you are lucky - and approachable - they may even tell you directly what is worrying them.

Sensible leaders, in particular, challenge '*Let's Do It!*' recommendations. These are, by definition, the ones that could possibly lead to accidents and disasters. Alert leaders look for weak signals that something is not right, that something could go wrong. These can always be found (in hindsight) after major disasters. And they reward those who respond properly to such signals.

Good leaders do not cease to listen if they are deluged by complaints. They instead listen carefully and try to identify the underlying causes of the complaints. They are particularly concerned to identify systemic problems that might have large scale or devastating consequences.

Recent problems in hospitals and prisons, as well as disasters such as contaminated blood and Grenfell Tower, suggest that too many senior officials were either unforgivably oblivious to, or insufficiently concerned about, the serious and persistent problems in those areas of the public sector for which they were responsible. Let's try to ensure that this doesn't happen again.

4.6 Management

Leadership and management are inseparable – two sides of the same coin – and yet quite different. Leadership is mainly about who you are. Management is mainly about what you do. Management is the process of achieving your aims by getting the most of out the resources at your disposal, and in particular getting the most out of your team.

It is perhaps worth stressing up front that managers need to be ready to be unpopular. You and your staff may be friendly and enjoy each other's company, but you cannot be friends.

We often need to forgive, or at least ignore, the faults of our family and friends. They may be unpunctual, they may tell off-colour jokes, they may make lots of careless mistakes, they may be critical of your and others' life choices. Relationship counsellors will recommend that you try to see the world through their eyes and avoid taking a polarised position. It is very different in the workplace. There are boundaries and you need to police them. If a behaviour in unacceptable then you need to call it out immediately you see it.

Much the same can be said about the frequent calls for managers to be 'authentic'. The fact is that no one wants to see your true self at the office. You don't need to become a totally different charcter. But you do need to present a professional version of yourself.

Management can be emotionally draining because it involves telling people what to do, and what not to do. You should not be unpleasant to your colleagues. You should listen to them and - if you agree with them - you should be their advocate. But you should not, at the end of the day, care whether they like you. You must be prepared to be an authority figure, because you are one.

Most management processes involve the following:

- Establishing the identity of your customer: the person (a Minister?) that you are trying to please – not necessarily (or usually) the person who is managing you.

- Establishing (with your customer) your **aims** and **objectives** that show if you have done the job asked of you.

- Choosing an appropriate **strategy** – best thought of as the route that will most efficiently get you to your objective – and then develop a more detailed plan, at least for the first few stages.

- Identifying what resources you will need and, in particular, creating and motivating an appropriate team.

- Measuring progress towards the objective, using milestones as necessary.

- Revising the strategy and plan as and when necessary.

We'll now look at Strategy, Aims and Objectives in more detail before turning to team building.

4.7 Strategy

This section discusses proper strategy-setting, not the preparation of 'strategy documents'.

(Whitehall strategy documents seldom do little more than pull together a list of separate policies so they can be wrapped under one banner. The contents of these documents are too often the result of well-minded requests to colleagues and outside interest groups asking what should go into the strategy.

Blogger 'Beisian Reasoning' points out that:

'This process could be a perfectly effective tool for creating good policy, if it was followed up by further attempts at developing a joined-up, strategically coherent approach. Sadly, the above process is often the limit of what happens when producing a strategy. Once all the ideas have come in from the specialist policy teams and external interest groups, the extent of 'strategy' involved is often picking which policies to include and which to throw out.')

Remember that you don't need a strategy to manage a steady state. But you do very much need a strategy when facing opposition and/or significant obstacles to achieving your aims.

Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat'. – Sun Tzu

If your organisation has a vague high level 'strategy' or vision then your job is to translate it into something that makes sense. Even better, try to create something that is relevant to your team and that inspires both you and the people working with you.

Against that background, here is the best advice from genuine experts.

Strategies require making choices. What route are you going to follow to overcome those obstacles? And therefore - by definition - what routes are you **not** going to follow?

Strategies must say what you are not going to do. If you can't say this then your so-called strategy will be little more than a meaningless jumble of words.

A good strategy will generally include:

1. A diagnosis that defines the challenge that you face.
2. A guiding approach or route map which will help you deal with the challenge.
3. A set of coherent actions and objectives consistent with '1' and '2'.

