

Hi, everyone, welcome to today's session: turning a crisis into a success story for you. It's great to have so many of you with us here today. Although I have to say I'm really thankful I can't actually see you all, it would make it even more daunting that it is already for us. So I'm Suzanne Morris, your host for today's session, and I'm joined today by Rupert McNeil, and Sarah Harrison. We're going to try and cover quite a lot this session. And whilst we want to be able to share with you enough to help you understand strengths and how they are used in Civil Service context. I'm pretty sure what's going to be more valuable to you is hearing from Rupert and Sarah who are primed to share their own personal experiences. So do post your questions for them in Slido and we'll try and get some of them depending on time towards the end of the session. But we'll also be trying to answer questions in the forum afterwards as well. So don't worry if we don't answer your questions today, there'll be an opportunity to still put them through the wringer afterwards. So whilst it's going to be a whistle stop tour of strengths. If you want to find out more, there's lots of material available on Civil Service learning. The slides from today's session, along with a pack with a number of exercises for you to work through in your own time, to help you understand your own strengths, will also be available in about a week's time. Understanding each and every one of us has our own unique combination of strengths. Knowing your own strengths and their flip sides and how to use them is important at any stage or level in your career. So during today's session, we'll explore briefly the difference between strengths learned behaviour and weaknesses. We'll introduce the Civil Service strengths dictionary, ensure we can avoid the pitfalls of our own strengths, and hear about the importance of making mistakes and dealing with a crisis and what importance that can have for you in your career, with Sarah and Rupert sharing some of their own personal experiences in relation to this. So hopefully what you can see on your screen now is the Civil Service success profiles framework. If not, it should come up shortly. I'm just working with the technology and the internet clicker. So let's see how we get on. If you want to find out more about success profiles, like I said, have a look on Civil Service learning or watch the success profile session from earlier today once the materials available after the event. So whilst I'm not going to go into detail today about the framework, I thought it might be helpful if I just explained briefly why it was introduced to provide some context. So the success profiles framework came in in about 2018. I think that's right, Rupert. And moved Civil Service recruitment and selection from a purely competency based approach from which those of us who've been in the Civil Service a while will be familiar with to a much more flexible framework which assesses individuals against a range of elements using different selection methods. We wanted to be able to attract and retain people of talent and experience from a range of sectors and from all walks of life. So strengths were introduced as one of these elements, so recruiting managers would have the best possible chance of finding the right person for the job. So not just someone who could do it from a competency perspective, but someone who'd been motivated and energised onto taking the role. In other words, someone for whom the role played to their strengths. So we can use the two axis shown in this diagram on your screen capability and use and engagement to help us understand strengths. From this, you'll see that a strength, on the top right hand side, is something you do well, do frequently and enjoy doing. The more we engage in activities that play to our strengths, the more energised and motivated we'll be. A potential strength as we move down to the bottom right, is something you have some capability for and do sometimes, that is something that you enjoy doing. These are the strengths we haven't had the opportunity to develop or fully developed yet. A learned behaviour, so top left, is something you can do well do sometimes, but don't particularly enjoy doing. These are often the skills and behaviours we developed as children or perhaps due to social pressure. So we can learn these skills and be good at them. But they don't give us energy and

spending too much time engaging in them can deplete us. And bottom left a weakness, something you don't enjoy, don't do well, and don't do frequently. So I don't know about you but that sounds like something to try and avoid having to do if you can help it. Everyone has some activities they're not motivated by, rarely engage in or not very good at. It might not be possible to always avoid these tasks, but we can do what we can to keep them to a minimum or find others to collaborate with for whom this is a strength. So this slide just summarises how you can know what your strengths are. We've talked about that already.

