GCS Leadership Framework
May 2020

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Foreword

As a profession, the Government Communication Service (GCS) cannot afford to stand still, it must continually evolve. Science, technology and society are changing at an exciting and rapid pace. As well as excellence in our professional and technical communication skills, we need excellent leadership to meet these challenges. As a part of our improvement programme, GCS2020, we are creating new tools, models and processes to ensure that we are fit for the future.

We already have established technical competencies for our recruitment and development of people across all grades and disciplines. However, until now, there has been less focus on the strengths and behaviours of GCS professionals – **how** we think and **how** we deliver, not just **what** we do. For me, this is just as important an aspect of leadership. It is not just technically knowing what to do, but also ensuring that you support and bring out the best of those you work with.

I believe that we lead at every level. We all have a responsibility to be leaders and to demonstrate the leadership behaviours set out in the Civil Service Leadership Statement; to be inspiring, confident and empowering. Each of us will have our own examples of great leadership in mind, whether it is somebody you know at work or somebody you have seen in the news or world leadership space. But whoever you aspire to emulate, it is likely that they demonstrate these three characteristics in one way or another.

Our new leadership framework builds on this to set out what great communication leadership looks like. We set out that we want our leaders to be strong strategic thinkers, creative, collaborative, connected and ultimately trusted. Wherever you are in your career, these strengths will support you to build on your leadership capability and progress and develop in line with your goals.
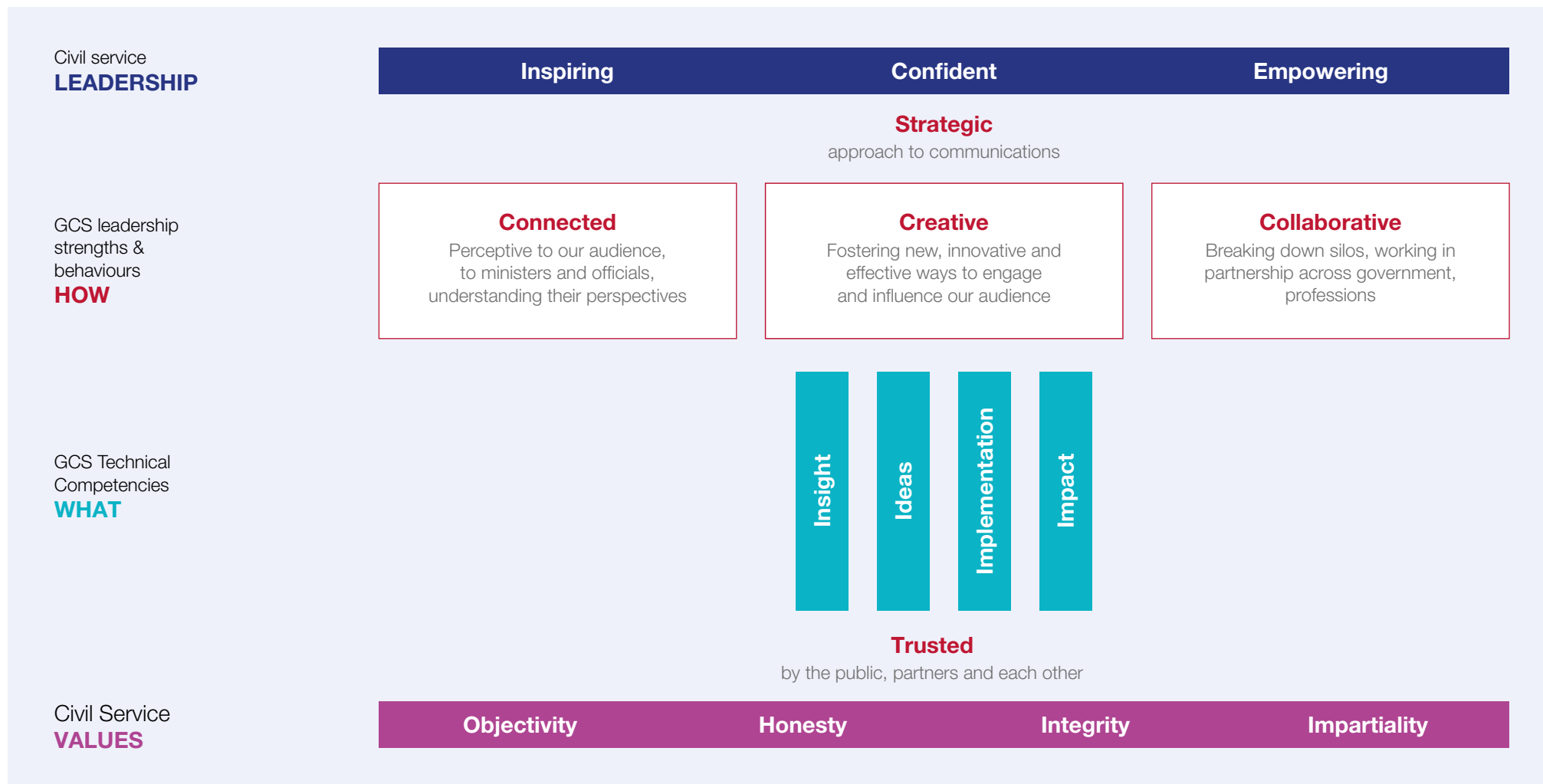
Alex Aiken
Executive Director of GCS