Vague aims, vision statements and the rest seldom assist either managers or those they manage. "We are going to be the best in the world at what we do" is not a strategy. It is a vague ambition. And words like *synergy* and *customer-centric* add nothing to the sum of human knowledge.

Pamela Dow points out that pithy labels aren't inherently a problem.   'Fly to the moon' was a clear goal specific and measurable and underpinned by sustained commitment and resources. Campaign slogans become a problem in policy making when what's behind them is imprecise.

The necessary prioritisation inevitably requires hard decisions and clear consistent communication. The most important principle that Pamela learned from witnessing Public Service Ageement Boards in action was that if something is everyone's problem, it's no one's problem. One minister working with one small multi-sector team of talented people is quicker and more effective than a board overseeing fancy colourful grids.

4.8.1 Aims and Objectives

Many organisations set far too many aims and objectives, so that priorities are unclear. Indeed, few of us can cope with more than three tiers of *Aims, Objectives* and *Targets*. As an example, whilst an *objective* of the Permanent Secretary of the Home Office might be to cut crime, or keep it to a certain figure, this would become part of the *aim* of more junior officials who might be responsible for the Police Pension Scheme. The important thing is that those in charge of the pension scheme should know that it needs to be so designed that it will attract and retain high calibre police officers (and that might be their quantifiable objective) in order that those officers might in turn cut crime.

It can appear difficult to define worthwhile objectives for someone who is used to working to day-to-day targets and activities. But it can often be helpful to ask them what would change, or how they and their team would be missed, if they did not exist. Alternatively, the line manager might help them complete the sentence beginning "*You will be a success if you …*". It often makes both of them think!

But take care! Objectives are powerful things, especially when linked (as they should be) to appraisal. Get them wrong and your whole organisation will go off in the wrong direction.

The **objectives** of individual staff members should as far as possible be 'SMART', i.e. Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Time-dependent.

Although I always write the first draft of a person's objectives, I have often found it helpful to ask colleagues to say, in effect, what they offer to do by way of **satisfactory performance**. This can help dispel unreal expectations that satisfactory performance somehow deserves an exceptional report, and the consequential rewards.

The identification of satisfactory performance also helps those who wish to show that their performance has been much better than satisfactory. Some managers call this **breakthrough performance** as this phrase is easily understood by ambitious staff. In particular, it makes it clear that breakthrough performance cannot be recognised in the absence of a clear agreement between manager and managed which specifies the level of performance that has been exceeded.

Civil servants have traditionally drafted their own objectives or job plan. This approach was unfortunately enshrined in official guidance when objectives-setting was first introduced in 1986. Why 'unfortunately'? It is surely axiomatic that managers should take responsibility for defining what jobs they want done, what sort of person they want to do them and what standard of performance is expected. This should be clearly set out in a document, which draws as necessary on the department's and directorate's written objectives, and should in the first instance be drafted by the manager, not the managed. After all, who else but the manager can in the first instance say why a particular individual is employed within their team?

And too many civil servants default to job descriptions that are all about what people do ('I give policy advice . . .', 'I manage . . .', 'I handle applications') rather than what they are trying to achieve. The usual response, of course, is that things like the health of an industry, or of the population, are dependent upon so many variables that it is positively unfair to credit any one civil servant with their improvement. There is of course some truth in this, but it is also true that a great deal of effort will be wasted unless it is directed towards an identifiable (even if distant) objective. Also, the adoption of challenging and worthwhile objectives leads quickly to innovation, team working and other good practices.

If you don't already have a favourite standard *Personal Responsibility Plan* (or similar), then please feel free to adapt the one in **Annex A**.

4.8.2 Planning and Measurement

Having set your objectives, you must now plan how you will get there.

Planning is an unnatural process. It is, after all, much more fun to do something. And the other nice thing about not planning is that failure comes as a complete surprise rather than being preceded by a period of worry and depression. But experienced managers know that most planning (a) is relatively simple (which is perhaps another reason why it does not appeal to many civil servants) and (b) is an indispensable precursor to success. The main thing, therefore, is to do it! But when you do it, these are the key points that need to be borne in mind.

- Keep it simple;
- Focus on results, i.e. what is to be achieved;
- Ensure individual responsibility for all members of the team, preferably by managing through a structured breakdown of the project into constituent parts which are the responsibility of named individuals;
- Communicate, and in particular clearly communicate both objectives and progress both within and outside the team;
- Monitor progress carefully and frequently.

