Working with stakeholders to build a talented workforce – The role of Senior Civil Servants in the Public Service in Israel

This case study was prepared in the context of the 2017-2019 OECD multicountry project on civil service leadership focussing on a variety of challenges and practices relating to the changing nature of leadership in the public sector. It was peer reviewed at a workshop with the ten countries participating in the project. In the context of greater transparency and open government, this case study focuses on the implications of the active involvement of senior civil servants in Israel in key aspects of recruitment to attract candidates with highly sought-after skills and profiles. It analyses four examples from the Israeli Civil Service where senior civil servants where personally involved in the recruitment or engaged as champions of change supporting hiring managers to trial new initiatives.
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Introduction

Across the OECD, public services are competing for talent. A growing body of research highlights that a combination of globalisation, changing demographics and rapid technological change are having profound impacts on society. Citizens expect governments to be more transparent, accountable and responsive. They are willing and eager to collaborate with the public sector to achieve increasingly complex and global goals.

In response to this demand, governments in OECD countries have adopted the four open government principles endorsed in the OECD Recommendation on Open Government: transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation. Open government agendas aim to design and deliver public policies and services in an open and inclusive manner. They encourage greater citizens’ involvement in public processes to improve trust between the public sector and citizens.

To serve citizens best in an open and complex environment, public services must be able to draw on a diverse workforce with skilled, effective and motivated public servants. But public services are under pressure to attract and recruit new candidates from various backgrounds, with vital skills and competencies. This may be partly because aspects of public service employment models that traditionally attracted candidates – such as security of tenure and competitive retirement benefits – are either no longer on offer to the same degree, or do not resonate with candidates eager for autonomy, learning and instant impact.

At the same time, traditional employment models haven’t always been successful in ensuring representativeness of society. Attracting wider groups of talented people could contribute to improve that representativeness.

As some organisations in the public sector struggle to attract talented civil servants, an emerging practice is the active involvement of senior civil servants (SCS) in key aspects of recruitment such as candidate outreach, job profiling, and interviewing/assessment. The hypothesis underpinning this practice is that candidates with highly sought-after skills and profiles are more likely to want to apply and work at organisations where they feel there is a strong match between their motivations and the organisational environment. Proactive involvement of SCS alongside human resource professionals and hiring managers can be a way to create that match.

This case study focusses on four examples from the Israeli Civil Service where SCS have played an active role in ensuring that match. They primarily achieved this through either encouraging candidates with sought-after skills to apply to work in government and/or through taking a greater personal role in the process of job profiling, testing and hiring the candidates.

There are trade-offs to the involvement of SCS in recruitment, notably the risk that civil servants not specialised in recruitment may place a premium on skills over the integrity of process, or the extent to which this distinct and senior cohort may subconsciously seek to replicate the conditions of their own career development. But with appropriate care, SCS can be engaged as partners for recruitment in a number of ways. Given their position at the interface of political and executive power, they have a unique opportunity to understand how the policy challenges facing their countries can be addressed through effective talent identification and development.
Senior Civil Servants can be part of improving the attractiveness of the civil service

Public sector attractiveness

Public servants have traditionally suffered from an unflattering narrative that characterises the public sector in many countries as inefficient, unresponsive and excessively bureaucratic. Changing that image is central to improving the volume and quality of candidates for key positions. Across the OECD, the most basic point is to understand why not enough people (volume) or not enough people with the right skills (quality) are applying to work in select government jobs. Eliminating economic necessity as a factor, people generally need to have a specific motivation or reason to choose working in one organisation over another. Identifying those motivations or reasons and developing communication and recruitment strategies accordingly is how the public sector can attract the talent it needs. This is commonly referred to as ‘employer branding’, and it’s something that many public sector organisations struggle with.

The concept of employer branding is traditionally associated with household names in the private sector – Google’s carefully cultivated reputation for disruption and innovation, for instance – but there are compelling reasons to consider its application in the public sector. Drawing mainly on private sector examples, Ambler and Barrow suggest that marketing and human resource teams should work more closely together to create a ‘virtuous circle’ (Ambler and Barrow, 1996):

![Figure 1. Link between quality of employees and quality of product/service](source)

This framework makes intuitive sense, as does its reverse: organisations with poor reputations are unlikely to be able to attract the right number and quality of people to be able to work effectively, which in turn creates a ‘vicious circle’. As such, the key question for the public sector is to consider how it can attract the best applicants in the first place. This can be seen in a context of Open Government:
Box 1. OECD Framework on Open Government

People across the world are calling for more openness in government. Citizens are seeking public administrations that are more transparent, accountable and responsive, and are increasingly collaborating with public sector institutions to achieve these principles. The 2017 OECD Recommendation on Open Government comprises four principles that adherents commit to work towards:

Transparency

Government transparency is understood as the disclosure and subsequent accessibility of relevant government data and information.