So what you'll see now is hopefully a slide with all 36 of the Civil Service strengths on so I'm not going to talk about each in turn, you'll be pleased to know, there's a Civil Service strengths dictionary for that. And again, that's on Civil Service learning, but it will also be in the material we share with you after the event. But what this slide should show you though, is there's an almost infinite combination of strengths out there. We're all very different. And that's a good thing. One of the exercises you'll find in the handout, when it's available, will help you work through a process to identify your own personal strengths. But please remember when you do it, be honest, it's not a test, you can't fail. So it's important that you do it honestly for yourself. The strengths can also be mapped to the Civil Service behaviours, as you can see here, and this is something that people are much more familiar with, I'm sure. So wouldn't it be great if everyone was in a job that allowed them to play to their strengths? By adopting strengths based approach to recruitment and development, we recognise that everyone is different, is motivated and energised by different things. But what's the difference between a strengths based interview and a more traditional competency based one? So you'll often find in the Civil Service, we're using a blended approach combining both strength and behavioural questions. But in a strengths based interview, it's quite common for the first question you're asked to be completely unrelated to the role you're applying for. And for it to not form any part of the assessment process at all. Don't let that throw you. The questions designed to act as a baseline for the interviewer or panel so they tune in to how you speak and behave when you talk about something you really enjoy. For example, they might just ask you tell us about the best holiday you've ever had. The panel will then use what they observed you in the way that you answer that question as a guide for the main interview to help assess whether something really motivates and energises you. In other words, it's a strength or a potential strength, or something you can do but don't necessarily enjoy, a learned behaviour, or perhaps worst case scenario, it's even one of your weaknesses. Again, it's really important that you're honest in the interview process, don't try and hide your natural reactions. No one is going to benefit if you end up in a role that you're not confident or happy in. So when you think about your next role, look for jobs that play to your strengths. Keep your weaknesses to a minimum, and avoid opportunities where you'll spend too much time on learned behaviour, as it depletes your energy and motivation. Think about what you've learned about your own strengths and potential strengths when you look for ways to stretch yourself at work. So a good development opportunity will be one that allows you to focus on your potential strengths and develop them further. It will take you a little out of your comfort zone, but hopefully not move you into your terror zone. No one wants that. But can strengths be too much of a good thing? Can you take them to extremes and what happens when you do? What you need to watch in yourself? So this is known as the flipside of your strengths. And it's important to recognise this can have a negative impact on others if it's not managed. The answer is not to lose or stop using the strength. But to mitigate the negative impact of its Flipside. Leaders have often been derailed by the very strength that made them successful in the first place. I'm sure lots of you will have seen the TV show The

Apprentice over the years. Even if you haven't been an avid viewer, you'll have seen a couple of episodes here and there or watched it on Goggle box. And you'll recognise that it's the candidates who are confident and determined, who often ends up coming across as arrogant and blinkered and then fail to do well. So what you'll find now if you're on slido is a poll popping up, where you'll be asked to match a series of flipside behaviours with their Civil Service strengths. And the answers to these will be included in the pack after the event. So just see how you get on. Knowing the flip side of your own strengths can be helpful. And the second exercise in the handout you'll get will help you consider what yours are. When they show themselves, it can often be an indicator pressure is too high, and if you can recognise that, you can do something about it. You can take a step back and ask yourself, what's really needed in this situation? I know I'm micromanaging. Is that helping others? Or is it just my response to the pressure I'm feeling? Am I perhaps doing it to mask a performance needing others? And what's the consequence of me doing that? Is it really helpful? But again, another important message, be kind to yourself when you notice Flipside behaviours come into the fore. If you become angry or frustrated, you'll only increase the pressure on yourself, which will make that behaviour even more likely to come out. Or you might find you manage that particular behaviour, only for another one to pop up to try and derail you. So now I want to move on to think about failure, and how that can be just a step on the journey for success.