Much of the above implies measurement. This lies at the heart of effective management, whether of the policy process or of anything else. We all know – though we often forget – that 'you cannot manage what you do not measure'. Another version of this saying is that 'If you measure it, you change it '- which leads to the conclusion that you should 'Make the important

measurable, not the measurable important. 'This really is the key to success in all your endeavours, and time spent on unmeasured activity is the most likely time that is being wasted.

However, ... at the risk of repeating what I have said earlier, don't let your measurements so dominate your life that they distract you from achieving your objectives. As the old adage has it: 'Weighing the pig will not make it fatter!".

Do not be tempted to organise long and complicated staff or customer surveys. Five questions, with answers on a 10-point scale, will often do quite nicely. Customers, for instance, might be asked about the extent to which your team understands their needs, helps them achieve results, handles their matters efficiently, keeps them informed, and uses initiative on their behalf.

4.9 Building Successful Teams

A vital part of being a manager is building a team that can be managed to success. Much has been written about how to create and build successful teams, but Judy Foster (author of *Building Effective Social Network Teams*) summarised it very well when she stressed that there are five key enabling factors:

1. Coherent policies
2. Effective professional development
3. A sense of autonomy: the ability to innovate in response to customers' needs
4. Sound support structures, including well-run and genuinely participative management meetings
5. Sufficient mental space to be able to process difficult emotional situations, see clearly and think creatively. This includes supportive supervision provided by more experienced colleagues.

Judy's research showed that mental space is particularly vital – and in short supply in some of the social work teams that she studied. The same could be said of many policy teams who (through no fault of their own) spend too much time attending inefficient meetings and/or fire-fighting in response to short-term pressures, and taking far too little time to think clearly and creatively.

This leads naturally to a brief mention of ...

Workload

As of 2024, large (but not all) parts of the civil service are seriously understaffed. This not only leads to delays. It can also lead to important issues being neglected. The key Grade 7s in the Infected Blood scandal and the Grenfell Tower/cladding disaster were under huge pressure and attempting to cope with a very large number of discrete policy issues.

You may feel that the most senior staff in your department (and Ministers) will not sympathise with your requests for more resource, but you must at least record your concerns so that they have them in mind if and when they have an opporunity to address them.

You should also offer focussed support for your staff. Make sure that they are working steadily and effectively and prioritising sensibly. Lengthy working hours, including weekend working, are fine for a short period but will lead to mistakes being made if carried on for too long. Be particularly concerned if you see or hear of signs of stress. It's much better to intervene to head off a period of sick leave than to have to work out what to do when your team becomes even more short-staffed.

Does Morale Matter?

Morale, just like happiness, can be surprisingly elusive. It is a great mistake to try to directly improve morale. Good morale comes naturally to any well-managed team, and never comes to a team that is poorly led, lacks clear objectives, is poorly trained or lacks good honest communication. So, if you lead and manage well, high morale will inevitably follow, however difficult the surrounding circumstances.

Do also bear in mind that morale will inevitably dip during a period of rapid change. The team does not at first realise that it needs to change. (This state is sometimes unkindly referred to as '*unconscious incompetence*'.) Once it faces up to its problems then confidence and morale will inevitably decline ('*conscious incompetence*'). It will then begin to do better, although perhaps rather self-consciously ('*conscious competence*') and finally morale will rise rapidly once the new way of working has become second nature ('*unconscious competence*'). It is then the job of the leader to ensure that this state is maintained for as long as possible, through seeking continuous improvement, so that the team does not lapse back into unconscious incompetence.

Establishing a Great Culture

Leaders set the tone of the organisation – even in small but important ways. For instance, I always hoped that any visitor to my office would find that we were open, informal and hospitable. We felt that it makes a real difference if we are friendly and polite to each other, and offer refreshments and other courtesies to visitors. We in particular welcomed the opportunity to talk about our work, and our approach to our work, and welcome visits from colleagues from embassies, from industrialists, from students and from teachers. This all reinforces a culture of openness and transparency which is helpful to the unit's work.

You should also expect everyone to recognise their responsibility for the safety, health and well-being of themselves and all their colleagues. Your team needs take the alarm bells seriously, even if they suspect that they are a false alarm.