Integrity

Public integrity refers to the consistent alignment of, and adherence to, shared ethical values, principles and norms for upholding and prioritising the public interest over private interests in the public sector.

Accountability

Accountability refers to the governments’ responsibility and duty to inform its citizens about the decisions it makes as well as to provide an account of the activities and performance of the entire government and its public officials.

Stakeholder participation

The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government defines stakeholder participation as: all the ways in which stakeholders can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery, including through the provision of information, consultation and engagement.

Source: [https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government.htm](https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government.htm)

A useful way to think of employer branding is to consider how employers can communicate functional benefits and symbolic benefits. Functional benefits refer to tangible things such as pay, benefits, pension, working hours, etc. Symbolic benefits refer to more abstract concepts. This can include aspects such as the chance to have a positive impact on society. As we will see in the case of Israel, it can also include the chance to work with specific individuals. The ability to convey symbolic benefits to employees makes employer branding especially useful, as symbolic benefits have been found to be more important than functional ones in predicting employer attractiveness, which describes the basic interest of an individual to be employed by a certain organization (Lieber, 1995 in Weske et al., 2019[1]). This is where senior managers can play a critical role.

Public sector recruitment in Israel – four case studies

In Israel, public service recruitment is under pressure to deliver candidates with the skills and competencies needed to solve an array of pressing public policy challenges. For certain
professions and skill sets – such as candidates with an IT or cyber-security background – the public sector is not perceived as an employer of choice. This can have drastic effects on the public sector workforce: the Israeli National Cyber Directorate, for example, reports a staffing gap of 40% between the ideal headcount it needs to deliver on its mandate and current staffing levels.

Anecdotal evidence gathered by the Civil Service Commission highlighted that younger candidates on the Israeli job market, particularly ones with sought-after skills in specific industries such as IT, appear to place a significant weight on the opportunity to work with high profile managers when making career decisions. The assumption underlying this is that ‘star’ managers can offer candidates something that employers cannot – such as unparalleled opportunity for personal development and access to a valuable professional network. That young candidates want to work with high profile managers is not unusual – what is interesting is the structure developed by the Civil Service Commission to respond to this emerging ‘client’ (candidate) need.

As such, the Civil Service Commission is leading a project aiming to involve senior leaders to a greater degree in operations that would traditionally have been seen as the preserve of human resource departments. The CSC launched a call for expressions of interest from agencies and Departments across the public sector. The organisations selected (see Box 1) all displayed one or more of the following characteristics:

- Not enough candidates with the right skills
- Unable to compete with private market regarding employment conditions
- Competition with other Government departments for candidates
- Previous setbacks with recruitment procedures
- Need to emphasise employer brand in order to attract candidates

Box 1 describes the four organisations that were selected to take part in the project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2. Israel: Proactive Recruitment and Sharing Project</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Examinations and Tenders Division of the Civil Service Commission organises recruitment and assessment for candidates who have applied for a position in the civil service. This Division is the lead for a new project aimed at providing more tailored support to units across the civil service that face specific recruitment challenges. Following a call</td>
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for proposals, the Division selected the following units as candidates for an innovative work stream aimed at providing bespoke support and advice:

1. **Israel National Cyber Directorate**: responsible for all aspects of cyber defence in the civilian sphere, from formulating policy and building technological power to operational defence in cyberspace.

2. **Government ICT Authority**: directs the information systems divisions in Ministries and in the units, promotes government communications, embeds cross-cutting methodologies and standards, works to develop infrastructure, systems and services to streamline government work, and to make government information and services available to the public.

3. **Israel Judicial Authority**: judicial branch of the state of Israel, authorized to interpret and apply the law in the name of the State. The court administration coordinates the administrative activities of the judiciary, and assists and supports the judicial and administrative level in the courts around the country. It is responsible for setting the goals of the Court system, passing guidelines to presidents of the Court, and providing effective and professional service.

4. **Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Social Services**: promotes employment in the economy through regulation of the employment market, formulation of government employment policy, development and management of employment programs aimed to increase the participation of diverse populations in the labour market, the regulation and enforcement of labour laws, professional training, daycare supervision, coordination of research.

