

Behavioural Insights Team

Evidence Report

**Literature review and semi-structured interviews to
support the establishment of the Centre for Public
Service Leadership**

August 2018

Definitions used in this Report

Term	Definition
Leadership	Setting organisational direction, aligning relevant actors and influencing others to move in that direction. ¹ It differs from management in its focus on change. ²
Leaders	Senior leaders of public service organisations including positions equivalent to chief and senior executives (for example, the top 2-3 layers of an organisation).
Public services	For this paper, covers entities involved in the delivery of public services: the National Health Service, education, public administration (especially local authorities), other health and social work, police, HM Forces and public construction. ³ The scope of this study includes public, private and third sector organisations. It excludes political leadership and, due to initiatives that are already underway, the Civil Service.
Networking	Interacting with others, normally external to the organisation, to exchange information and develop professional contacts.
Coaching	Form of learning driven by one-to-one conversations aimed to improve the capabilities of a leader. Generally focused on day-to-day activities.
Mentoring	In a voluntary arrangement, a more experienced or knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or knowledgeable person. Generally focused on career decisions and broader skills.
Public service productivity growth	The delivery of improved public service outcomes (e.g. student achievement, lower mortality) for the same or lower inputs.

Baseline findings

- Effective public service leaders are associated with improved organisational productivity and employee wellbeing
- Effective public service leaders drive performance, set clear expectations of their team, establish a shared vision for the organisation, work collaboratively internally and across the community, embody integrity and authenticity and create a culture that sustains productivity and wellbeing
- Interventions to develop leaders *can* work but they must account for culture and context, offer practical insights and focus on behaviour change. They should also be evaluated in the context of the UK public service
- Public service leaders want the Centre for Public Service Leadership to act as a central hub for evidence on best-practice leadership and involve peer learning alongside training and development

Interventions to develop leaders

- There is good evidence for the effectiveness of structured leadership development programmes that utilise a best-practice training curriculum, peer learning, feedback, coaching and behavioural insights
- Peer learning interventions that are cross-industry, revolve around site visits and involve significant discussion show success in the private sector
- Feedback (including positive feedback from the community) is associated with individual engagement and organisational outcomes
- There is directional evidence on the positive impact of mentoring, coaching, mindfulness training and senior team development especially on individual outcomes. More evidence is required for their impact on leader and organisational performance
- We suggest the Centre for Public Service Leadership experiment with building, and evaluating, a toolkit of the specific habits and skills of effective public service leaders

Executive summary

Public service leaders are accountable for delivering vital services, adapting organisations to change and achieving organisational outcomes. Their job is not easy. The scale of decisions, changing technology, requirements for efficiency and demand for better services place them under considerable stress.

In Autumn 2017, the Government announced the creation of a Taskforce to advise on the role, remit and responsibilities of a new Centre for Public Service Leadership. The Centre will aim to further develop leadership in UK public services.

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) was commissioned to conduct a rapid literature review and 50 interviews with public service leaders on effective leaders. The Centre for Public Service Leadership Taskforce requested BIT conduct a short research project to:

- understand whether leaders impact public service performance;
- provide a clear definition of effective public service leaders;
- understand what we know (and don't know) about effective public service leaders; and
- provide a view on the support that leads to the development of effective public service leaders.

The literature and interviews led to five conclusions.

1. Effective public service leaders are associated with improved organisational productivity and employee wellbeing.

Correlational and causal studies find a positive organisational impact associated with the presence of effective public service leaders.⁴ Critiques question the link between leaders and productivity especially after controlling for context.⁵ However, we conclude the weight of evidence, including randomised controlled trials focused on improving management and leaders, suggests the presence of effective public service leaders is associated with improved organisational performance and employee wellbeing.

The real questions relate to when leaders are most effective and how effective developing leaders is relative to other interventions that could improve productivity. On when, we suggest leaders are a core requirement whenever significant change is needed in an organisation. A report on school leadership claims that no documented instances of school turnarounds exist without the catalyst of an effective leader.⁶ In terms of relative effectiveness, leaders matter. One study of a services firm found replacing a poor team leader with a good one increased productivity by 13%⁷ whilst a structured programme of peer learning for leaders in the private sector increased revenue by 8.1%.⁸

Despite evidence on the association between leaders and organisational performance, we note public services operate in dynamic systems influenced by wider factors such as governance, pay and reward, learning and development and recruiting.⁹ We conclude these factors are necessary but, like the presence of leaders, insufficient conditions on their own for sustained organisational success. Instead, they must be combined with effective leaders, especially during periods of change, to help public services perform.



2. Effective public service leaders drive performance, set clear expectations of their team, establish a shared vision for the organisation, work collaboratively internally and across the community, embody integrity and authenticity and create a culture that sustains productivity and wellbeing.