So as children, we're told to learn from our mistakes, but as adults we develop a failure phobia. So we must become more comfortable with failure and see it for what it is. It's just a step on the way to success. Making a mistake is a process of discovery. The more you test things and potentially fail, the more likely you are to have overall success. It's the agile way of doing things. Admitting your mistakes as a leader shows you're human. There isn't one successful leader who hasn't made at least one mistake and probably a whole lot more at some point in their career. And a common interview question is what's your biggest mistake as a leader? And what did you learn from it? Interview panels aren't asking you this to judge you for the mistake you've made. But they're trying to find out how self aware you are, and whether you're able to learn from your own mistakes. No one's infallible, and there's no point pretending we are. But it's not likely to come easy to us in an interview to talk about when something went wrong. We're all used to thinking about talking about positive examples. So it might feel really counterintuitive, but it's okay. It really is okay. Mistakes you making your career are likely to stick with you and ensure you don't do the same again in the future. And sharing that experience is really powerful too. So on that vein, I'm going to share one of mine, and then we'll ask Rupert and Sarah to share one of theirs two. So I can still remember how I felt nearly 10 years ago now, when I was on temporary promotion to grade seven, and working in a team that was about to enter into negotiations with trade unions on the introduction of a new pay allowance. It was my first experience of working with unions, particularly my first experience of big negotiations. We'd put together a document setting out the new policy and payment rates, which was going to be shared with the unions ahead of the negotiations. And on the draft version, in track changes, we'd included our thinking about our negotiating strategy, setting out our opening position, our red line and our compromise position. After all that work, we were finally ready to share the document. And my manager asked me to send it over to the unions. And I'm sure you can guess what happened next. And for those that haven't, despite everyone thinking the comments and track changes had all been removed, the version I shared with the unions still had that detail about our proposed strategy. And to make matters worse, it was one of the Union reps who rang me to let me know. I was completely mortified, went into complete panic mode

and felt physically sick. I thought, I've completely blown the whole negotiation process. And even talking about it now takes me back to how I felt at the time. So I had to let my manager know. And to their credit, they remained completely calm, reassured me it showed I had a good relationship with the union colleague that had called to let me know, and also reassured me that actually, the management side thinking had moved on. So in fact, the three positions the unions had seen had completely changed. So there was no real harm done. But I still panic about it even thinking about it now. So I learned a few things from that experience. Use Track Changes sparingly. It's not the god send that everyone thinks it is. Get someone else to check before you press send when you send something important out, and don't do it at the end of a long day. But most importantly, I think, act quickly when something goes wrong, and ask for help. So let's hear now from our two speakers, Rupert and Sarah about a mistake that they've made in their own career that stuck with them, and perhaps a mistake they've made as a leader. So first, Rupert, can I ask you as the Civil Service chief people officer, no pressure, tell us about something that happened to you.

Thanks Suzanne. And I'm going to actually give two because you've prompted me, one I wasn't going to mention but it's so close to what you said at the at the end of working with materials. I worked for a chief executive of an organisation who had trouble with, had a difficult relationship with one of our subsidiary chief executives, a joint venture. And I wrote him a very candid, frank briefing on what he should say about how this person's behaviour should change. And I then had lunch with the person that he was going to be having the meeting with, and handed over a sheaf of documents to her, including that brief thing. But I didn't have anyone call me up as you did. I only learnt that about six months later from my boss when she finally told. It did explain why it'd been a very frosty relationship after that lunch. I thought that's really strange. So yeah, always check. Now I always I always try and print those things out on a different coloured piece of paper and I always check the sheets of paper I give people. My one actually, if I tie it back to your great description of strengths, Suzanne, is and people may have heard me talk about this before, but in 2014, I took about three months off work from anxiety. And I, the interesting question is how had I got to that point. And I was thinking about that in terms of the strengths dictionary because one of the strengths is resilience and being resilient. And in the jobs that we do and the Civil Service in general, you know, you have a good stock of resilience, but it had been quite heavily eroded, that I had to take that time off. And eventually, how would I got to that point? Well, actually, overplaying a strength. And I, I was then pretty gung ho about things and had seen a problem in the organisation that needed to be fixed, had been allowed to go and fix it. And in doing that, I made a fatal mistake for someone in a management position, which was I probably gone down one or two levels below what I should be doing, which meant that I wasn't paying attention to some other things. I should have been paying attention to in the external environment, so, my overplays strength of, let's say courageous or catalyst, those are two good ones to look at, really gone in and done it. But actually, what it stopped me doing was fulfilling my job as a preventer, another strength which is in there. And that's, that's really stuck with me. And I learned a lot from it. And I'd finish off by saying that actually, having that time off, made me focus much more on how I should stay resilient. And what I should be looking out for. The early warning signs both of how I was feeling, but also thinking about what's what are the real strengths I should be focusing on in my current job? Not necessarily the ones that were what got me to where I was in my last job. And the general point I'd make is that I feel it's really important to in a way, just accept that we progress through our careers through what I think of us 'realised incompetence.' We talk about competencies but incompetencies that you understand are probably as