**Young talent and the public sector**

Young candidates actively search for employers whose values align with their own. Salary is an important factor for this group, but there are many other factors at play that strongly influence their career decisions. Research from Gallup has identified six core aspects of what younger employees expect from their employers: purpose, development, coaching, ongoing conversations, a focus on their strengths, and healthy work-life balance (Gallup, 2016[1]). Although opinion among Delegates in The Hague was divided on the degree to which young candidates have markedly different needs and preferences from older staff, public sector hiring managers can take much from Gallup research. What is clear is that young employees want purpose and development. They want a manager to act more like a coach or mentor than a hierarchical superior; providing continual feedback and ongoing performance conversations. Work-life balance is important, too, but it is not just that this cohort wants more time to pursue interests outside of work – they expect their work to provide them with the opportunity to live and implement their values through their work.

The ‘one size fits all’ approach to attraction and recruitment that may have served in the past is no longer sufficiently flexible to identify niche skills and candidate profiles. Candidates no longer tolerate being kept at arms’ length and provided with a drip feed of
information based on their stage in the selection process. Re-thinking candidate engagement strategies to position candidates as clients can pay dividends. The best talent are increasingly asking, ‘what can this prospective employer offer me?’ This suggests that public employers need to accept that now and in the future, the best candidates expect to evaluate their employer as much as their employer evaluates them. This may require a new approach to candidate engagement before, during and after the recruitment process to respond to these expectations.

**Senior Civil Servants and recruitment**

It is often assumed that public service motivation (PSM) – or the willingness to contribute to society at large and serve the public interest – affects individuals’ attraction to government as the employer of choice (Weske et al., 2019[2]). The pressure point for Israel is that for key positions, young candidates are not applying even though the positions would seem to align with the expectations and ambition of younger generations referred to above.

A typical recruitment process for public sector roles in Israel comprises a robust advertising phase. A dedicated Facebook page for careers set up by the CSC has attracted more than 15,000 followers in two years, and candidate outreach includes liaison and engagement with university career departments, as well as use of executive search firms for some positions.

The recruitment system for positions in the Israeli civil service has undergone change in recent years to move toward a more modern, dynamic and flexible system. The length of the tender publication process – the equivalent of a recruitment competition or job advertisement in some countries – now lasts seven days in most cases, down from fourteen. Jobs are advertised online and candidates can submit applications through a government job portal. There is a built-in mechanism for each posting to define whether an examination needs to be carried out (in order to save time and resources), and analysis is carried out to research the validity of predictions for senior positions (Civil Service Commission of Israel, 2017[3]). Yet, some organisations still struggle to find suitable candidates. Senior Civil Servants are becoming the link between their organisations and sought-after talent. This aligns with demographic expectations of younger generations who expect personalised service and a high degree of attention during recruitment processes, and also direct access to senior personnel during their roles. Moreover, OECD research has highlighted that senior leadership is a key driver of employee engagement in the public service. (OECD, 2016[4])

The involvement of senior civil servants through the four examples below is focussed on several distinct but related aspects of recruitment:

- **Candidate outreach**: Proactive engagement to potential candidates through in-person events, partnerships with universities, social media use, etc.
- **Job profiling**: reviewing the job description, minimum requirements, ‘ideal’ candidate types, etc. to align with the reality rather than legacy of the role
- **Assessment/testing**: administering assessment methodologies such as interviews directly to candidates and helping (re-)design the process for these
Involving Senior leaders in proactive recruitment: four examples

The four Israeli institutions analysed in this case study have tested new ways to recruit sought-after talent, which tested new ways of communicating with citizens. Each of the four case studies involves SCS to a greater degree than the traditional or usual method of recruitment described above.

Israel National Cyber Directorate – Head of the Guidance Division

The challenge

The Israel National Cyber Directorate faces a number of operational challenges. The Directorate was set up in 2012 and scaled rapidly in staff due to necessity for its expertise on issues such as data security. Because the profession of cyber security covers many fields, there was a lack of formal standards for specialists. The organisation has conflicting demands in terms of personnel, as it needs highly specialised people with the technical expertise to carry out tasks such as combatting cyber-attacks at the same time as it needs those people to understand the policy and political context for their work. There is substantial competition from the security industry and foreign companies for these types of profile. And due to the nature of its work, the Directorate can only provide a limited amount of information to prospective employees. The Directorate estimates its staffing gap at 40% and characterises this as a “crisis” – there is a draft law for the cyber-security sector which includes a section related to recruitment

HR staff at the Directorate observed that the ideal candidate expects to be ‘wooed’. In a cut-throat market, they expect the best jobs come to them. They expect end-to-end quality customer service during the hiring process, and they expect the hiring process to be quick.