You should take seriously all reports of sexual harassment, racial or sexual discrimination, or bullying, and give unquestioning support to colleagues who express concern about safety, harassment or discrimination.

Above all, do not ask colleagues to work so hard that they become stressed or over-tired. This is not only unethical, but it leads to mistakes and misjudgements – which in turn create more pressure.

Next, it makes sense to encourage everyone to be **customer-focused**, where our customers are defined as the immediate beneficiaries of particular pieces of work. If you are preparing a briefing, your customer is the person who will use it. If you are organising a meeting, your customers will be those who attend the meeting. Our customers should be the sole and decisive judge of the quality of our work. The test is not whether we think that our work meets the requirements of the customer, but whether the customer is satisfied.

This implies measurement (again!). You cannot tell whether your customer is satisfied unless you have asked him or her in a structured way. It should become second nature that your plans and your day-to-day work are driven by the expressed needs of your customers.

Measurement in turn drives **continuous improvement**. You and your team should constantly be looking out for ways – usually quite small in themselves – in which you could improve the satisfaction of the customer, or do the job more efficiently or effectively. The cumulative effort of many small improvements can be very noticeable indeed. Conversely, a cumulative failure to improve will eventually and inevitably lead to your customers feeling dissatisfied with the service that you are providing.

If your organisation seems stuck for ideas, remember that imitation is a virtue. If you hear of a good idea, or see something working well, you should not hesitate to copy it so as to improve the service that you are providing to your customers. And if you run out of ideas for improvements, you should benchmark your team against another team or organisation. You will probably be surprised at what you find.

Continuous improvement in turn requires a **no fault culture**. We assume that everyone is trying to do a good job, within the limits of their skills, training and experience.

Management gurus often say that 'customers' complaints are jewels to be treasured'. This is a bit over the top for most of us, but it is certainly true that complaints should never be ignored, and a single complaint often represents the tip of an iceberg of unvoiced dissatisfaction. Quality conscious organisations are therefore usually obsessive about investigating and resolving customer complaints, whether from internal or external customers. And complaints should never be used as a stick with which to beat your staff or other colleagues.

If mistakes are made, or if quality standards are not met, then the person involved should be given clearer instructions or better training, or attention must be given to the process that they were carrying out, or to whether they are in an appropriate job. (This judgement should not be arrived at lightly, but neither should it be ducked. If necessary, the person must be moved to a job that they can do.)

There is also plenty of research that shows that high reliability organisations encourage and **reward error-reporting**. Best-performing nursing units, for instance, have been found to have higher detected rates for adverse drug events than did lower performing units . This counter-intuitive finding almost certainly meant that a climate of openness made nurses more willing to admit errors – and learn from them – not that there were in fact more errors.

A good reporting culture is of course nowadays central to the safety of the airline and some other industries.

Take care, too, to address all those petty frictions that bedevil established organisation. Watch out for complaints that your atff are entangled in red tape, worn down by petty rules, held back by nit-picking managers, and facing slow 'death by meeting'. Your own (good) example will ake a lot of difference, but you may sometimes need to go into battle on behalf of your demoralised staff.

Back-Office & Shared Services

Senior officials are under natural pressure to improve the performance of 'the front-line': those staff who are delivering the department's key services and/or are in direct communication with the public. This too often leads them to neglect those equally important staff who provide accomodation, information technology (including websites), HR services and the rest. This is a

huge mistake for significant faiures in these areas can be much more devastating and take much longer to fix than problems in the front office.

It can be tempting, too, to transfer routine and less glamorous work into call centres, correspondence units and the like. This sometimes makes sense but not if senior managers then lose interest in the performance and efficiency of these units. Their targets are all too often written in terms of outputs (such as calls handled, speed of response) rather than outcomes (problems resolved to the satisfaction of the caller).[2]

It has become quite common for departments to share several back office services. Again, this can make sense but I am generally sceptical. I was the Chief Executive of two small departments over a period of eight years and strongly resisted sharing our HR, ICT and similar functions, mainly because I regarded them as mission-critical. I wanted them to work in ways that reflected our culture and which were responsive to our needs. I was particularly keen to ensure that we could make immediate changes to our web pages to respond to significant criticism - *either* by quickly admitting error *or* by explaining our policies and actions.