A core finding from the literature is no one dominant framework exists for defining effective public service leadership.^{10,11} For example, within a sample of 129 articles, more than 20 theories of leadership were identified.¹² Further, the literature has weaknesses because of its reliance on the North American context and predominantly male samples.¹³

Despite definitional and sample problems, a broad approach to effective public service leadership does emerge in the literature. This suggests effective public service leaders drive performance, set clear expectations of their team, establish a shared vision for the organisation, work collaboratively internally and across the community and embody integrity and authenticity.¹⁴ These styles are informed by an overall culture that sustains productivity and wellbeing.¹⁵

Table 1 shows the leader styles and behaviours that emerge from the literature. The literature and interviews suggest effective leaders adapt their style and behaviour to suit the context of their organisation. Analysis on UK headteachers, for instance, found heads of high achieving schools demonstrated multiple styles whilst heads from 'special measures' schools focus on a single transactional approach.¹⁶

Table 1: Effective public service leader styles and behaviours

Leader styles		Example behaviours
	Drives performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on performance and results • Puts in place clear plans for staffing, processes, reporting and budgeting • Creates high expectations for performance
	Ensures clear expectations, rewards performance and monitors mistakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on team and giving them the tools they need • Ensure structured team processes to manage time constraints and efficiency • Rewards achievement and monitors mistakes

Leader styles		Example behaviours
	Sets a shared vision and future direction whilst inspiring the team to achieve change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets and articulates vision and future direction • Role models expected behaviours • Coaches and develops individuals and teams • Helps team find meaning in their work • Seeks new ways of working / thinking
	Works across the community and shares power between and within organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides teams with the means to self-manage • Shares power internally and externally • Cooperates with other actors in the community • De-emphasises the role of leader and individuals to focus on the wider network
	Embodies integrity and authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pays close attention to the intent of individuals, the proper means for doing good and appropriate ends • Demonstrates integrity showing honesty, trustworthiness, fairness and conscientiousness • Shows vulnerability and takes time to know and manage themselves

Behaviours that drive performance, ensure clear expectations and create a clear vision are most tested in the literature - to positive effect. Evidence for newly defined leader behaviours, such as working across systems, is emerging but impressive. In a recent example, a community partnership between the health service, police and local government in Cardiff led to a significant reduction in violent injury in the community.¹⁷

Whilst Table 1 offers a useful framework for developing a broad leadership approach, a general weakness of the public leader literature is it often leaves practitioners confused about the specific steps for success.¹⁸

Professor Robert Wood suggests leaders should focus on four areas of influence: what they do, what they say, how they establish systems and processes and how they define culture and teamwork.¹⁹ This framework could offer a practical framework when combined with evidence on leader styles and behaviours from Table 1.

Observational evidence suggests there may be specific habits and skills of effective public service leaders. An unpublished analysis of more than 150 headteachers in the US suggests having three individuals who act as 'lifelines' during challenges and taking time to renew (and turn off the phone at the end of a day) are associated with longevity in position.²⁰ A study of 411 leaders of UK academies finds skills and experiences such as economics degrees and time in the private sector are associated with better headteachers.²¹ Given this emerging evidence the Centre for Public Service Leadership could, whilst acknowledging the diversity of experiences in the public service, experiment with building, and evaluating, a toolkit of the specific habits and skills of effective public service leaders.

3. Interventions to develop leaders *can* work but they must account for context, offer practical insights and focus on behaviour change. They should also be evaluated to *make sure* they work in the context of the UK public service.

Table 2 summarises interventions with good evidence in the literature. This includes correlational studies and at least two randomised controlled trials in a generalisable context.

Table 2: Good observational and causal studies of intervention

Intervention	Description
Leader development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership training with an emphasis on overall development, a strong evidence-based curriculum and implemented well within the context and culture of the organisation is associated with better organisational performance
Peer learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured peer learning among leaders – where leaders meet other leaders and actively share lessons and challenges from their experiences in formalised meetings - increases productivity in the private sector Causal evidence is required to understand specific impact of peer learning in UK public services
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance management and feedback is associated with increased presence of leadership in public service Feedback from beneficiaries enhances the impact of leadership performance Feedback can backfire if focused on weaknesses - caution is needed Further evidence is required to understand the best methods of feedback to improve leadership in the UK public service

There is directional evidence on the positive impact of mentoring, coaching, mindfulness training and senior team training, especially on individual outcomes, as shown in Table 3. More evidence is required for their impact on leaders and organisational performance. The underlying analysis would also benefit from further rigorous correlational studies and randomised controlled trials.

Table 3: Directional evidence for positive impact – more evaluation required

Intervention	Description
Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentoring programmes can increase profits in the private sector Mentoring is likely to work better when targeted at less experienced leaders Causal evidence is required to understand specific impact of mentoring in public services
Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak meta-analysis finds positive association between executive coaching and enhanced effectiveness of leaders Causal evidence is required to understand specific impact of coaching in UK public services
Mindfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mindfulness training is associated with improved individual outcomes such as lower stress and propensity for burn-out More evidence is required on impact of mindfulness training on leadership and organisational performance

Intervention	Description
Senior team development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observational studies show teams are more important than star performers for organisational performance • Possible leader training and development programmes should include team development • Causal evidence is required to understand impact of team development on leadership and organisational performance

Whilst an attempt is made to delineate interventions it is likely any programme will combine elements of all areas explored in Tables 2 and 3 to maximise success.

Despite evidence they can work, interventions to improve public service leaders fail when organisations²²:

- underestimate the importance of the leaders internal relationships and the organisation's culture;
- distance the intervention from the real problems faced by the organisation;
- do not grapple with the difficulty of behaviour change and closed mindsets; and
- do not test and adapt programmes based on evaluating what is working.

The Centre for Public Service Leadership must have a clear plan in each of these four areas to succeed.