As the Directorate struggled with the lack of candidates, a new approach to recruitment was necessary to improve its attractiveness to the new generations. Based on an analysis of recruitment processes, the Directorate’s HR team identified some of the factors that tended to attract or discourage candidate.

- Unengaging job descriptions
- Lack of information on hiring manager profile
- Narrow range of candidate sourcing channels
- Uncertainty on timeline for length of recruitment process

In collaboration with the hiring team leaders, the directorate improved the job descriptions, which were used to support a personalized and “customer experience” approach to candidates. By doing so, it would help the Directorate attract more candidates but also build a reputation for later recruitments.

The Cyber Directorate advertised the position on social networks, including sponsored promotion and audience targeting (see box below). The Directorate also reached out directly to non-profits and academic organizations, implemented a refer-a-friend style mailing network, and provided support to individual candidates. The challenge was to provide a personalised recruitment process while also complying with the fairness and equal opportunity rules of the public sector employment policy.
Box 3. Using social media to build a talented civil service

As an employer, the public sector is constantly competing for qualified and professional human capital. In Israel, improving the attractiveness of working in the public service is one the strategic goals of the Civil Service Commission (CSC). To this end, the CSC helps ministries recruiting the best and most qualified workers, in particular in challenging positions for which there is a lack of enough qualified candidates.

Recent initiatives across the civil service are using social media to reach out to candidates outside the traditional recruitment pools, especially for positions which are hard to fill, such as engineers or IT professionals. Administrations are gradually introducing targeted advertising for positions which are hard to recruit, in parallel with more traditional vacancy announcements in the institutional social media webpage.

Targeted advertising is becoming a key element of the overall vision for building a more talented and efficient civil service and communicating about the public sector. It helps administrations reach out to qualified candidates who are not necessarily "job seekers" – and as such, they would not necessarily consult the job advertisement page of the Civil Service. It also gives the public sector more visibility as an employer of choice. While experiences are mostly in the pilot phase, some of the first results are very positive. They include an increase in the number of qualified applicants and considerable reduction of the duration of the job application procedure. Without the tailored advertising, the candidates who applied and reached the final stage of the selection procedure would not have applied for the job position at all.

Source: Civil Service Commission, Israel

Role of the leaders

The hiring team leaders were involved throughout the whole recruitment process. They worked closely with the HR department to improve job descriptions in order to attract the younger generations, who tend to place higher value in the meaning of work and values. Flexible working arrangements is still not a possibility due to the nature and often unpredictable aspects of working in cyber defence but is being investigated.

Leaders were essential to help the HR department to communicate better about the impact of the positions in the organisation and for the public sector more broadly. They participated in a “spotlight meeting” where they could meet groups of candidates in order to provide information about the position and the terms of employment (salary and expectations).

Results

By changing job descriptions and personalising the recruitment process as much as possible, the National Cyber Directorate reached out to new profiles, who would probably never have applied through a traditional process.
The tender procedure for hiring seven Heads of Guidance Division was faster and successful. Out of the 53 candidates, six were selected and two were considered eligible for the position.

**Government ICT Authority – Chief Technology Officer (CTO)**

The Government ICT authority was initially based in the Ministry of Finance but since 2015 has operated from the Prime Minister’s Office. Its mission is to create citizen-centric digital services that are simple, advanced, secured and needs-driven. As such, people and skills are central to its operations. This is acknowledged on the authority’s website: “the government’s IT infrastructure and capabilities rest on our ability to hire and maintain high quality personnel”.

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The challenge

The key challenge facing the authority was recruiting a Chief Technology Officer to be the senior manager of human capital – a position likened to ‘a CTO’s CTO’. The core role of the position is formulating the digital technology strategy and guiding all government offices and auxiliary units in the field. It requires specialised technical knowledge of the IT industry, sensitivity to the political context, and substantial operational experience managing human capital and budgetary issues. The issue is that finding candidates with this mix of experience, skills and competencies who want to work in government is difficult: anyone with this profile has clear and better-paid alternatives in the private sector. Moreover, much of the Israeli IT industry is based in Tel Aviv, but government jobs are concentrated in Jerusalem.

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Leaders

Leadership involvement in this case study centred on innovative ways to identify the ideal profile for this role and to develop a targeted strategy for attracting candidates with that profile to apply to work at the ICT authority. With SCS buy-in, the recruitment manager and Human Resources department developed a strategy to focus on candidates working in leading organisations in the private sector who were one reporting rung below the CTO. Once identified, the goal was to reach out to these candidates by emphasising the opportunity for professional development by contributing to public values in working for the public sector.