GCS Leadership Framework Summary

GCS2020 Government Communication Leadership Framework

Civil service
LEADERSHIP

Inspiring	Confident	Empowering

Strategic
approach to communications

GCS leadership
strengths &
behaviours
HOW

Connected
Perceptive to our audience,
to ministers and officials,
understanding their perspectives

Creative
Fostering new, innovative and
effective ways to engage
and influence our audience

Collaborative
Breaking down silos, working in
partnership across government,
professions

GCS Technical
Competencies
WHAT

Insight Ideas Implementation Impact

Trusted
by the public, partners and each other

Civil Service
VALUES

Objectivity	Honesty	Integrity	Impartiality

How to use the GCS leadership framework

Strategic thinking is at the heart of good communications. We deliver the priorities of the Government by understanding the most effective ways to influence within the resources that we have, making deliberate choices to provide the most effective outcomes for the public benefit. We consider the big picture, including the social and political context, being flexible and responsive to a rapidly changing world and understanding the changing needs of our audiences.

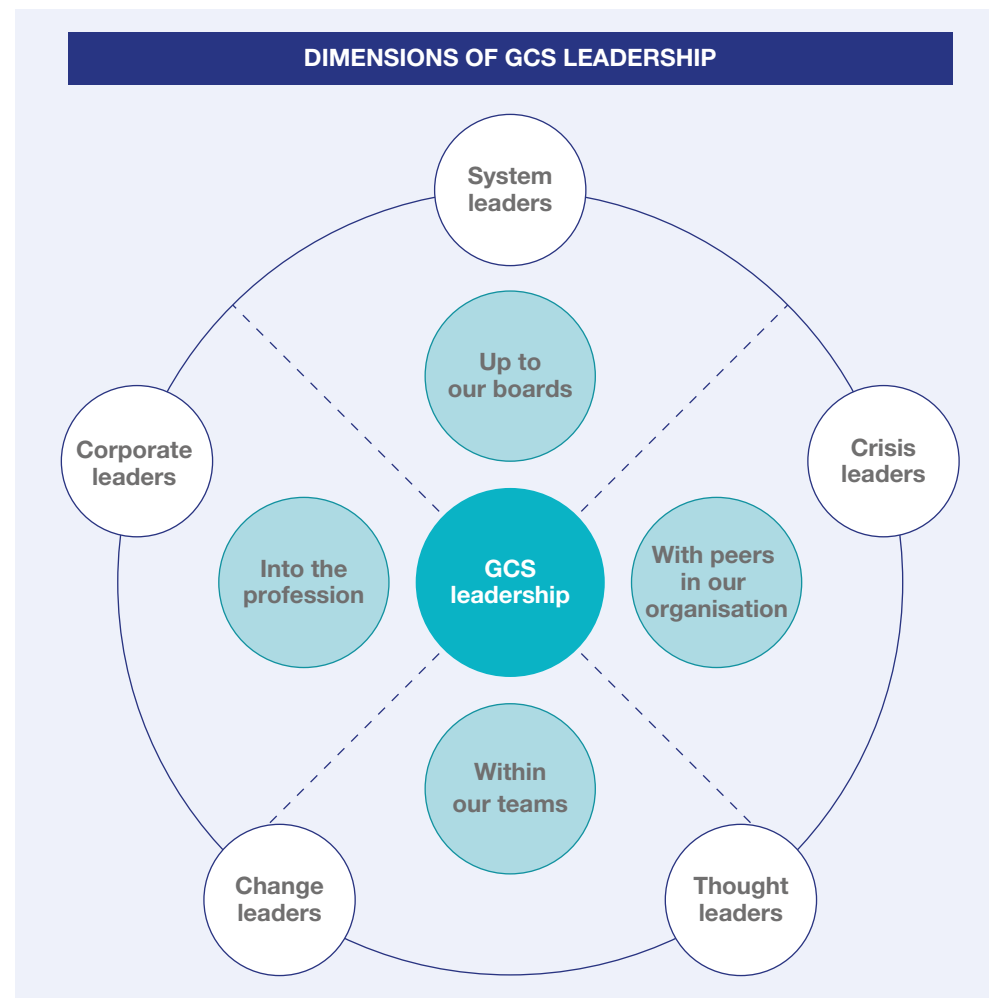Government Communications professionals at all levels also need to:

Be connected and perceptive to our audiences, understand their perspective using research, behavioural science and emotional intelligence. We will listen to, understand and interpret the needs and priorities of our audience from a range of diverse backgrounds.

Be creative in finding new, innovative and effective ways to engage and influence our audience. We will foster an environment that supports bold and courageous communications, encouraging teams to continually push the boundaries of creativity.

Be collaborative with one another and work in partnership across government and professions, as well as with our partners and audience. We will take collective responsibility and have clear accountability throughout, taking an audience-based approach to our communications.

Ultimately, we want to **be trusted** by the public, our stakeholders, ministers, officials and each other. We will deliver authoritative, credible and honest communications, using our public-facing position to help build and maintain trust and confidence in the government.

GCS leadership is not just within your team or organisation but has a range of dimensions.

DIMENSIONS OF GCS LEADERSHIP

System leaders · Up to our boards · Crisis leaders · Corporate leaders · Into the profession · GCS leadership · With peers in our organisation · Change leaders · Within our teams · Thought leaders

Who should use the government communication leadership framework

This framework is for leadership at all levels, across all roles, grades and communications disciplines.

GCS professionals should aspire to demonstrate all these strengths, and they should be considered an essential part of any appointments and/or promotions. This is particularly relevant to senior leaders focusing on securing the right people, developing the right strategy and, critically, creating the right culture.

Using the framework to help recruit, train, develop, appraise performance and set goals for yourself and your staff

For example:

- Use the framework for recruitment – test the strengths in interviews as part of the blended success profile approach to interviewing

- On the job learning – finding opportunities in your day to day work that allow you to practice doing things differently. This may involve changing jobs in order to get the development opportunities you need

- Stretch assignments – signing up for new activities, projects or assignments that allow you to stretch yourself and develop new skills and behaviours

- Feedback – seek formal or informal feedback from a range of stakeholders on the areas that you are developing (your manager, direct reports, peers or customers)

- Learning from role models – identify people who are excellent at the things you want to develop. Observe them (perhaps by job shadowing) and reflect on what you can learn from the way they do things. Ask them questions to help you understand what they do and ask for feedback on your behaviour

- Coaching or mentoring – seeking a coach or mentor who can help you reflect on your leadership journey

- Leadership workshops and training – through civil service learning or GCS for example

- Widen your network – for example by working on a cross-government GCS project, attending communication industry events or seminars

- Get involved in a project that requires you to engage with the big picture and the longer-term strategy

- Look for opportunities to learn how things are done outside the civil service so you can bring into new ideas to your work.