valuable, and you build on them. And I would always rather be interviewing someone who's gone through the process and appointing someone who's gone through the process and understands their strengths, their weaknesses, what they might overplay and, and have actually had the experience of having that tested in, in real life.

That's great. Thanks Rupert, really honest reflections there that I think lots of people will empathise with, as well. Sarah, how about you?

Thank you, Suzanne. And thanks, Rupert. So yeah, let me let me go back a bit, I suppose in my career, before I became a Civil Servant I worked in, in the energy industry and I was an energy regulator. And the particular set of circumstances that always stick in my mind are I just relatively recently taken on a new role and we were setting up a new enforcement function. As a regulator, we we knew strategically we needed to get tougher with the energy market because we knew there were some really poor practices. And I was leading both the policy around that and the enforcement action. And one of the first cases that we ran, one of the first off the blocks was a pretty big one. And it was against a big PLC company. And these are tough things to run because you've got to put a lot of resource into it. The process can be really combative. It takes a long time. And I persuaded the top of the shop to really get behind this and back this. And we took a quite a punchy position on it. We were testing some new regulations, and we were wanting to really kind of make a mark and huge amounts of effort fantastic teams put in and we massed our case, and we presented it to an independent panel who ultimately made the decision. And we went in with some really, kind of, we felt very strongly evidence based recommendations both for the failures we've identified and the action we thought was right. And despite a lot of hearings and hearings and proceedings, the panel concluded, they agreed with us on some of the findings, but not all. But they were, they took a very different stance on what we thought was the right penalty. Now, because amount of time that we all expended on this, and because it was first off the blocks, you know, it was seen as a failure in some senses, both in the team immediately, quite visceral, actually, and also at the top of the shop, in actual fact, because we had got some outcomes and because these played out in the media really quite well. In fact, in the outside world, it didn't necessarily seem like that, but certainly inside it did. And it was really tough. It was particularly tough for me personally, because I had very much led this and indeed, in a lead the whole strategy as well as the execution. So some of the immediate things for me were actually really visceral and Suzanne, you're sort of very physical feeling that you described, I completely resonated with, I mean, when we got the outcome, I was actually abroad, when we got the sort of, you know, the sort of judgement if you like, and it was phoned through to me. And it was it was really a real struggle to get personal focus, while I was busily trying to think through what we were going to do. But what was really important to me, actually, when I got back to London and back to the team was to quickly get some personal support around me, because I knew I quickly had to provide some air cover and support for the team. And I also had to dig deep to find what were the real things we did gain from this. It might seem like a failure, but actually, there was some really great things to learn. So I had to work really hard. And I really got someone alongside me to help me because I knew personally I needed that support. I think the other thing we did was then spent quite a bit of time perhaps a little bit more than we would otherwise have done and because we had lots of cases mounting up, that was a bit of a luxury but essential which was to get some fantastic feedback. And we did that both from the panel themselves that made the decision, but also by talking to a few other organisations who are in similar territory, doing enforcement.

And we really played through some of that learning and applied it not just to the way in which we took cases going forward, but also the rule book, if you like that we wrote around that.