Two tools were identified for this pilot. First, the authority partnered with an executive search company – ‘head-hunters’ – specialised in recruiting senior profiles in the technology sector. Second, the recruitment manager are developing an online platform for candidates featuring an explanatory video and content related to the purpose and mission of the role.

Finally, given that many candidates for these types of position are used to interviewing under private sector methodologies (or through personal contacts/referrals), the authority introduced a tailored assessment process for candidates. The process should focus first on technical skills through a practical examination/case study and presentation in English and Hebrew, followed by a panel interview for shortlisted candidates.

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**Results**

The pilot is still at an early stage, so concrete results are not yet available. Nevertheless, the structure of the pilot aligns with emerging research on attracting and recruiting specialised profiles for the public sector through emphasis of public sector values.

**Israeli Judicial Authority – Senior Director (Legal and Empirical Research)**

The Judicial Authority is comprised of three levels of courts: The Supreme Court, the District Courts and the Magistrates’ Courts. Within the Judicial Authority, the Courts Administration service coordinates the administrative activities of the Judiciary.

**The challenge**

The Courts Administration Service had previously advertised the position of ‘Senior Director (Legal and Empirical Research)’ but was unable to find a suitable candidate. This is a key position as it involves managing research across the various levels of the Courts Administration in Israel. The Courts Administration found that there was a large gap between the strategic and day-to-day reality of the job and the job title, which tended to attract younger and less experienced candidates.

**Leaders**

SCS involvement was key to successfully recruiting for this position. The methodology involved a four-step process beginning with a kick-off meeting between the senior hiring manager, the recruiter, and the Civil Service Commission to understand the challenges, define objectives and set expectations.

First, the decision was taken to adjust the job description for this position. It was felt that there was too much jargon and that it did not communicate the strategic nature of the job effectively to an external candidate. Stakeholders interviewed observed that the perception around the role was that it was principally a ‘back office’ administrative role rather than a critical position. As such, it was decided to re-brand the role to include the title ‘Director’ and to tighten the educational and professional qualification requirements to include basic statistical competency and legal training.

The second stage involved changing the examination process, where SCS were directly involved to determine whether the existing exam was testing elements relevant to the job itself. SCS then led outreach efforts to universities to engage with candidates.

Third, the senior manager helped re-write the job description and filter candidates. Retaining candidates during the selection process was also given attention: The Ministry sent a personal letter to each applicant explaining the job description in a more accessible way. An internal panel was established to demonstrate how the interview process would work and gain buy-in from panel interview members.

**Results**

The key outcome of this tailor-made process was that the hiring team leader found an excellent candidate that she felt she would not otherwise have been able to hire. Moreover, the senior manager enjoyed the process because she felt like a true partner rather than passive recipient of talent selected mostly by someone else. This contributed to her feeling more personally invested in the candidate and the candidate’s career development than through a regular candidate from the job market. An important lesson for the Human
Resources department is that it can pay dividends to challenge SCS on what they feel are the key needs and profile for a specific position. Engaging constructively with SCS to pin down the key requirements of a post helps them to adjust their view of specific positions and how they fit into the organisational architecture.

**Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs – Engineers and Architects registrar**

This Ministry provides a range of services to help citizens with issues relating to disability, financial hardship, unemployment, discrimination, exploitation and more. The main positions in the Ministry are social workers who are directly employed by the Ministry. Three quarters of Ministry staff provide services directly to the public.

**The challenge**

Candidates for non-core but key positions in the Ministry, such as engineers and architects, expect that the recruitment process will be quick – but this is a challenge for the Ministry. It proves difficult to attract candidates with these specific skill sets and qualifications to work in a government Ministry, partly because the job description is either too rigid or because the messaging does not convey enough information to prospective candidates on who their manager will be – a key driver of engagement.

**Leaders**

SCS in the Ministry had observed the difficulty in recruiting skilled candidates with professional experience. Interviews with staff and candidates revealed that the selling point for many management positions in the Ministry was the opportunity to contribute to the public good and make an impact. The roles of senior managers recruiting for this position was to hold a high-level meeting with the division CEO to identify the ideal candidate profile. Executive search agents were engaged to target this profile alongside a multi-channel communication initiative. Candidates were targeted through a range of social media as well as directly through relevant academic organisations and university career centres.