4. Public service leaders want the Centre for Public Service Leadership to act as a central hub for evidence on best-practice leadership and involve peer learning alongside training and development.

Leaders emphasised the challenges of increased decision-making power, higher accountability, the risks of media scrutiny, navigating governance issues and the need to make more connections across the community when shifting to a chief executive role. For support, it was felt specific leadership programmes already exist in each service but they lack coordination and do not adequately share best practice. Interviews suggested there could be a central role for cross-service networking and peer learning (mentioned by 52% of interviewees), training and development (40%) and holding evidence and case studies on best-practice leadership (30%). A small minority also called for ways to demonstrate skills (for example, through a certificate) and better signposting of existing provision.

5. In summary, our review of the evidence and 50 interviews suggests a gap for a programme of cross-service, evidence-based and rigorously evaluated interventions to develop public service leaders.

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Introduction

The National Health Service helps one million patients every 36 hours²³, local authorities manage some 550,000 tonnes of household waste and more than 35,000 new requests for social care per week.²⁴ The Met Police in London responds to 830,000 offences every year²⁵ and HM Forces coordinates some 150,000 service personnel around the world.²⁶ At their best, the United Kingdom's public services impact millions of lives every day. Yet the job of public servants is not easy. The scale of decisions, changing technology, demands for efficiency, growing demand for better services and the pressures of an aging population place leaders and the systems they help govern under considerable stress.²⁷

Leaders of public service organisations are often those most responsible for delivering outcomes within our public services. They must be enabled and empowered to decide the best way to deliver results. However, despite a general acknowledgement of their importance, too little is known about what makes an effective public service leader and what measures the Government can pursue to increase the presence of effective public service leadership.

To grapple with this gap, the Chancellor announced the creation of the Centre for Public Service Leadership at Autumn Budget 2017. The Centre aims to be a centre of excellence; creating a framework for better collaboration between public and private sector leaders; driving standards of leadership training; and researching effective leadership interventions to improve public sector productivity.

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) was commissioned to support the Cabinet Office and Civil Service Human Resources (CSHR) conduct a rapid literature review and 50 interviews with public service leaders focused on defining effective public service leadership, understanding the impact of leaders and identifying interventions that help develop leaders.

In this Evidence Report, we present our findings to help inform the establishment of the Centre for Public Service Leadership. The Report has three sections. In **Section 1**, we establish the policy context and project objectives. In **Section 2**, we detail our methodology and in **Section 3** we present our findings.

1. Policy context and project objectives

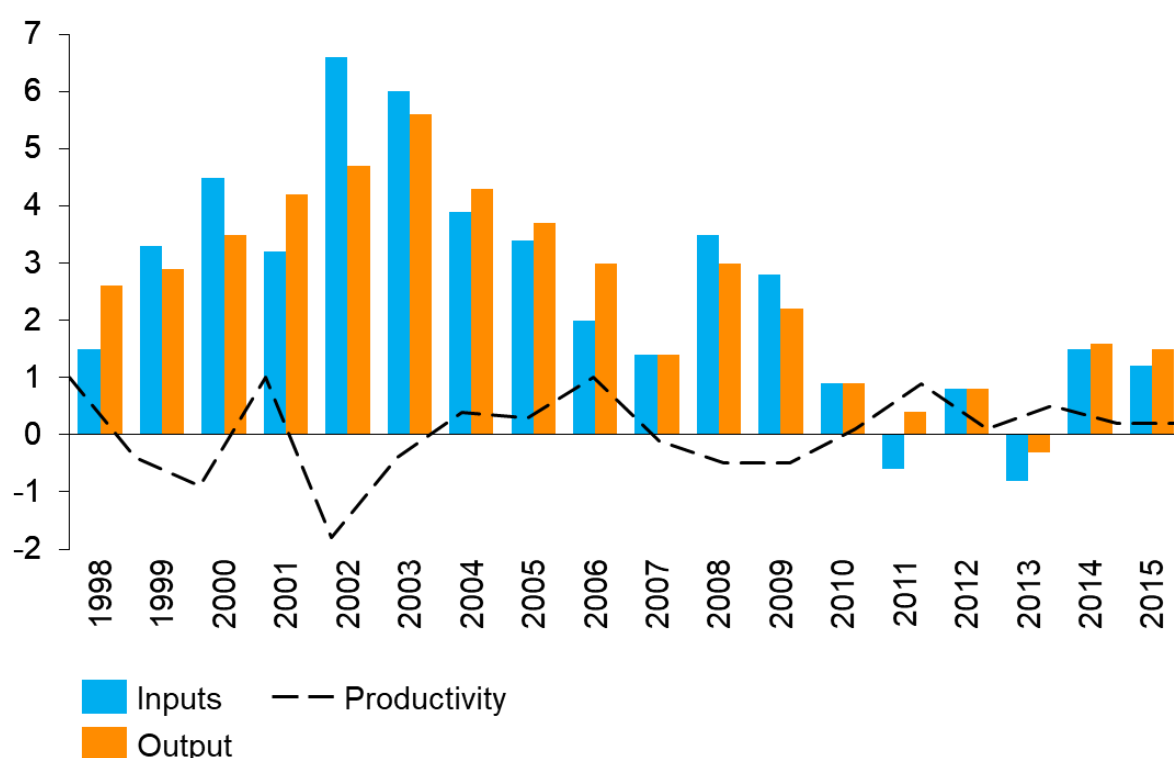
1.1 The policy context

Efficient and effective public services are vital for supporting a healthy, safe and educated community. The Government is seeking to maintain and improve the quality

of public services whilst meeting the challenges of controlling public expenditure and high-expectations on the standard of services.²⁸

Figure 1 presents productivity growth estimates for the UK's public services from 1998 to 2015. Inputs are measured as price expenditure on labour, goods and services. Outputs are the quantity of activities performed and services delivered. The estimates are open to interpretation but indicate that, though positive, productivity growth has been weak in recent years.