I found support for my defiance in the private sector where shared services are unknown. Private sector CEOs are happy to act as a customer and buy in professional and other services but they would not dream of relinquishing control of their staffing and technology.

Staff Surveys

It is important to know what your staff think about their jobs, including how well they are being managed. Some staff surveys are extremely lengthy and hence unfocussed, if staff can be bothered to complete them at all - or at all accurately. I prefer to use the more simple survey at **Annex B.**

You should always arrange for the answers to be collated and summarised by an independent person or organisation so that anonymity can be preserved.

Setting Boundaries

The culture of any organization is shaped by the worst behavior the leader is willing to tolerate. When toxic employees' negative behaviours are tolerated, it can have a hugely detrimental effect on the overall culture, decrease collaboration between teams, affect how customers are treated, and so much more.

It is therefore vitally important that leaders should establish the ethical, financial, legal and other boundaries within which their colleagues should work. Problems (and sometimes severe problems) arise when these are not explicit or, even worse, when senior managers appear themselves not to respect those boundaries. It is particularly important that civil servants should operate within the ethical, financial and legal boundaries laid down by Parliament and summarised in my book *How to be a Civil Servant.*

Many boundaries are cultural, rather than ethical, in the sense that leaders are responsible for establishing the parameters within which staff deal with each other, with customers, with work

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[2] John Seddon has strong views, too:- See his Manifesto on Regulation: https://www.civilservant.org.uk/library/2024-John-Seddon-Re-thinking_regulation_to_achieve_growth.pdf

pressures and so on. It is worth noting that some staff will constantly test your boundaries and force your intervention when the boundaries are likely to be breached. They will accuse you of micro-management. Other staff will respect your boundaries, and get on with their jobs with very little intervention from yourself. They may as a result worry that you are not interested in them or their work area. It is therefore important that you explain your approach, and reassure those who think you have taken empowerment just a little too far.

Empowerment

Empowerment is often confused with delegation. Empowerment is better because it allows the colleague to choose how best to achieve his or her objectives and targets. Delegation often means no more than that the delegate is simply told what to do and how to do it. Leaders don't delegate. They empower.

Empowered staff must of course work within constraints laid down by their managers, including appropriate professional standards, standard procedures, quality standards and financial constraints. You should help them gain experience by empowering them, monitoring their performance and acting to relax the constraints - by giving them greater financial freedom for instance, or freedom to innovate - as soon as you can.

Submissions, draft letters etc. should be prepared by the person, however junior, best equipped to prepare a first draft. If the issue is not novel or contentious, and the person is appropriately experienced and trained, then there should be no need for the work to be countersigned by anyone else. Two heads are however better than one if an issue is novel or contentious. A senior colleague who countersigns work in these circumstances should concentrate on the substance of the work, and the way it will appear to Ministers or the recipients of letters etc. They should pay relatively little attention to the detail, style or grammar of the work.

Work should also be countersigned if the action officer is being trained or gaining experience. It is helpful in these circumstances if the countersigning officer pays attention both to the substance of the work and to the detail, style and grammar. The objective of this intervention should, however, be to train the colleague so that countersignature is in due course not necessary.

Slightly 'tongue in cheek', I enjoyed this praise of empowerment (though he calls in delegation) in Amor Towles' *A Gentleman in Moscow.*

> Josef H was one of those rare executives who had mastered the secret of delegation - that is, having assigned the oversight of the hotel's various functions to capable lieutenants, he made himself scarce. Arriving at the hotel at 8:30, he would head straight to his office with a hurried expression, as if he were already late for a meeting. Along the way, he would return greetings with an abbreviated nod and, when he passed his secretary, he would inform her (while still in motion) that he was not to be disturbed. Then he would disappear behind his door.
>
> When the manager's lieutenants had no choice but to knock - due to a fire in the kitchen or a dispute about a bill - the manager would open his door with an expression of such fatigue, such disappointment, such moral defeat that the interrupters would inevitably feel a surge of sympathy, assure him that they could see to the matter themselves, then

apologetically back out the door. As a result, the Metropol ran as flawlessly as any hotel in Europe.

Annexes

There is much to be said for using, and if necessary adapting, leadership and management material which has been prepared by previous generations. So I have collected together the following material, much of which I have in turn plagiarised from my predecessors. You are therefore very welcome to copy and use it without attribution.