This example highlights the interplay between employer branding and branding related to recruitment. For example, in addition to the communication steps taken above, the Ministry also published a print advertisement aimed at improving overall employer branding. While technically this may have appeared unrelated to the recruitment process, it illustrates the premium placed by candidates on working for an organisation with a good employer brand.

Second, this example highlighted effective candidate engagement strategies to prevent candidate drop-out during the recruitment process. Given that the job description stipulated strict criteria – candidates with five years management experience could not apply if the requirement was for six, for example – the candidate pool tended to be relatively small. As such, candidates were contacted by telephone with information during the recruitment process in order to personalise their application.

**Result**

The tender was published in May 2019 and resulted in 38 applications. One candidate was selected from a final pool of three strong candidates. The Ministry felt justified in its decision to tailor the recruitment strategy to the job characteristics as much as possible instead of following the standard recruitment route with no intervention from SCS.
Emerging expectations on leaders

The four initiatives above suggest that bringing talent into the civil service is increasingly relying on opening the administration to the citizens, communicating better throughout the recruitment process, and involving senior leaders to a greater degree than in the past. The underlying assumption is that citizens who are interested in what the public sector does will be more likely interested in working with or for the public sector. In turn, this would increase the talent pool available for recruitment and ultimately the skills levels of new hires.

Communicating better about the public sector traditionally involves communicating about public institutions, processes and policies. Public institutions adapted quickly to the new forms of communication made possible with the internet and are increasingly represented online, including on social media. In 2016, fifteen OECD countries advertised all vacancies for senior civil servants online and twenty-seven countries proactively shared online administrative data.²

At the same time, citizens are becoming active stakeholders in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery. Participatory citizenship is spreading throughout OECD countries, and placing new expectations on the public sector. More than providing information to citizens, civil servants are expected to create space for implementing more complex consultation and active engagement processes (OECD 2017a). From this perspective, citizen engagement involves developing new skills within the civil service. Among those skills, many relate to the capacity to communicate better (see table below).

### Table 1. Which skills for citizen engagement?

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<th>Skills for a civil service…</th>
<th>… Professional</th>
<th>… Strategic</th>
<th>… Innovative</th>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional building blocks of service and engagement skills include professionals with expertise in public relations, communications, marketing, consultation, facilitation, service delivery, conflict resolution, community development, outreach etc.</td>
<td>Using engagement skills to achieve specific outcomes to inform, for example, better targeted interventions, or nudging public behaviour towards desirable outcomes, such as healthier eating habits or smoking reduction.</td>
<td>Innovation skills applied to engagement to expand and redesign the tools themselves through, for example, co-creation, prototyping, social media, crowdsourcing, challenge prizes, ethnography, opinion research and data, branding, behavioural insights/nudging, digital service environments and user data analytics.</td>
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Source: Adapted from (OECD, 2017[5])

Unsurprisingly, the speed and scope of digitalisation are also transforming public communication by placing individual civil servants – and senior civil servants in particular - under the spotlight. As with restaurant or hotel review platforms, employer review platforms such as Glassdoor, where employees can comment on various aspects of their interview process and job, means that the reputation of employers is increasingly a factor in candidates’ employment choices. Before committing to a new job, candidates increasingly look for information about their future managers and colleagues including online and in social media, during the recruitment processes. For example, the Head of the Israeli Tax Authority noted that part of his role in recruitment is to take part in career

outreach events with candidates to respond to precisely this expectation and engage with high-potential candidates. These trends illustrate well the growing body of research suggesting that the leadership of an organisation has significant influence building up employees’ expectations and engagement in the workplace (see for example OECD 2016).

Against this backdrop, civil service attractiveness is relying more and more on leaders’ ability to attract talented candidates. This implies looking beyond leaders’ capacity to engage their teams and build employer reputation. It means that public leaders need to understand who the ideal candidates are, and know how to communicate with them before and throughout the recruitment processes. The examples above suggest that the SCS involved in recruitment processes shared some skills that made possible attracting more candidates to the public sector. What those traits, skills and competencies are, and what are the implications of developing them across the SCS, will be discussed over the next sections.

What are the new expected traits, skills and competencies of leaders?

Identifying and attracting leadership skills are one of the core concerns of the public sector in OECD countries. Possibly deriving from the particular attention placed on recruiting senior civil servants, twenty-four OECD countries have a centrally defined skills profile for senior managers, and twenty-one countries have a training strategy or action plan that targets senior managers. Unsurprisingly, competencies related to managing people and change, strategic thinking, values and ethics tend to be the most commonly prioritized in OECD countries. Interestingly, while employee development is a key expectation for the new generations of candidates, it is rarely a priority for recruiting and developing senior managers (see figure below).