1. Strategic

Strategic thinking is at the heart of good communications. In an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world, GCS professionals need to make sense of this complexity while maintaining a focus on the bigger picture, and to place things in their wider political and social context. They will need to be flexible and responsive to their environment, knowing that priorities can change, while also setting a clear and consistent long-term direction and destination for government communications and prioritising their resources to focus effectively.

Examples of strategic behaviours:

- Shaping the communication priorities of your department, external audiences and the wider government, and prioritising your resources to achieve those objectives

- Agreeing and communicating your long-term goal, and keeping this in mind when making decisions on day-to-day priorities

- Understanding the inter-dependencies between policy, operations and communication, and translating complicated policy and operational challenges into a key message or call to action

- Diagnosing and addressing sensitive and complex problems, and using strategic communications to help solve them.

Case study

Rebecca Thould
Head of Marketing Department for Education

" I oversee marketing for a range of technical education qualifications including T levels and apprenticeships. Looking at the audience insight, it was clear that young people and parents do not consider their choices after GCSE in isolation and need to understand how technical routes compare with their other options, including academic qualifications. I knew we had to take a more strategic approach to our communications to achieve the desired outcome and help our target audiences to make sense of the complex landscape of post 16 choices.

I recognised that this was a strategic leadership challenge that would mean we needed to adopt an audience-led, rather than an individual policy-led, approach to communications. I set out a clear plan of how we could deliver this project and identified the resources needed to deliver the end goal.

I used audience insight to influence communications leaders, policy leads, ministers and the wider team to make the case for an umbrella strategy to communicate post 16 choices and frame campaigns to drive take up of T Levels and apprenticeships. The first step has been to create some collateral to support information, advice and guidance through schools and careers advisers, which has tested extremely well with audiences, and the project is gaining momentum. "

2. Connected

Building a strong connection with our audience is crucial if we want to be responsive and ensure that their perspectives form the heart of public service communications. Those audiences are increasingly polarised and fragmented, so GCS leaders need to be perceptive and use a number of tools – including research, behavioural science and emotional intelligence – to understand, interpret and influence a diverse range of needs and priorities. They need to build these connections from the inside out, developing strong personal and strategic relationships with their own colleagues and stakeholders, as well as wider audiences.

Examples of connected behaviours:

- Building relationships with a broad range of people from different backgrounds and levels, both within and external to Government, seeking multiple perspectives to improve thinking and bring the audience needs into designing communications

- Actively building teams with different skill sets and experiences to solve problems; creating a culture that encourages diverse thinking and variety – a fusion[1] approach

- Making time to listen to staff, audiences and stakeholders on the ground; utilising all insight channels to understand the public mood and dominant narratives to ensure that our communications resonate

- Understanding that human choices are often emotional rather than rational; designing communications to resonate with the heart and head to move people.

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1 The fusion doctrine, National Security Council Review 2018 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-capability-review-nscr)

Case study

Steve Fairman

Head of Internal Communications and Engagement, Food Standards Agency

" In my experience, being connected is a vitally important part of leadership in government communications. If I'm getting it right, it means I'm listening to what my team, my organisation, stakeholders and audiences are saying – not just with their words but with their behaviours. This gives me the best insight to tell stories that will resonate.

The idea of being connected is truly tested when we're under pressure. That's when things can break down quickly if you aren't using the insight and knowledge you have in an effective way. For instance, we know that a large percentage of our staff work from home or are based in operational settings – so in a crisis how we do we engage with them in the best way? How do we help them to feel a part of a collective effort? We create opportunities for them to be heard. We ask things. We listen. We measure and test again. It's dynamic and challenging but it unlocks so much that we can use to make things even better for everyone. It's the role of internal communications to join the dots across the organisation, which is the very essence of connectedness.