Annex A   A Personal Responsibility Plan

Annex B   A Staff Survey

Annex C   Further Reading

ANNEX A. Example Personal Responsibility Plan

To ....

This minute summarises what I would like you to do whilst you are working in the Regulatory Impact Unit over the next year or so. It also summarises certain of my commitments to you.

<u>Your Objectives</u>

You lead a team whose main aims are:

1.   To ensure that the Task Force provides timely and effective advice to the Prime Minister, to the Minister for the Cabinet Office and to his departmental colleagues:

- about the principles which should be applied to regulations,
- about new regulatory proposals, and
- about existing regulations, focusing on the scope for removal or simplification.

2.   To ensure that Departmental Ministers take full account of Better Regulation Task Force advice, and that significant failures to reconcile the views of the Task Force and those of a department are reported to the Minister for the Cabinet Office and if necessary to the Prime Minister.

3.   To ensure the trouble-free Third Session enactment of legislation which will improve the effectiveness of the Deregulation & Contracting Out Act 1994.

Your principal objectives are summarised in "RIU's Aims and Objectives".

Working Style

We are all under a great deal of pressure, especially from No.10. Our central and high profile role, the status of the Task Force - and its individual members - and the nature of our Ministerial clients, means that we cannot cut corners, relax our professional standards or provide an inadequate service whether to internal or external customers. Equally, however, we are expected to work efficiently and innovatively, and to respond quickly to requests and questions. I therefore expect you:

a)   to concentrate on important and worthwhile objectives, ruthlessly to prune or eliminate work on issues which are peripheral to your main objectives listed above, and to eliminate unnecessary record-keeping, consultation etc.

b)   to manage your team so that they too work in a very focused, innovative, efficient and effective way in support of your aims and objectives. You will in particular need to ensure that they have the right experience and appropriate and timely training, including coaching.

c)   to ensure that your secretarial and administrative support team work in an efficient mutually-supportive way and are not asked to carry out tasks which add little or no value to the work of your directorate. As rule of thumb, I would not expect the size of this team to exceed 20% of the size of the whole of your directorate.

d)   to take controlled risks. I expect that both you and your team will make mistakes, and I will defend you when you do so.

Meeting the Needs of your Customers

Everyone in your team should be trying to "hand it on with pride": i.e. ensure that their immediate customer, whether a member of the task Force, a colleague, a Minister or a member of the public, is satisfied with the work or service that they receive.

This particularly applies to the Task Force members - and especially [the Chairman]. In order to achieve this, you need to set a good example yourself. You should also have simple but effective

systems which ascertain the needs of your customers - and in particular the Task Force - and measure their satisfaction with the performance of your team.

Professional Standards

The essence of your professional skill is that you should be able to get things done whilst respecting the ethical and other constraints within which civil servants must work. The standards to which I expect you to work are summarised in a set of notes which you have seen, and you should immediately let me know if you find any difficulty in following the guidance in that document. I would particularly draw your attention to:

a)   Your duty to Parliament, which means that you have to take particular care with the taxpayer's money. You and your team should only authorise expenditure and payments when you are wholly satisfied that you have the power to do so, that the expenditure represents good value for money, and that all the necessary notifications, checks etc have been undertaken.

b)   Your duty to Ministers, which means that you must provide them with reliable and unbiased support and advice whether in person or in the form of submissions, briefing, Parliamentary Answers or speeches. Your professional advice, and your decisions, must be based on a sound understanding of the facts and circumstances applicable to the issues for which you are responsible.

c)   Your duty to treat all members of the public, and all your colleagues within the public service, with equal respect and consideration.

Keeping me informed

The basic rule is that I am interested in what you achieve, not how you achieve it. I therefore do not want to see copies of most correspondence etc.* *However:-* in order that I can relax in the knowledge that all is going well, I need to know that you are providing a good service to our principal customers. I also need to know what is going on so that I do not appear too ignorant when I meet these customers. You should therefore ensure that I am kept in touch with progress on major and high profile issues, and also told about and copied into all but the most routine dealings with the Prime Minister, all Cabinet Ministers including of course the MCO, all other Cabinet Office Ministers, Parliament (as represented by Parliamentary Branch), [the Cabinet Secretary], [the Permanent Secretary] and all Directors.