Figure 1: Total public service inputs, output and productivity growth rates, 1998 to 2015, UK²⁹



In the Autumn Budget 2017, the Government announced the creation of a Taskforce to advise on the role, remit and responsibilities of a new Centre for Public Service Leadership to improve the standard of leadership in public services. The Taskforce was launched with the tagline 'great leadership is crucial for improving productivity'.³⁰

Whilst this Report - and the Taskforce - will focus on leaders, it forms part of a wider programme of work inside Government assessing ways to improve public service productivity. This includes Sir Michael Barber's Public Value Review.³¹ The Barber Review suggests the delivery of public value (and productivity growth) is tied to the capacity to:

- innovate and learn;

- plan and deliver;
- engage with the delivery chain;
- work across organisational boundaries;
- develop an effective workforce; and
- review performance data and evaluate impact.

The Framework includes specific questions related to leadership capability in public bodies. This is important because, as we shall find, whilst reforms that help leaders develop are crucial they must sit alongside wider reforms to deliver public value.

1.2 Project objectives

The Centre for Public Service Leadership Taskforce requested BIT conduct a short research project to:

- understand whether leaders impact public service performance
- provide a clear definition of effective public service leaders;
- understand what we know (and don't know) about effective public service leaders; and
- provide a view on the support that leads to the development of public service leaders.

For this Report, the public service covers entities involved in the delivery of public services: the National Health Service, education, public administration (especially local authorities), other health and social work, police, HM Forces and public construction.³² The scope of this study includes public, private and third sector organisations. It excludes political leadership and, due to initiatives that are already being undertaken, the civil service.

The group of interest for this Report are senior leaders of public service organisations including positions equivalent to chief and senior executives (for example, the top 2-3 layers of an organisation). Whilst leadership can be illustrated across an entire organisation, the Centre for Public Service Leadership will initially focus on developing senior leaders. Therefore, this Report focuses on evidence related to the development of senior public service leaders rather than a broader definition of organisational leadership that may apply across all layers of an organisation.

This was a discrete project focused on reviewing information from the academic literature and 50 interviews with public service leaders. It was agreed the following areas were out-of-scope for the review:

- market scan of the existing ecosystem of support for leaders;

- review of effective Civil Service leadership (our focus is on the delivery of public services);
- strategy for improving collaboration and sharing of best practice and standards;
- solutions to knowledge gaps identified by the literature review; and
- recommendations on the operating model of the Centre for Public Service Leadership.

BIT conducted a literature review as well as semi-structured interviews with 50 leaders in public services. In Section 2, we detail our methodology and explore findings from our review.

2. Methodology

Working with the Centre for Public Service Leadership Taskforce, we identified four research questions to guide our literature review and interviews:

- How do we define the behaviours of effective public service leaders?
- Can we understand when effective public service leaders are present?
- In what ways do effective public service leaders have an organisational impact?
- What are the specific forms of support and conditions that allow effective public service leaders to thrive?

2.1 Methodology for Literature Review

To understand conclusions from the literature, we conducted a review in three phases:

- **Phase 1:** consolidated existing evidence reviews and policy documents from BIT projects and drew on relevant Cabinet Office reports;
- **Phase 2:** focussed on a small number of the most relevant summary journals, databases and meta-analyses. Meta-analyses were identified through past research and Google Scholar; and
- **Phase 3:** time-limited review of the latest literature. We searched through high-quality (peer-reviewed) sources and the grey literature of market research, working papers and Government reports.

Our review of available information followed a rapid version of the methodology suggested for Government social research.³³ We sought papers that were high-quality, generalisable for the UK public service context and relevant to our questions. In total, we reviewed more than 200 academic papers, government reports and general literature.

2.2 Methodology for structured interviews

Sampling method

Our Cabinet Office partners provided BIT with interviewees using contacts in their network. Information about the project and a request for participants were sent to key organisations across eligible public services. Key contacts forwarded the information and request on to relevant organisations within their sector, including delivery organisations. BIT also used contacts in education and the NHS to identify additional leaders within these sectors.

Although not intended to be a statistically representative sample, we ensured that the 50 interviewees reflected the spread of different public services with respect to:

- geography;
- sectors;
- leadership role (leaders within the top 2-3 tiers of leadership within organisations); and
- variability (leaders with a range of experiences including high-performing organisations and those facing clear challenges).

Given the relatively small sample of interviews in comparison to the size of the public service workforce, our findings, whilst useful and indicative of sentiment, cannot be generalised to the full population of UK public service leaders. Appendix A provides a detailed summary of the regional and public service type characteristics of the final sample of 50 interviews.

Interview method

Interviews were conducted over the phone. They were semi-structured using an interview guide developed to answer the key research questions. The interview guide can be found in Appendix B. Interview length varied depending on the leader we were speaking to, and ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour.