From a team perspective, by getting to know my colleagues professionally, and personally, I can encourage us to all bring the best versions of ourselves to our work. Sometimes these kind of connections can't be measured but the rewards show themselves in different ways. Being connected, and staying connected, is hard work but it's the best work we do. "
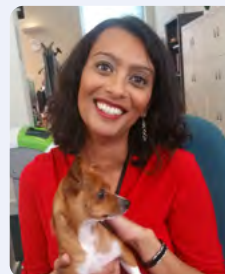
3. Creative

The best communicators look for new and creative ways to engage, influence their audience and solve problems. As channels continue to proliferate and the public becomes increasingly discerning about the media landscape, GCS leaders need to foster an environment that encourages teams to be bold and courageous in their communications. They should empower teams to push the boundaries of creativity and solve complex challenges through managed risks, as well as tried-and-tested methods, innovating and adopting the latest game-changing approaches from across the industry.

Examples of creative behaviours:

- Committing time and resource to trialling new techniques, communications solutions, platforms and channels to solve problems
- Accepting mistakes, and diligently learning from them, emulating the 'fail-fast' culture of start-ups
- Using creative leadership techniques e.g. divergent and convergent thinking
- Encouraging challenge and creating a safe space for experimentation where all colleagues can cultivate creative ideas
- Using practical solutions to foster creative environments, such as online collaboration spaces; 'play time' initiatives used by start-ups; using a percentage of the campaign budget to test innovative approaches; and flexible and inclusive working patterns.

Case study

Minaxi Henegan
Head of Strategic Campaigns, HMRC

" To keep engaging with our audiences and achieve cut-through we need to get more creative with our communications. That's why we've set up the Creative Hub at HMRC.

The Hub is about generating innovation and creativity, being on the front foot through horizon scanning and presenting communications solutions to business problems. It brings together creative minds and skillsets from across different teams, including PR and consumer marketing, design, audio-visual, digital and social media.

This is a new way of working and I'm creating a safe and collaborative environment to foster creativity and help the team break out of the 'normal' ways of working. Part of my approach is giving the team time and space to get curious, work together to think about the audience and data, bounce ideas off each other and build ideas. The team has licence to be bold. If an idea is risky, it's our job to help manage and mitigate the risks.

With the team spread across the UK, we're using online collaborative spaces and video conferencing facilities to make sure that location isn't a barrier.

This is an exciting time. Through the Hub we are exploring and piloting new ideas, learning quickly, sharing and putting these learnings into practice. "

4. Collaborative

GCS professionals work best when they work together, solving problems in a truly cross-government operation. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has been defined by an unprecedented and hugely disruptive level of digital innovation, and communicators will only respond to this challenge effectively if they break down silos and collaborate at all levels, bringing different teams, departments and the wider Civil Service together behind one goal. We should take collective responsibility and have clear accountability throughout this process, while looking to build relationships across the wider industry to bring in new ideas, learning and expertise from outside the Government.

Examples of collaborative behaviours:

- Working with others to identify shared communication challenges across systems and prioritising the best outcome for the audience over narrow team or departmental objectives
- Recognising differences and understanding creative tension to overcome barriers and find where objectives align
- Bringing a broad range of people together in mixed teams from different disciplines, and encouraging cross-system working and knowledge-sharing within and between departments and partners
- Asking who is 'not' in the room, and making sure other voices are heard to improve effectiveness
- Bringing ideas and learning from outside the government to enhance performance.

Case study

Karen Clubbe
Insight and Strategy Campaign Lead, DWP

"It's difficult to envisage any type of successful communications without inclusive and collaborative leadership.

In my campaign role, my starting point is to explore a problem or challenge by consulting with a 'virtual team' of colleagues, taking an audience-focused approach. This includes drawing together external affairs, press office, digital and internal specialists.

It's also equally important to look outwards to analysts, project portfolio managers, policy and operations leads.

Different voices bring different perspectives and promote valuable knowledge sharing. I've been able to produce more nuanced strategies using this approach, both for national paid and localised no/low cost campaigns.

Recently, by reaching outside of communications, I've been able to learn a lot more about programme risk management. I've folded this into our campaign governance. As a communications team this is enabling us to be more closely aligned with our internal stakeholders and strengthen our credibility.

Sharing learnings and insights from varied sources is incredibly important to continuing to grow our communications capabilities. Being open to peer reviews and objectively scrutinising our evidence base and outcomes will enable us to continue to respond effectively to the many and varying challenges ahead."