And so I think the things for me, I'd reflect on in terms of the strength framework. Well, first off, one of my strengths is seeing the big picture. And I think I really drew on that in those immediate days after we got the outcome was working with the team recognising how I felt, but nonetheless, I needed to help lift this up and help the team see the bigger picture and see what we were actually gaining from the work that we had nonetheless done and how we could build on that. But where one of my preferences might have been then that's a strength framework, would have been, I'm quite an action focused person, you know, being an enforcer in that context is pretty evidence of that. And I really wanted to kind of my instincts might have been sort of move on to the next case, you know, you know, demonstrate that we got it right by applying the next case. So the learned behaviour for me was really taking that time to step back and test our learning, not just by among ourselves, but to get some external perspective on that. And actually, that's something I particularly learned and applied to out, including, most recently in COVID, when we've been in the heat of COVID, and the need to take that action. For me, it's none. That's been really important to make sure I draw on external perspective, to help test some of my thinking and some of the things that the team is taking forward. So I hope that's useful insight. Thanks a lot.

Thanks, Sarah. That's great. So Rupert, and Sarah, thanks both for sharing those experiences. I think what we heard from that are probably some of the things that are showing on the slide about turning a mistake into a positive learning opportunity as well. When it pops up, so admit it, take responsibility for it, and keep things in perspective. Allow yourself to feel awful about it. It is a natural reaction, but don't do it for too long. So as Sarah said, you know, have that moment, feel awful, and then start to think about how you can turn it into something more positive. Analyse the point where things went wrong, and identify where there's room for improvement. So now we're going to move through to think about leading through tough times. So it's perfectly easy to lead when everything's going well. You've got a great team around you, there's no challenges, but it's what you do and how you respond during the tough times that will really stand you apart from others, is when you really earn your stripes as a leader. Leaders need to be able to adapt and know when a different approach will have greater impact. So in a crisis, you can afford to just try something and give it a go. But we need to find a way to take that same approach in calmer times. So let's hear now from Rupert and Sarah about whether they think their own leadership style changed over the past few months during the COVID crisis. Rupert, we'll start with you.

I think it's, I hope this counts as change. I think it's just reinforced some messages for me, Suzanne, about collaboration, actually, and about just how, if I think back through my career, teams I've enjoyed being in or the place I've most enjoyed when I'm in a team, and where we've been really collaborating towards a common goal. And that's really what's happened in the, in the COVID context, I think what's interesting is that it's actually been teams of teams. And there's a phrase isn't there that, you know, the whole should be greater than the sum of the parts. That's how I felt about working in the Civil Service during this time. So Sarah and I are on a couple of teams together, and the sense of team spirit and and playing to people's different strengths, which I think is a really important part of it, assembling the right set of people to deal with, the best set of people to deal with a problem and people not feeling and it's reinforced for me people not feeling myself not feeling that I need to do everything or be expert in

everything because that would be impossible. And so that's, that's it and then I was linking it back to strengths. I mean, I think there's, there are three strengths there that are really relevant there, one is being inclusive. You're not going to get the best out of a team, when Sorry, I'm leaning forward, the best out of a team when you're, if you're not inclusive and recognising people. Networking, because you want to keep building your team and your, your your teams of teams, and then being a team player itself. So those are all those are all strengths, and I just that's been really multiplied and reinforced for me through COVID.

Super, that's great. Thank you. Sarah how about you?