3. Findings

We have five core findings from the literature and interviews:

1. Effective public service leaders are associated with improved productivity and employee wellbeing
2. Effective public service leaders drive performance, set clear expectations of their team, establish a shared vision for the organisation, work collaboratively internally and across the community, embody integrity and authenticity and create a culture that sustains productivity and wellbeing
3. Surveys, tied to organisational performance, are used to diagnose the presence of effective public service leaders
4. Interventions to develop leaders *can* work but they must account for culture and context, offer practical insights and focus on behaviour change. They should also be evaluated to make sure they work in the UK public service
5. Public service leaders want the Centre for Public Service Leadership to act as a central hub for evidence on best-practice leadership and involve peer learning alongside training and development

To ensure clarity, we define leaders as those setting organisational direction and influencing others to move in that direction.³⁴ Generally, leadership differs from management in its focus on change – both incremental and dramatic.³⁵ This was echoed in interviews. “Leadership to me is about making sure that you have a clear direction and bring in your team and the organisation along that journey. It is making change happen across teams, organisations, and communities to make a difference in people’s lives.” and “for me it’s about creating a context that feels positive, achievable and successful for people in a way that allows them to follow me...and try and make sure that things are better in the future.”

Before we explore our findings, we present three fictional but illustrative personas representing leaders we spoke to during our qualitative research: a well-performing service, a service struggling to meet targets and an organisation undergoing significant change. Since, all interviewees faced circumstances which were to some extent unique, these aim to illustrate some of the more generalisable aspects of the contexts in which leaders were operating and the challenges they face. The personas, presented in Figure 2, provide an entry point into our findings that we will describe in detail in the remainder of the report.

Figure 2: Personas from our interviews



Well-performing: Chief Constable, Police

Jane is a chief constable of a well-performing police force. She previously worked in the private sector.

Jane is careful to set a clear vision for her organisation and believes that leadership across all levels of the police force is important. She cares about staff wellbeing, as she understands how demanding their jobs are, but she is also able to be “robust” to manage poor performance and dissatisfaction. She applies lessons she learnt in the private sector to her role in the police force.

Jane thinks there is much on offer in terms of leadership programmes both within the police force as well as across different sectors. However, she thinks that more could be done in connecting agencies to share best practice or training programmes to improve efficiency and effectiveness.



Struggling to meet targets: Chief Executive, NHS

Mike is the chief executive of a large teaching hospital that is struggling to meet its performance targets. He has been a chief executive for nearly two decades in a number of different NHS organisations.

Mike believes in embodying the values of the organisation: putting patients first, taking ownership, being positive and striving for continuous improvement. In his current role, he is finding it challenging to constantly adapt to new national directives. Recently, he has come under intense public scrutiny for an issue related to a patient that he feels is beyond his control. He thinks that how chief executives are perceived and treated by both the media and the NHS is unacceptable.

Mike acknowledges that there is a lot of support on offer from the NHS Leadership Academy and NHS Improvement. However, he tends to rely on his personal network for challenge and advice on best practice.



Undergoing significant change: Chief Executive, Local Authority

Harish is the chief executive of a local authority that is attempting to drive a significant IT transformation programme.

He thinks that local authorities are becoming increasingly commercialised. He is grateful for his business qualification as he needs to have forensic insight into the finances of the organisation.

During the transformation programme, Harish has found it difficult to work with multiple organisations, achieve buy-in from a minority of staff who are resistant to change and ensure that his workforce have the required digital skills to adapt to technological changes. He is still relatively new in his current role and doesn't yet have strong relationships with his team and through the organisation.

Looking forward he wants to ensure his workforce makes use of new technologies and is keen to understand how the use of artificial intelligence will impact service provision. He makes use of internal support from his team, namely 2-3 trusted advisors, and attends events run by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

The personas in Figure 2 show the different contexts and organisational constraints that leaders must work with in the public service. They illustrate a single approach is unlikely to apply to all organisations. Instead, leaders must use multiple styles and behaviours whilst ensuring they pay attention to systems and processes, culture and other enablers in the organisation. These are themes we will explore as we consider our findings in the remainder of this section.

3.1 Effective public service leaders are associated with improved productivity and employee wellbeing

- The presence of effective public service leaders is associated with organisational performance
- Interviewees agreed on the positive impact of effective leaders whilst also highlighting the particularly destructive influence of poor leaders

The academic literature finds effective public service leaders are associated with increased organisational performance.³⁶ The greater debate surrounds *when* is it most effective and *how large* is its relative impact.

Survey and correlational studies suggest relationships between effective public service leaders and organisational performance, for example:

- a correlational study suggests a relationship between the presence of integrated leadership and federal programme performance;³⁷
- a study using qualitative interviews in Derby City Council suggested that leadership training had a positive impact;³⁸
- a correlational study suggested leadership training to Directors in the NHS had individual and organisational impact;³⁹
- a correlational study in the UK suggested a relationship between leadership, service performance and customer satisfaction in local government;⁴⁰ and
- a longitudinal study of a US federal sub agency finds improvements in leadership are positively associated with employee satisfaction and work quality.⁴¹

These studies are not causal and occur in different contexts. As such, caution is required interpreting their conclusions. However, they correspond with the weight of evidence that leadership matters for organisational outcomes. The work of Bloom and Van Reenen, and more recently the ONS, shows clear associations between management practices and improved productivity in both public services and the private sector. Management practices - which include elements of both leadership and management - highlighted include⁴²:

- **Targets:** sets targets that are linked to organisational goals, are time-defined and stretching;
- **Incentives:** promotes and rewards high performance, retains the best employees and tries to fix underperformance through training or firing;
- **Monitoring:** monitors activities and uses this information for continuous improvement; and
- **Operations:** uses modern processes, has a rationale for introducing new practices and pursues continuous improvement.