> *[*This will need to be amended if the post-holder is inexperienced, newly promoted, or new to the subject area. It may then be necessary for the line manager temporarily to see/check more of the post-holder's work.]*

Assessing Your Performance

It is already clear that you are a very capable and energetic Senior Civil Servant who should have no difficulty in getting "3+"s.

So how do you get a **Box 2**?   In short, you have to *surprise* me by achieving more than the basic performance is required by this PRP. This is sometimes referred to as "breakthrough performance". In practice, this often involves a combination of achieving more than is required by certain aims, and demonstrating surprising quality whilst achieving other aims.

I believe that you have plenty of scope to do this, particularly by helping the Task Force to become a force to be reckoned with. This will mean helping the Task Force to write reports etc. which are powerful and compelling, and helping them gain the confidence to press much harder than in the past for their recommendations to be accepted by departmental Ministers and officials. They must also work much more effectively with the MCO and No.10.

Other areas where you should be able to shine include:

- improving the flow of information to the Task Force so that they feel better plugged into the work of the wider unit,

- adding value to the work of …'s team, and, in particular,

- getting the Task Force to work harder and more effectively on the deregulation agenda, and, of course

- getting the Bill through smoothly and without significant controversy, given that it will attract a good deal of attention.

My Commitment to You

I for my part undertake:

- to be open and fair in my dealings with you;

- to give you clear authority and responsibility for running your team;

- to delegate effectively and to the maximum possible extent, and to involve myself in operational matters only where I can add significant value;

- to ensure that you have the resources needed to achieve the objectives set out in this PRP;

- to support you when necessary in your dealings with Ministers and with other internal and external customers (e.g. in resisting unreasonable demands and in dealing with unjustified criticism);

- to assess your performance objectively, openly and fairly on the basis of this PRP; and to recognise and reward good performance;

- to give you the opportunity to develop and broaden your skills so that you can improve your performance in your present post as well as prepare to fill quite different jobs, including jobs of a higher weighting. (Your Personal Development Plan is summarised below.)

<u>Personal Development</u>

Example:-

[It is helpful that you have had a varied career and I am not currently aware of any pressing training or development needs, other than to continue to learn on this challenging and exciting job. However, you should look out for other opportunities to undertake interesting activities, even if not directly relevant to your present job. And in due course, maybe about a year from now, think you should look out for an opportunity to go to a management school or similar, mainly to give yourself some time out, and an opportunity to review your skill set alongside others of your generation, including non-civil servants.]

[Signature]

ANNEX B. An Example of a Good Staff Survey

Please indicate, by circling the appropriate figure, the extent to which you are content with the five features of your job.

1. Clarity of Objectives

I have no idea of the purpose of my job, or what I am expected to achieve.		I fully understand the purpose of my job, and what I am expected to achieve.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Appropriate Quality of Work

I spend all my time doing work which either does not interest or challenge me, or which is too difficult for me.		I spend all my time doing work which interests and challenges me, and is not too difficult for me.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Training and Experience

I have had no training or experience which has prepared me to do my job effectively.		I have had the right training and experience to prepare me to do my job effectively.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Appropriate volume of work

I always have far too little work to do.	I have just the right amount of work to do.	I always have far too much work to do.

-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Assessment and Feedback

I have no idea how well my managers and colleagues believe that I am performing in this job.		I fully understand how well my managers and colleagues believe that I am performing in this job.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

ANNEX C. Further Reading

As well as the books mentioned in the above text, I recommend Tony Rossiter's book *Management Basics* as a very readable combination of plain common sense and the kind of unofficial tips that are rarely written down but which go a long way towards making a decent and effective manager.

I also strongly recommend Lucy Kellaway's entertaining demolition of the worst management fads. You can find it here:-

> https://www.civilservant.org.uk/library/The_Best_of_Lucy_Kellaway.pdf

There is much good sense to be found - albeit indirectly - in cartoons such as *Dilbert* and *Clare in the Community*. I am particularly grateful to Harry Venning for allowing me to reproduce the 'bullying' cartoon, and to *Onemanadreaming* for similar permission for the 'planned vs. actual' sketch.

Many more of Harry's cartoons can be found in *The Clare in the Community Collection* which covers Clare's 25 years in *the Guardian*.