Yeah, well, I certainly echo what what Rupert said I'm, I'm a definitely a team player and I've learned a lot, personally, about the power of that collaboration over COVID. But the example I wanted to pick out, is, again, if you look at the strengths framework, so I'm probably a bit of a problem solver. So in a crisis, the risk there is that you can kind of really dive in and get into the detail and again, be quite action focused. So the thing I've really learned through COVID is the importance of and in a crisis, it's important to have that that is a strength, but also the counter is that if you if you're focused on that you're not really reflecting on on your team, and where people are at. And that's the thing I've learned most in COVID, I think I mean, I think I kind of know it, but I've really learnt it is how particularly important it's been in COVID to really understand where your colleagues are at and where indeed you are. Because what COVID has done is while we've all been busy as Civil Servants doing fantastic work, supporting the country, if you like through this, we've been living through it ourselves, you know, and we've all found it in my own family, I've got caring responsibilities, we've all faced that. So the thing I've really learned as a leader is the importance of really give, really give time for that. And just to give you a little example of how I've done that, and again, it's a little bit of perhaps learned behaviour is finding little techniques that work for you. So, to give you an example, when I have leadership team meetings, particularly at the the height of COVID, right, in those very early weeks, we started every meeting not with a sort of a what's going on or a sitrep but literally with a How are you? And and we invited, I invited each colleague, my senior colleagues simply to say on a scale of 1 to 10 what what's your number for the day? And why is that? And the reason we did that, why I did that, was because I felt that that was first of all, putting first off a conversation about how you are, and second off by using that technique, you know, not everybody feels they want to actually kind of tell everything about how they're really feeling because it was complex, wasn't it and things are moving quite fast. But by using a number, you've got a sense immediately of where your colleague was at and you knew whether, you know you need to lean in and support, or maybe pick up the phone afterwards and have a conversation. But also, by developing that habit, we really came together as a team. And you then start to build, you know, a currency if you like, and a conversation around what your number was. So things like that, you know, learning those techniques, you know, recognising what your strengths are, but recognising what the flipside can be and learning things that can you can deploy to help, you know, manage that and get the best out of yourself and out of your team is something I've certainly learnt through COVID. Thanks, Suzanne.

Great, thank you. So we've heard Rupert and Sarah's reflections of their experience of COVID. But it's really important that you will take the time to reflect on your own COVID experience as well and how you might tell that story in the future. Whilst it's still fresh in your mind. You can turn the experience into

a positive to self reflection and learning opportunity, so think about how you might use it to illustrate your strengths during a recruitment process. How might you use it to talk about how you adapted your working style? Did some of your potential strengths come to the fore? How might you use it to talk about mistakes, and what you learnt from them. So hopefully I've managed the time well enough now that we've got at least a few minutes left, I think we've got about 10 or 12. So we're doing all right, to open up for some quick fire questions to Rupert and Sarah. As I said before, we'll try and answer some more of your questions on the forum after the event, so don't forget to go on there and post your questions too. So Rupert, I'm going to start with a question for you. Do you have any tips for introverts in particular to make the most of their strengths when preparing for interviews?

Yeah, great, great question. And just a bit of definition, actually, because I'm checking my definition here of what an introvert and extrovert are and extraversion is one of the big five personality traits, I'd really recommend people going on to the great Wikipedia page which talks about the big five personality traits. And extroverts are people who get their energy from dealing with external conversations with other people, their gregarious etc. As it happens to all the tests I've done, I'm sort of right in the middle of extrovert and introvert and I get very drained if I do too much of that. And I need to take some time out myself sort of decompress. And, but I think there is something that I noticed with people who and some of my family members are more introverted and this is true of them as well is you've got the advantage that you probably got more you take more time to listen and reflect. So I think that's a strength and to think about what you're hearing what what answer, because in interviews people can quite quickly come in and answer because they think they've heard a question, but it isn't quite what the interviewer wanted. And you've got the opportunity to perhaps reflect a bit on your experience, listen, and then come in. And I think that I would say that introverts and extroverts are all able to come across brilliantly in interviews. But being authentic to themselves, you know, talking with a quiet authority or those things, so be yourself. But maybe as an introvert, take time to reflect and use that use that strength.

Great. Thanks Rupert. So Sarah, one for you. Imposter syndrome is a huge issue for many people. So sometimes it's hard to believe in your own strengths. How do you suggest tackling this?