In education, higher management scores are positively correlated with better pupil outcomes.⁴³ Bloom *et al.* find a 'one standard deviation increase in our managerial index is associated with a 0.232 to 0.425 standard deviation increase' in examination-based pupil outcomes.⁴⁴ Further, they suggest governance and leadership (which they define as having a long-term strategy for a school) are core drivers of success. They find similar results for health.⁴⁵ Hospitals with high management scores have, on average, lower mortality results. In turn, the closer a hospital is to a university that offers both medical and business training, the higher, on average, its performance.⁴⁶ Bloom *et al.*'s work on public services mirrors their findings from the private sector. Based on Bloom *et al.*'s work, the ONS found, on a 0-1 scale, a 0.1 increase in management score is associated with a 9.6% increase in gross valued added per worker.⁴⁷

Reflecting the work of Bloom *et al.*, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing found effective leadership and management practices in NHS Trusts increases the likelihood of high patient satisfaction and improves staff outcomes.⁴⁸ Practices they identify include ensuring there are clearly defined roles, performance appraisals and staff involvement in decisions. When these are in place NHS Trusts are over three times more likely to have the lowest rates of staff sickness absence, over twice as likely to have the highest levels of job satisfaction and at least four times more likely to have the most satisfied patients compared to Trusts that make the lowest use of these practices. No link was found between management practices and patient mortality.

Data on the impact of effective leaders on organisational performance is supported by studies that show its impact on employees. Both randomised controlled trials (RCTs) – the gold-standard of evaluation – and quasi-experimental studies find a link between leadership interventions and employee engagement.⁴⁹ In turn, higher levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction and trust are associated with higher productivity.⁵⁰

Almost all interviewees endorsed the view that leaders impact almost every facet of an organisation, whether staff wellbeing, productivity or the external face of the organisation. Leaders saw their role as guiding the organisation, “it starts from the top” and “absolutely pivotal”. They believed they could have a significant impact.

It was felt in interviews that poor leaders might have even greater (negative) impact than good leaders. One chief executive of a services agency said “frankly some [leaders] have been appalling...have no idea about their own personal impact and they can throttle a whole organisation without much effort.” The chief executive of a charity similarly suggested “a bad leader has a much bigger impact than a good leader... they can actually pretty much single-handedly destroy the organisation.” This suggests an interesting role for the Centre for Public Services Leadership *could* be improving poor performers and not only already high-performing leaders. The Centre could develop an intensive programme to assist leaders and teams who are about to lead, or are leading, struggling organisations. Interviews suggest this could produce significant gains. However, ultimately we conclude evaluations should take place to understand which organisations and leaders benefit the most from the Centre’s programme.

Leaders are associated with organisational performance but they are not the only factor. We must be careful to avoid over attribution. Organisations are dynamic systems with overlapping structures, policies and processes.⁵¹ Learning and development, pay and reward, recruiting and progression, diversity and inclusion and access to wider resources will all influence organisational performance. Interviewees spoke of media scrutiny and financial constraints impacting their ability to lead. A recent study of the NHS, released whilst we were conducting research for this report, found little evidence that ‘top managers’ had any impact on hospital productivity.⁵² Further, studies have shown the experience of teams working together - rather than individuals - to be a core factor in performance.⁵³ Star performers in areas such as financial services take five years to regain performance when they switch firms *unless* they move with their team.⁵⁴ Longitudinal data suggests the cross-sectional studies prominent in the literature may overvalue the effect of leaders (despite their impact

remaining positive over time).⁵⁵ Despite these issues, a report on school leadership claims that no documented instances of school turnarounds exist without the catalyst of leaders driving change.⁵⁶ Indeed, given its importance, it is likely organisations underinvest in getting leadership right. Leaders are famously overconfident – Bloom and Van Reenen show UK managers overestimate their management scores – and often lack information on how to effectively intervene to improve leadership.⁵⁷ In summary, despite the importance of other factors, we suggest effective leaders will always be a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for organisational success.

3.2. Effective public service leaders drive performance, set clear expectations of their team, establish a shared vision for the organisation, work collaboratively internally and across the community, embody integrity and authenticity and create a culture that sustains productivity and wellbeing

- There is strong evidence for the effectiveness of leaders who drive performance, set clear expectations, create a shared vision and develop and inspire their team
- There is emerging but impressive evidence of the effectiveness of leaders working collaboratively internally and across the community and embodying integrity and authenticity
- The application of styles and behaviours associated with ensuring a clear vision and illustrating authenticity and integrity were most mentioned in interviews
- Leaders felt that their biggest impact was setting the culture of the organisation
- A fifth of interviews highlighted the importance of resilience but the theme, whilst promising, remains underdeveloped in the quantitative public leadership literature

3.2.1 Defining effective public service leadership

In the public administration literature, leadership is a central concept that remains subject to considerable debate.⁵⁸ A core finding from the literature is no one dominant framework exists for defining and assessing effective public service leadership.^{59,60} For example, within a sample of 129 articles, more than 20 distinct theories of leadership were identified.⁶¹






Within the diversity of literature, leadership theory and research generally focuses on three components of effective leaders: traits, competencies and behaviours.⁶² Traits refer to the personality of effective leaders.⁶³ This might include self-confidence, emotional maturity or high energy level. Competencies refers to management ability covering technical, conceptual and social skills. Finally, behaviours refers to the specific tasks leaders undertake such as planning, setting a vision and monitoring.⁶⁴

The causal effect of traits and competencies on leader effectiveness are not well tested in the literature.⁶⁵ Behaviours are explored in greater depth.