3 SHRM survey, Q.82
4 SHRM survey, Q.84
The interviews with the Israeli institutions suggest that the challenges around building a talented workforce call for a new type of leader. This does not mean placing less emphasis on traditional components of leadership, such as the ability to manage budgets, motivate employees and negotiate a complex web of relationships. Instead, the emerging paradigm is that successful workforce development strategies increasingly include leaders who understand that building a talented workforce starts with recruitment, and invest their time improving it. The examples highlighted that building a talented workforce required leaders who share two main traits:

- First, leaders who have grasped the potential of a talented workforce. If leaders do not prioritise the development of skilled teams, they will not be able to deliver on their mission.
- Second, leaders who were prepared to communicate more and using a wide array of channels, targeting their communication to their audience.

From this perspective, building a talented workforce requires leaders to be agile communicators. In Israel, the leaders who were involved in the recruitment processes described above cooperated with HR teams and the CSC to match the institutional mission to the long-term staffing needs, and translated that into meaningful and jargon-free job descriptions. Leaders were also actively involved in the pre-recruitment process, to present and discuss their work with potential candidates, in person or online. Finally, leaders were also active in the recruitment and selection processes, namely during panel interviews.
Implications of the new approach to recruitment and selection

The transformation of the way the public sector attracts and recruits candidates raises a fundamental question in most countries in which, like in Israel, equal access to public employment is a fundamental right. When the public sector reaches out to necessary skills in specific candidates, it needs to ensure that the foundations of transparent, open and merit-based processes remain solid, to avoid nepotism and favouritism (OECD 2019a) (see box below). The focus on the pre-recruitment phase in the four experiences described above allowed safeguarding the equal right to access public employment. In each process, potential candidates were encouraged to apply through the regular recruitment process.

Box 4. Investing in public service capability candidates through transparent, open and merit-based processes.

Adherents to the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability are encouraged to invest in public service capability in order to develop an effective and trusted public service, in particular by recruiting, selecting and promoting candidates through transparent, open and merit-based processes. The purpose of this recommendation is to guarantee fair and equal treatment to all candidates, and can be done by:

a. Communicating employment opportunities widely and ensuring equal access for all suitably qualified candidates;

b. Carrying out a rigorous and impartial candidate selection process based on criteria and methods appropriate for the role and in which the results are transparent and contestable;

c. Filling vacancies in a timely manner to remain competitive and meet operational staffing needs;

d. Encouraging diversity – including gender equality – in the workforce by identifying and mitigating the potential for implicit or unconscious bias to influence people management processes, ensuring equal accessibility to under-represented groups, and valuing perspective and experience acquired outside the public service or through non-traditional career paths; and

e. Ensuring effective oversight and recourse mechanisms to monitor compliance and address complaints.

Source: OECD 2019a

However, as SCS become increasingly involved in pre-recruitment, guidelines may be necessary to ensure that SCS keep focus on the long-term value of employer branding for a talented civil service. Especially in the current digital media ecosystem, unconscious bias or incoherent communication can influence the pre-recruitment process. In parallel, senior leaders involved in employer branding become personally more exposed to public and social media than previously. As the experience in Israel shows, not all civil servants have the necessary skills to communicate effectively about the civil service with potential applicants. Perhaps more importantly, SCS are generally ill-equipped to manage potential risks associated with communication in social media – which is possibly related to the capacity of the civil service itself to communicate in today’s fast-moving media ecosystem.
Traditional, senior civil servants were not in the public eye and therefore not involved in communicating the value of public sector jobs. The four pilot projects discussed in this case study suggest that SCS are being put into the spotlight in ways that are not always comfortable for them, or at least not for all senior civil servants. Becoming brand ambassadors and champions of change for the public sector is a new kind of responsibility for senior managers.

The four pilot projects discussed in this case study involve SCS in different ways. In some, SCS are personally and directly involved in operational recruitment; in others, they are engaged as champions of change who provide the necessary authorisation and support for hiring managers to trial new initiatives. Early results from the pilot projects suggest that both types of involvement are necessary and productive. Three broad conclusions emerge.

