The Crown Commercial Service:

Communications Capability Review

Government Communication Service

Background to the review

1. The Communications Capability Review of the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) is one of a series of reviews across the public sector, including Whitehall departments and arm's length bodies (ALBs). The review fieldwork took place in July 2014.

2. Each review is carried out by a combination of peer and external reviewers. Review methodology is based on interviews and examination of supplied materials. The reviewers evaluate capability to achieve communications and marketing objectives using a framework. This report contains their assessment and provides recommendations for improvement.

3. The review's scope covered the breadth of the CCS's external and internal communication, including the relationship with the Cabinet Office campaigns and media teams. The review also looked at customer and supplier relationships.

4. The review team conducted 25 interviews. Interviewees included the Chief Executive of the CCS, Crown Representatives, Customer and supplier representatives as well as the existing communications delivery team and Cabinet Press office.

Organisational context

5. The Crown Commercial Service (CCS) is a new Executive Agency of Cabinet Office. It brings together Government Procurement Service (GPS), the commercial function of Cabinet Office, and common goods and services procurement and the commercial management currently undertaken by central government departments.

6. Inheriting resources from the commercial arms of numerous departments and attending to the legacy of GPS the CCS faces the challenge of getting staff, customers and stakeholders to see the value added in a centrally consolidated organisation.

Summary

7. The reviewers found that the CCS's communications need prioritisation and improvement. This is especially the case in strategy development, professional communications products, stakeholder evaluation and digital capabilities. There must be shared accountability for leading the organisation and setting direction. All must understand that they are responsible for communicating with clarity and purpose to their people, their customers and their stakeholders.

Role for communications

8. Communications has an important role to play among key audiences for CCS, including clients of CCS across government, internal audiences within CCS and suppliers. Communications should set out the new role and purpose of CCS and the benefits of working closely with it.

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9. The communications team needs to set out this offering more clearly within the organisation. At present, it tries to provide an events, design, internal communications, and media connection service for Cabinet Office but struggles to get traction across the CCS. It feels confused and the team are doing work that is not the usual function of communications team (writing slides for an event is one example).

Areas of strength

10. There is a great willingness from the majority of customers and stakeholders to see the CCS succeed.

11. Good awareness of some of the senior management team (SMT). This needs to be expanded on to ensure that there is buy-in across the whole team.

12. Good work being done around brand identity and professional products which will support ambitions to create a unified CCS.

Areas for improvement

13. **Clarity around CCS purpose:** Reviewers concluded that the CCS has not clearly set out its vision, mission, narrative (explaining the distinction from legacy organisations and managed service benefits) or business plan. SMT does not seem to acknowledge its responsibility to communicate.
14. **Communications leadership and trust:** Reviewers felt there were no clear communications objectives and strategy. There is little confidence in communications across the organisation and it has limited influence at senior levels.
15. **Lack of prioritisation:** Reviewers concluded that there is a surfeit of initiatives and a lack of prioritisation. Comms has been haphazard, experimenting with new channels / ideas (e.g. an external blog) without a clear strategy or metrics for evaluating success.

Recommendations

R1. Hold a SMT strategy day to develop the narrative, embed leadership accountability and responsibility for the reputation of CCS and the engagement of its people.

R2. Use business plan to develop a set of communications objectives and strategy.

R3. Set up SMT level communications governance (and evaluation).

R4. Communications to develop concise and regular briefings, targeted at their key audiences.

R5. Recruit G6 head of communications, to provide strategic leadership and constructive challenge.

Then, create a new communications structure to focus on:

- Internal & culture change communications

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- o Going forward, internal communications is going to continue to be extremely important in supporting the ongoing organisation transition.

- Stakeholder engagement– including customers and suppliers
  - o There are some excellent examples of good stakeholder and customer management across CCS. But there are also some examples where the CCS's reputation is being damaged by poor customer service and disjointed stakeholder and relationship management. There is a role for communication to help facilitate better analysis of customers and stakeholders and help develop better frameworks for managing them.
  - o There is limited evaluation on the success of communications being delivered – especially on the events side. There is a role for an events team, working in coordination with the business to focus on the priority events for CCS for the next 12 months.
  - o Media relations, although important, are not at the levels that need dedicated media support from within CCS. The Cabinet Office Press Office team has the capability and capacity to deliver proactive and reactive media relations on behalf of CCS.

- Digital strategy and delivery
  - o The government drive is to be Digital by Default. The CCS, like all departments, needs to develop its digital offering to staff, stakeholders and customers. This needs to reflect where these groups are in their own digital maturity.

Recommendations- Specific Actions

Item	Action in six months	Action in 12 months
R1. Hold a strategy day to develop the narrative, embed leadership accountability and responsibility for the reputation of CCS and the engagement of its people	• Develop Vision and priorities – translate into a 1 page narrative (aligned with Business Plan) • Set direction for 12 months (then revise) • Roll out across CCS in a new team briefing channel • Publish Business Development Plan • Create an internal engagement strategy to communicate this plan to staff, interested customers and stakeholders • Embed communications and engagement metrics into performance contracts/PMRs of SMT	• Evidence of new strategy in action. • CS People Survey benchmark in October • Continue engagement/leadership visibility strategy on a 6 monthly basis
R2. Use business plan to develop a set of comms objectives and strategy.	• Develop a communications strategy to align with Business Development Plan. • Identify priority areas (Whitehall depts. and current suppliers) and develop team capability to deliver	• Refresh communications strategy in line with new government and CCS priorities • Develop stakeholder

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	against objectives in strategic comms, stakeholder engagement, internal and culture and digital engagement – recruitment/skills developed needed	engagement approach for wider public sector
R3. Set up SMT level comms governance (& evaluation)	- Head of Comms to sit on SMT - Put communications on agenda at each SMT meeting – cascade key messages from SMT to whole organisation - At least fortnightly catch-ups with Sally Collier (in addition to meetings with Sally's office) - SMT visibility plan Sept-Dec. Town Hall events across 7 sites	Consider using digital channels to support SMT visibility across sites.
R4. Comms to develop concise and regular briefings, targeted at their key audiences	- Create a catalogue of communications services to staff and explain this to each team - For leaders develop fortnightly update covering hot media issues, feedback on events, insight from staff and recent customer feedback - Develop protocols for dealing with media and deciding which events to attend. Proactive and reactive media to be handled by Cabinet Office. - Monthly face to face meetings with Cabinet Office press office, weekly dial-ins to discuss forward look grid.	- Evaluate communications service provided over 12 months. - Review relationship with CO Press Office.
R5. Create a new communications structure with focus on: - Internal & culture change communications - Stakeholder engagement– inc. customer and suppliers - Digital strategy and delivery	- Recruit G6 head of comms to provide strategic leadership. - Audit all internal communications channels – involve staff in the audit to get their views. Introduce a team briefing channel to help do this and create a link between staff and SMT. - G7 lead for stakeholder engagement – work across CCS to help develop stakeholder mapping and engagement principles for Business Partner Teams and communications team - Audit and evaluate events participated in and recommend events to commit to for next 12 months - Recruit digital communications specialists and develop digital strategy that will support	- Evidence through stakeholder and reputation survey - Repeat internal comms audit in 12 months to see what has improved. 2015 events grid – aligned with communications objectives and stakeholder strategy - Review digital access/maturity by customer groups. - Refresh stakeholder engagement approach for wider public sector

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	engagement and communications objectives. • Continue with the development of brand work and templates. Get a professional look and feel to all products – Customer Charter needs review and professional design before it is rolled out.	