To ensure both rigour and practicality, this paper focuses on the styles and behaviours of effective leaders. As in the wider literature, it is difficult to provide specific and cohesive definitions of effective public service leader behaviours. However, there is a broad clustering of behaviours related to successfully driving performance, leading a wider team, setting a shared vision for the organisation, working across the community and embodying core values.⁶⁶ As baseline behaviours, all effective leaders apply their skills, learn from experience and understand context.⁶⁷ Effective leaders then flex through five styles (management-based, transactional, transformational, systems, ethical) depending on context and requirements of the organisations.⁶⁸

Table 4 presents the core theories that emerge from the literature in terms of public service leader styles and their corresponding behaviours.

Table 4: Styles and behaviours of public service leaders found in literature⁶⁹

Leader styles		Leadership behaviours
	Drives performance (<i>Management-based</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on performance and results • Puts in place clear plans for staffing, processes, reporting and budgeting • Creates high expectations for performance
	Ensures clear expectations, rewards performances and monitors mistakes (<i>Transactional</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on team and giving them the tools they need • Ensure structured team processes to manage time constraints and efficiency • Rewards achievement and monitors mistakes
	Sets a shared vision and future direction whilst inspiring the team to achieve change (<i>Transformational</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets and articulates vision and future direction • Role models expected behaviours • Coaches and develops individuals and teams • Helps team find meaning in their work • Seeks new ways of working / thinking
	Works across the community and shares power between and within organisations (<i>Systems</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides teams with the means to self-manage • Shares power internally and externally • Cooperates with other actors in the community • De-emphasises the role of leader and individuals to focus on the wider network
	Embodies integrity and authenticity (<i>Ethical</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pays close attention to the intent of individuals, the proper means for doing good and appropriate ends • Demonstrates integrity showing honesty, trustworthiness, fairness and conscientiousness • Shows vulnerability and takes time to know and manage themselves

Behaviours that drive performance, ensure clear expectations and set a shared vision and future direction are most tested in the literature - to positive effect.⁷⁰ Evidence for newly defined leader behaviours such as working across systems is emerging (see Figure 3) but impressive. In a recent example, a prototype community partnership between the health service, police and local government partners in Cardiff led to a significant reduction in violent injury in the community.⁷¹

Literature and interviews suggest effective leaders use these styles and behaviours as complements, adapting to suit the context of their organisation. Analysis on UK headteachers, for instance, suggests heads of high-achieving schools demonstrated multiple leadership styles whilst heads from 'special measures' schools only focus on a form of transactional leadership.⁷²

The styles and behaviours presented in Table 4 do not occur in isolation. They are informed by a culture that sustains productivity and wellbeing.⁷³ For instance, observational studies indicate leaders who create a cooperative culture are more likely to reap the productivity benefits of diversity in their teams.^{74,75,76,77} An in-depth study of effective culture or suggestion of a target culture is outside the scope of this report. However, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) identifies positive culture as, among other areas, honest, open and respectful whilst a toxic culture is arrogant, does not accept challenges, short-term focused and not transparent.⁷⁸

Figure 3: Examples of public service systems leaders in the field

Evaluations of 'systems-based' leadership remain scarce especially in the UK. We present five examples below from both the UK and other countries. In all approaches, system leaders were a core enabling factor. However, a collaborative approach was applied alongside other interventions meaning results cannot be credited to the presence of systems leaders alone.

Peer-review: Health, police and local authorities working together to reduce hospital admissions related to violence

Setting: Health, police and local authorities worked together in Cardiff to target resources for violence prevention.⁷⁹

Intervention: Structured approach to sharing anonymised data relevant to violence prevention from patients attending emergency departments and reporting injury from violence. Data shared with police and local authority partners to target resources for violence prevention.

Results: Hospital admissions related to violence fell from seven to five a month per 100,000 population in Cardiff compared with an increase from five to eight in comparison cities.

RCT: Community partnership to prevent youth substance abuse

Setting: In several US towns and cities, community teams of 8-12 people formed, led by a university liaison and a public school representative, to target youth substance abuse. The teams included social service workers, health agency officials, parents and youth.⁸⁰

Intervention: University researchers provide the community team with a list of evidence-based programmes. The community selects one family-focused program to deliver in 6th grade and one school-based program to deliver in 7th grade.

Results: 'Community-wide reductions of 10-35% in starting to use illicit drugs by youth who were non-users in 6th grade' and reductions in substance use for the full sample.⁸¹

RCT: Linking employment services with private sector and support services to raise incomes

Setting: Per Scholas, a non-profit training and employment service provider located in New York, collaborated closely with support services and employers to help low-income citizens find work.⁸²

Intervention: Per Scholas facilitates comprehensive employment services. Two core components are a full suite of career readiness services and strong relationships with employers that ensures participants are immediately hired following the programme.

