



Leadership in Action

Every day civil servants across the UK and abroad work directly with or for citizens and provide advice on complex issues, from welfare to financial regulation to trade. The Leaders in Action stories show the diversity of our leaders across a broad range of roles - they offer a snapshot of the many different Civil Service leaders who are building and supporting their teams to deliver for citizens. These leaders show us their pride and enjoyment in leading others, solving problems and shaping and delivering government priorities.

It is clear from these stories that each leader is reflecting on their own leadership 'style' and considering what is needed to achieve their own objectives, as well as their team's and their organisation's objectives. However, reading through these stories, we are also able to draw out some of the attributes of the best Civil Service leaders.

These attributes set out **what great leadership looks like**.¹ Few leaders will fully demonstrate all of these attributes, all of the time. Part of the challenge for a leader is to think about how they can be at their best, more of the time, and for leadership teams to identify the right mix of people needed for great leadership across an organisation.

By setting out the leadership attributes in Leadership in Action, the aim is to help individuals to actively consider their own leadership and purposefully identify the experiences that they might need to stretch themselves.² These leadership attributes should also help those designing leadership development programmes to consider how to support Civil Service leaders to develop, learning from leadership that we see in action and practice every day.

Every day we see the best Civil Service leaders...

...creating a sense of purpose and focusing on outcomes

...demonstrating passion and wanting to change things for the better

...exercising judgement and making good, evidence-based decisions

...guiding teams using experience and expertise

...empowering and developing individuals and teams

...building inclusive teams and encouraging challenge

...collaborating, making connections and encouraging cross system working

...continually reflecting on their leadership style and developing self awareness

¹ The Indicators of Potential help identify how people might become the best Civil Service leaders and provide guidance on how to consider individuals' potential. They look at: Performance (Does the person have a track record that indicates they will succeed?); Purpose (Does the person show the motivation to succeed, with support, in a bigger or more demanding role?); and Values (Does the person role model Civil Service behaviours and values and actively demonstrate inclusive leadership?). They are used, for example, to select for the [Civil Service accelerated development schemes](#).

² See professional Career Frameworks and Career Pathways for more information.

Every day we see the best Civil Service leaders...

Creating a sense of purpose and focusing on outcomes: Civil Service leaders set a vision, understand the purpose of their work and are focused on results and what this means for the citizen, in the UK or abroad. They put the mission and the goals of the organisation and wider system ahead of self-interest. As well as focusing on delivery and the here and now, leaders take a longer term view and help others to also keep this in mind when making decisions. To achieve the best outcomes, leaders think about how a team can be at its best, building personal and staff resilience to support wellbeing.

Building inclusive teams and encouraging challenge: Civil Service leaders value and actively promote inclusion. They recognise that diversity – of background, of life experience and of thought – brings different insights, creates challenge and encourages change and innovation. Leaders create conditions of safety where all colleagues can provide challenge and feedback. They surface tensions and resolve ambiguities and speak up when they experience or witness unacceptable behaviour, discrimination, bullying or harassment. They value fairness and respect, share a sense of connectedness and create a sense of belonging for others.

Demonstrating passion and wanting to change things for the better: Civil Service leaders show pride and passion for public service - the work that they do drives them to want to do better and to seek out new solutions to challenges every day. They continually reflect on the values that underpin their work and that drive them to work to serve citizens, sharing this with others. They are ambitious about the changes they, their teams and colleagues can make for citizens. This includes leading new and different ways of carrying out tasks, innovating and transforming how we work.

Empowering and developing individuals and teams: Civil Service leaders continually think about and take action to develop others and build their capability. Leaders make the time and space to build the teams that are needed to achieve their goals. They make it possible for others to do their best work and have ownership of it. They help individuals to set their own objectives and make decisions on how and where they work. The best Civil Service leaders also continuously practice their active listening, coaching and communication skills.

Exercising judgement and making good evidence-based decisions: Civil Service leaders are rigorous in their decision making, using the best available evidence and wide range of expertise to underpin what they do. They exercise their judgement to make sure their advice is incisive and decisions are fair. They know when and how to bring in technical skills and different perspectives to inform debate. They know when it is useful to keep a broader, strategic perspective and when to get 'into the detail' to really understand a situation or problem. They provide challenge and hold others to account. In all their decisions, they are focused on value for money, efficiency and sound financial management.

Guiding teams using experience and expertise: Civil Service leaders have the experience needed to build and develop the right organisational structure and team to deliver against priorities, now and in the future. Leaders look across their teams to think about what they can learn and to identify what change they might bring. They understand how to implement effective governance and risk arrangements. They demonstrate a commitment to learning and professional development and throughout their career continue to consider the breadth and depth of experience they require to lead.

Collaborating, making connections and encouraging cross system working: Civil Service leaders recognise that many of the government's biggest challenges do not fit neatly into the boundaries of a single department, organisation or sector and work with others to identify shared solutions to challenges across systems. They encourage a broad range of people to work together to develop a shared view of a problem and to prioritise delivering the best outcomes for the citizen over narrower team or department objectives. They step out of the way to allow their teams to be innovative and take risks, identifying different ways of approaching and solving problems.

Continually reflecting on their leadership style and developing self awareness: Civil Service leaders are at their best when they are authentic and self-aware. They reflect on their actions and their emotions in different situations, show an openness to feedback and willingness to change, sharing reflections with their team. In doing this, they show their teams and peers that they are learning, make mistakes and learn from them, and can be vulnerable. Leaders commit to understanding how it feels in different roles, including for those delivering services direct to citizens. They regularly consider their own strengths and development areas, and have a personal development plan, using coaching and/or mentoring to support growth.