That's a great question. And just reflecting on my career, I must admit, I heard about the imposter syndrome as a concept at a very, very early stage in my career. And it was actually a complete relief, because the really very earliest days of my career I really felt this sense of the the imposter syndrome features and so to, to discover it was an actual thing and recognised was itself actually a real relief. So, you know, just recognise it for what it is would be my first point. I think one of the ways certainly and I have suffered from the imposter syndrome at various stages in my career, and, and I, you know, a lot lots of people have. And for me, one of the things that I've really valued, if I'm doubting myself, or I'm sure that this is something that I can really take on is seeking feedback, you know, working with colleagues who will give you great feedback, and will pay back to you both what's working well, and where you think you can develop, because I think that's giving you an objective assessment. It's the equivalent of sort of holding a mirror up to yourself, which I've certainly found particularly helpful at various different stages, both when I was thinking about making moves into different roles, and also where I was tackling kind of difficult, tricky issues, often, you know, for example chairing a complex or challenging meeting, and I was concerned about, you know, would I be able to do this, making sure I've

got a buddy in the room who would be prepared at the end of that meeting to give me a bit of personal feedback just helps me both in my learning, but also in reinforcing my confidence in my ability to be able to learn and to move on.

Great, thanks, Sarah. Rupert, do you want to come in on the imposter syndrome question?

Just, if I may, just to really reinforce that and endorse what Sarah said, and just make two additional points. One is that, again, if you're on if you're like me, like surfing on Wikipedia, look up the Dunning Kruger effect. The Dunning Kruger is basically the rule that people who are not very confident, not very competent are off are often the most competent and the most confident about what they're about what they're doing. In a way I see the imposter syndrome is linked to that. The more you do something, the more you realise how little you know about it. And so I think it's actually sometimes a positive very positive indicator. And I think the the other thing, there is an excellent interview technique because I think one thing people should always think about when they're going into an interview or any selection process is, it doesn't matter how far you are into the process, do you still want the job? You may have learned things about the job that mean that you've changed your mind. It's, you've always got that prerogative. When you go into an interview. Think about, you know, you're being interviewed, but you're also interviewing the people who are going to be your managers, how do you feel about it? And that could be quite a boost actually of confidence as you're thinking it's actually a bit of a two way process and the recruitment process.

That's a really good point, Rupert. Certainly from my own experience working in recruitment is something we tell candidates a lot as well, that you're giving them a grilling as well as them grilling you. So whilst we still got you on hand, Rupert, can I ask you another question. So what opportunities would you advise people to take to gain a better understanding and recognition of what their own strengths are?

Well, it's a really interesting debate. And it's an academic debate about whether you can both act and reflect. I think it's really important, particularly the longer you've been in your career, and the more you've got to think about what you've done, to take time out, actually, and reflect, and maybe start with a Civil Service strength dictionary. And I bet that everybody on this call could find examples of every strength in there. And or at least they've done examples of when they've done it, including things that they don't like doing, which should affect the type of job they want to do so and, you know, maybe the start, look at the strengths dictionary. That's what I do. And it's well constructed by occupational psychologists and see if you can relate that to your, to your experience, and be quite critical. And maybe also ask family, friends for feedback. About what they see you doing, there'll be some things you're doing that you just take for granted because they're such strengths, that they're almost automatic, they're unconscious strengths, people move from, you might have heard this, you know, unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence to unconscious competence. And it's that unconscious competence that are your probably your greatest strengths. So yes, taking time to reflect, think about them. And bear in mind that actually over maybe two or three years in a job, you'll have built strengths that you didn't have when you started. So it's worth doing, it's worth doing regularly.

That's great. Thanks. And Sarah, I'm gonna ask you to self reflect now and put you on the spot. So your day three into a new job? What strengths do you think you're using the most this week?

That's a great question.

So I think probably my seeing the big picture strength. I'm drawing on that quite a lot. This is really both to help me and begin to articulate with the team I'm working with some of the big priorities, as I see them, and based on what the conversations that I've had with colleagues as well. So that's certainly a strength, because I think it's quite, quite good to have a framework for your thinking, and to be able to begin to paint that picture for colleagues, because they also get an opportunity to get a sense of you as well and what your priorities are. And I think that's quite important. I think the other strength is, and I won't sorry, I won't get this quite right in terms of the dictionary definition. But is that is networking and building relationships. You know, one of the greatest ways I find to really get insight is not only to read up on a subject, but actually to talk to people and get them to tell it to you in their own words. So listening, building networks are great ways to absorb not just the what, but the how of an organisation because you need both those things to be able to sort of navigate and lead successfully. So there's a couple of thoughts from me.