5. Trusted

As the custodians of public trust, GCS professionals have a duty to deliver authoritative, credible and honest communications. This is increasingly important in the current climate, which has seen a decline in trust in the institution of government and the media alongside a rise in misinformation and fake news. GCS professionals need to foster trusted relationships within their own teams, provide trusted counsel to boards and ministers, and feel able to speak truth to power while holding themselves to the highest professional and ethical standards in their public communications.

Examples of trusted behaviours:

- Demonstrating confidence and professional expertise to internal clients and external partners to be seen as credible and trusted
- Using insight and evidence to build trust in our advice; sharing strategies to ensure that others understand what you are trying to achieve
- Taking accountability: doing what you say you will, and telling people if you have responded to their feedback
- Owning mistakes and failings; identifying processes to ensure we are learning from them
- Building relationships that allow us to be honest and frank with colleagues and stakeholders; demonstrating active listening and understanding their motivations and concerns and sharing yours, as appropriate.

Case study

George Kotschyn
Deputy Head of News
Department for Transport

" Earning and maintaining the trust of your colleagues, your team, senior stakeholders and the public, is one of the most important parts of being an effective leader in the Government Communication Service. We are at the forefront of building trust and confidence with the public.

In my role, it is vital that members of my team feel I will always honour my commitments to them, treat them fairly, take their opinions into account and offer support. Equally, senior figures – from communications colleagues to ministers – need to know that they can rely on me to provide trusted advice and help deliver against their priorities.

The other side of building trust as a leader is setting and maintaining a culture of high standards for the accuracy and credibility of your team's work – something which is of paramount importance in government communications. At a time when public trust in politicians has reached an all-time low, it has never been more important to ensure that our output is authoritative, reliable and factually correct.

I underline the importance for this in my team, stressing the need for colleagues to go through a rigorous fact-checking process with policy experts on all communications materials being produced to make sure they are trustworthy. "

How we developed this framework

We conducted an analysis of the academic evidence and carried out quantitative and qualitative research within the Civil Service. Our research included interviews with Civil Service leaders, leading academics and quantitative research across 4,500 GCS members, 100 civil servants and 100 new GCS recruits. We tested the framework with Directors of Communications, ALB communication leaders, Inspire graduates who did a leadership master class, and over 50 GCS members across grades, disciplines and geographic locations.

The five strengths we have identified are underpinned by academic research. For example, between 2016-18 the **University of Huddersfield** conducted a two-year research project to create a **global capability framework for public relations and communication management** that identified communications, organisational and professional capabilities.[2] The top capabilities under these categories respectively are being able to:

- align communication strategies with organisational purpose and values is the top communication capability;

- facilitate relationships and build trust with internal and external stakeholders and communities; and

- provide valued counsel and be a trusted advisor.

In addition, the **Chartered Institute of Public Relations' annual State of the Profession report** has explored the trends, issues and challenges facing public relations in 2019. It is the largest and most statistically robust investigation of its kind. It found that for senior communications professionals the attributes most valued by recruiters are: strategic thinking (91%), problem solving (48%) and emotional intelligence (41%).[3]

We are confident that cultivating these strengths will ensure that the GCS has leaders who can confront our biggest challenges head on in 2020 and beyond. The model aims to capture those strengths and behaviours considered core for all communications professionals which are aligned with, and mutually supportive of, the Civil Service Leadership attributes (inspiring, confident, empowering) and civil service values (honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity).

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2   hud.ac/ect

3   https://cipr.co.uk/CIPR/Our_work/Policy/CIPR_State_of_the_Profession_2019_20.aspx

Further reading and evidence

Strategic

Model:

The Communications Management Standard (CMS) is the mark of communications professionalism worldwide. Created by the PRCA, it is based on ISO 9001 and Investors In People, with criteria tailored specifically to the needs of in-house PR and communications teams. The model contains benchmarks for good practice, which includes providing "clearly defined responsibilities" and basing planning "on a clear view of your organisation's strategic plan, marketplace or policy issues, potential and direction".[4]

Book:

Strategic Public Relations Leadership, Anne Gregory and Paul Willis.