First, in a context of increasing citizen expectations of open, transparent and accountable government, the involvement of SCS in aspects of recruitment is a positive first step toward meeting those expectations. This case study heard examples of individual SCS who welcome this challenge enthusiastically, and much can be taken from these early initiatives in terms of identifying behaviours and methodologies of engaging SCS. But it must be acknowledged that not every SCS will be suited to this type of engagement with the public. Moreover, SCS involvement comes at a cost. Given the unique time and resource pressures facing this group, involving them in aspects of recruitment necessarily means spending less time doing something else that could also contribute to the public good. The challenge for the Israeli Civil Service Commission will be to identify the specific opportunities where the chances of securing an effective outcome can be maximised by SCS involvement. Not every recruitment difficulty can be solved by involving SCS, but where SCS are involved, they must be supported and provided with the necessary tools and training to be as effective as possible. As delegates at the meeting in the Hague noted, this requires leadership not just at the top, but may also involve middle managers managing ‘upwards’, i.e. persuading and lobbying their hierarchical superiors as necessary to build trust and dialogue.

Second, the examples of SCS involvement demonstrated that breakthroughs in difficult recruitments can come from identifying the scope to change ‘how things have been done’ at business process level. The involvement of senior leaders in proactive recruitment processes has shown that new expectations are being placed on the skills and behaviours that leaders need to perform. While new skillsets emerge (such as communicating through social media), they do not replace traditional skillsets (such as the ability to coordinate with other departments or the ability to engage one’s team). Changing the way ‘how things have been done’, is innovative and by definition carries some degree of risk. In the current media ecosystem the boundaries between personal and professional lives are often blurred. As such, communicating more with the public may mean that senior leaders will need to be better able to deal with risk associated with online exposure and disinformation.

Third, each of the four pilot initiatives discussed in this case study demonstrated the value of close tailor-made support provided by the Civil Service Commission to the four units. The pilot initiatives are a new and on-going process. Carried out for the first time in this format, the initiatives provided initial insights about SCS involvement and recruitment that could be applied to other Ministries. However, it may prove challenging to scale this level of time-, skill- and resource-intensive support to other departments across the civil service. The institutional leadership was fundamental for implementing the four pilots. Scaling up
this kind of experiences requires that the same leadership traits that made these pilots work will be found elsewhere.

**Workshop conclusions**

*These paragraphs were developed following discussion of the Israeli case study at a meeting in The Hague, November 2019*

As highlighted by Delegates at The Hague meeting, often people who have worked in the public service for a long time – like senior leaders – assume that prospective candidates know about the values of the public service and are sufficiently motivated by them to apply for jobs. This is not always the case, and a key takeaway of the workshop was that senior leaders can play a valuable role in identifying precisely what public sector values are, and communicating them more effectively to boost the overall employer ‘brand’. This may not be familiar territory for senior managers. Nevertheless, preliminary evidence from the small-scale Israeli pilot project discussed above suggest that it is one area of focus for future development initiatives. Ireland, for example, has included becoming an employer of choice as one of the pillars of its Civil Service People Strategy.

A related observation was that accountability for talent management could be improved in the public sector. Seeing recruitment as the job of Human Resource professionals alone – but not other line units – means that organisations are missing the opportunity to tap into valuable staff networks more systematically. It was noted that while workforce management is generally talked about in many organisations, often the challenge is getting it onto the leadership agenda in a more structured way. It was suggested that one way to do this is to foster a healthy competition among the leadership cadre by setting goals or establishing basic indicators for recruitment of specific skills, groups, etc. In this case of Israel, a successful practice was the consistent messaging on the part of the Civil Service Commission that sought to engage senior managers as co-creators of their own recruitment solutions rather than simply passive recipients of the eventual candidate chosen by a recruitment process.

Graduate recruitment programmes can be away to link both of these issues and succeed in attracting young talent. In addition to well-established graduate programmes such as the UK Fast Stream and indeed the Israeli Cadet Programme, Australia in particular described how it placed increasing emphasis on engaging with younger candidates as a way to access top talent. This involved a phase of consultation bringing together managers and staff from across the New South Wales Public Service to identify the employee value proposition for this demographic, leading outreach efforts and developing a greater focus on on-boarding and induction of new staff.

The Israeli case study and subsequent workshop discussions illustrated that senior leaders can be engaged as proactive recruitment partners. This involvement implies a prioritisation of resources, as the Civil Service Commission can only support a limited number of partners with the same level of support as outlined in the pilot. Moreover, not every policy challenge can be solved by recruitment; not every recruitment necessarily benefits from the involvement of senior leaders; and not every senior leader has the ability to play a role in recruitment. Public sector employers should henceforth give thought to how they can develop these skills, competencies and behaviours in the existing cadre of senior leaders, and assess such skills and competences in future recruits and high-potential middle managers.