I should say sorry, I realise it might not be on the strength dictionary, but a great sense of humour and the ability to have a laugh. That is a really important strength. I'm a great believer, if I'm smiling on the outside, I'm smiling on the inside. So if there isn't one in the dictionary yet, Rupert, we should think about

it's maybe the 37th hidden one that nobody knows about. So I'm going to ask these questions, both of you, but I'm going to start with you, Rupert, from your sort of Civil Service people officer hat on and then perhaps Sarah, you can answer it slightly more from the perspective of somebody who might be a sifter and a panel member. You'll understand when I ask the question. So when writing behaviours, I often feel I need to have a positive ending otherwise sifters will pass over my application. What are your thoughts on this?

Well, I think it's all about providing a compelling evidence that you've done something. And I think that I'm inferring that the meaning is, well, actually, you know, there's a behaviour where the final outcome was not as you wanted it to be, or as you expected it to be. But I think that's fine. It's an example where you actually practising the practising the behaviour. There'll be there'll be lots of reasons why the project was a great success or not. It might not have been success, but your behaviour might well have been absolutely impeccable. In a good example, you know, the conditions of success were different. So I would be I'd be going for clear, concise, honest and putting the evidence down like that.

Great, thank you. And Sarah is someone who's not as familiar with the Civil Service way of recruitment as a panel member, when you're looking to recruit someone, what are you looking for in the way that they answer questions and give examples.

So, I mean, I would draw very much on what Rupert's said there in terms of the evidence. And Suzanne, you and I work together, so you'll know what I'm saying when I mean this, not just the sort of

statements but the but the, the facts or the outcome that resulted from from that example that you want to use to illustrate, I think outcomes are really good to, to reflect on as well as the process that got you there. And then the other thing for me is sharing that self awareness, you know, and that's why the strengths dictionary is excellent, because, you know, it talks about your strengths, but talks about also that, you know, get that recognition of where you might need to realise a bit more on learned behaviour. And so reflecting on both those things, what you can bring, but equally, where your self awareness identifies areas where your need you need to develop or grow, I think are really important things to see in terms of really assessing a whole person.

Great, thank you. So we're almost out of time. But time for one last question. I'm going to fire at both of you. So a relatively quick response, you allowed a little more than one sentence, but keep it fairly short. So over the last few years, we've as a nation lived through a number of economic and public health crisis. Do you think crisis are better for development than peace times?

Wow, great question. And I think that they can be a bit more concentrated in the opportunities to learn because necessity is the mother of invention. But I think actually, when you look at things, you know, even through peacetime, there have been massive things which we've had to deal with, but I think we have been through in the Civil Service two extraordinary periods, and we're still in them: leaving the European Union and the COVID experience. And I've been really struck by the fact that if we hadn't learned things about preparing for no deal, that would not, that has allowed us to do things during this COVID period that we wouldn't have known how to do. So, I think actually my answer is a qualified yes, I think it's a more concentrated, more concentrated organisational learning experience.

Great. Thank you, Sarah.

Yeah, I think I'd agree. But but I think the sweet spot is, is the transition between crisis and peacetime and really being able to that accelerated learning experience that Rupert talked about, really being able to then translate that into sustained learning and sustained change, and both in terms of behaviour and action. That's the sweet spot.

Great. So just a couple of words. I know we're just about on time, but hopefully people will hang on just to hear our final reflections. So big thanks to Rupert and Sarah for talking so openly and honestly today, and I hope all of you who've been listening have been able to take some comfort from the stories they've shared. And if you take anything away from today's session, I hope it would be that common thing you'll have heard throughout the importance of taking time to focus on yourself, to reflect and be self aware. You might choose to do some of the exercises when you get them with your manager, a colleague or a friend, but the hard work to know your strengths can only come from you. Thanks for listening. Enjoy the rest of the day.