Reports:

University of Huddersfield global capability framework for public relations and communication management.[5]

CIPR annual state of the profession report.[6]

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4 https://www.prca.org.uk/about-us/communications-management-standard-cms/house-cms

5 hud.ac/ect

6 https://cipr.co.uk/CIPR/Our_work/Policy/CIPR_State_of_the_Profession_2019_20.aspx

Connected

Book:

   Emotional agility: get unstuck, embrace change and thrive in work and life, by Susan David.

Blog:

   As the World's Leadership Crisis Drags On, Research Points to the Cure,[7] by Rod Cartright.

Reports:

   The COO as pacesetter,[8] by Arthur W Page society. This report includes a number of interesting concepts for GCS leadership, for example:

   The changing global environment: "As we near the third decade of the 21st century, the landscape of business, society and public communications is being reshaped by new technologies; by new business models; by falling barriers to entry; by geographic, demographic, socioeconomic and political shifts; and by rising stakeholder expectations. Above (and underlying) all, our world is being reinvented by the phenomenon of data, both its application for greater knowing and its weaponization for mischief and profit."

   Progression path (Page 45 to 51) outlines the pathways to defining and communicating the desired culture based on the research Page has carried out. It supports the actions that GCS is taking to develop our leadership framework, the refinement of our internal brand, and some of the other GCS2020 actions. It also outlines some suggested KPIs that would be useful to reflect in a relevant document. You will see that GCS is between the 'Pathfinder' and 'Pacesetter' in the progression path.

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7   https://www.ketchum.com/leadership-communication-monitor-2013/

8   https://knowledge.page.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CCO_as_Pacesetter_2019_Page_Research_Executive_Summary.pdf

Creative

Watch:

David Marquet on Greatness.[9]

Reports:

How creative leaders live in paradox, by THNK School of Creative Leadership

USC Annenberg's 2017 Global Communications Report, for the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management, found that: "When asked what personal traits they felt were critical for the future, industry leaders ranked traditional values of teamwork (92%) and hard work (82%) near the top of the list but they believe their teams are already strong in these areas. They say more horsepower is needed in curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking."

GCS Blog:

Want a more creative team? Blog post by GCS leader Sara Vogt.

Collaborative

Reports:

5 trends in leading-edge communications, GCS, 2018.

Communications Professionals: Four Lessons In Leadership, Forbes, 2019.

The fusion doctrine,[10] National Security Council Review 2018. The fusion doctrine starts with strategy and fuses capabilities to maximise collective effect. It is Mark Sedwill's initiative to deliver strategy-led design of policy and planning.

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9   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqmdLcyES_Q

10 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-capability-review-nscr

Trusted

Reports:

Edelman trust barometer 2019. This found a lack of meaningful engagement between the government and the public, with 59 percent of respondents saying the UK government fails to listen to people like them.

Ipsos Mori's 2019 veracity of truth index says that only 17 percent of people trust government ministers.

Quote:

Christina Clinton, Christina Clinton Coaching, for the PRCA said; the secret sauce when creating a communications team culture is "when a leader can create an environment of trust, safety, truth, and feedback that leads to radical success – basically your team knows you have their back and this gives them confidence to take ownership, risks and innovate."[11]

Blog:

Debra Davenport, Purdue University's Brian Lamb School of Communication, in her blog **Five Traits of Effective Leadership: A Guide for Communication Professionals**, says; "A willingness to be open, straightforward, and forthcoming with information is essential for organizational wellness and positive public perception. Employees and audiences alike lose trust very quickly if they sense any level of subterfuge – and that trust can be extremely difficult to regain once it's been compromised."[12]

Book:

Jim Macnamara, **Creating an 'architecture of listening' in organizations.**

Further suggested reading on communication leadership is available on the GCS website.

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11 https://www.prca.org.uk/What-does-a-Leader-Leader-Culture-look-like

12 https://cla.purdue.edu/academic/communication/graduate/online/five-traits-of-effective-leadership-for-communication-professionals.html