Results: After three years Per Scholas increased participants' average earnings by 27%, or \$4,829, compared to the control group.

RCT: A comprehensive youth development programme to improve outcomes for economically disadvantaged teens

Setting: A youth development program in the US for economically disadvantaged teens. Youth enter the program at ages 13-15 and participate for three years, sometimes longer.⁸³

Intervention: Comprehensive assistance drawing from resources across the community including daily academic assistance, job preparation, family life and sex education, arts activities, sports activities, free mental health and medical care and reproductive health care. The program is provided after school at local community centres and runs for about three hours each weekday.

Results: 'For girls, 40-50% reductions in pregnancies and births three years after random assignment (at average age 17)'.⁸⁴ Evidence of effects on high school completion and college enrolment are promising but evaluation is ongoing.

Case study: Collaborative approach to reducing domestic violence

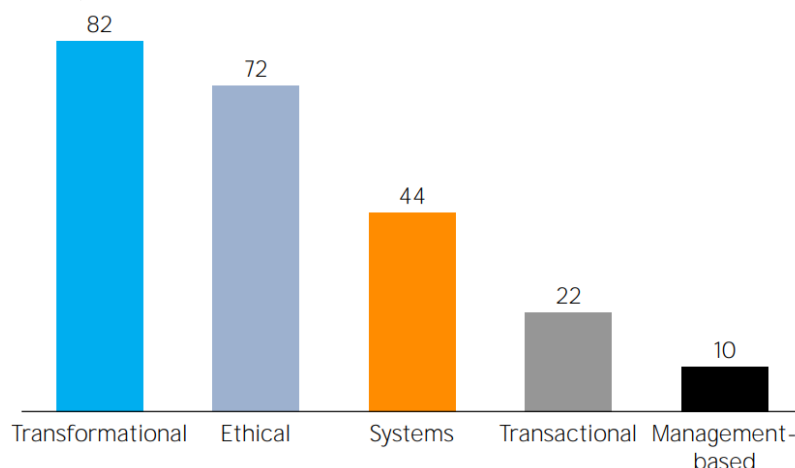
Setting: Reform of approach to domestic violence in Finland with shift from organising around providers and authorities (lawyers, police, social services) to organising around the victim.⁸⁵

Intervention: Rather than 1-2 police officers attending a domestic violence incident, 7-8 people intervene including four uniformed officers, a detective, social services and child protective services. Lawyers and additional service providers are on call 24-hours a day. Once an incidence of domestic violence is detected, the police contact social services immediately.

Results: Between 2010 and September 2015 more cases went to the police and made it to courts. There is no rigorous evaluation of the programme.

Figure 4 shows the number of interviews who mentioned behaviours associated with the leader styles. Leaders mentioned multiple styles in interviews therefore the total adds to more than 100%.

Figure 4: Leader styles mentioned in interviews (%)



Leaders spoke most of setting the vision and getting key stakeholders on board - attributes of transformational leadership. Almost all leaders interviewed emphasised the need for setting a clear vision for the organisation that is clearly communicated to relevant stakeholders with the aim of inspiring followers. Leaders spoke about the importance of “communicating your values and priorities” to stakeholders and understanding the “the *why*” in order to “sell to people what you want them to do”.

Leading with values was seen as an essential aspect of public service leaders. Many leaders had the sentiment that “in public service, ethical behaviour and behaving with a clear sense of moral purpose is fundamental”. This means “having the right values”, being “authentic” and “acting with integrity”. For one local authority leader showing empathy was critical to “link with the local community” in a moment of crisis. One leader, who has led crisis management during distressing events, spoke about allowing “people to be affected by hard things” whilst being explicit about the use of counselling services. One interview expressed concern that “ethics are going a little bit down in the pecking order in terms of [leadership] attributes”. They suggested school leaders were excluding poor performing students so they could improve attainment outcomes.

Working across organisations and the community is increasingly recognised as essential to successful public service leaders. There was a strong sentiment that “creating partnerships across teams, organisations and communities is one of the most important abilities of a modern public service leader” - particularly for those in the top leadership roles. Cuts to resources and increasing demands has created a greater need for services to “join up resources” and to “solve complex community problems”. As said by one leader “ten percent of the traffic in Bristol is due to the NHS hospitals in the city centre... If you’re talking about transport policy in Bristol, you have got to have the NHS around the table.”

Challenges of systems leadership include having to “compromise” to meet the differing needs and priorities of organisations. This means that the benefit of an investment, such as one by a local authority to reduce the number of people sleeping on the streets, may be felt more by different parts of the system, such as the ambulance services and hospitals. Often leaders are trying to “achieve results across systems in which they don’t have executive authority”, which calls upon transformational leadership attributes such as the ability to “inspire, engage” as well as “apply influence and persuasion”.

Although transactional leadership, key to leading followers, is seen as important, it tends to be conceptualised as ‘management’ rather than leadership. Typically, the transactional aspect of leadership was more commonly seen as ‘management’, although a minority of interviewees shared a sentiment that

good management skills were an essential part of being a good leader: “I think you can attempt to do leadership without management, but you won’t get very far”.

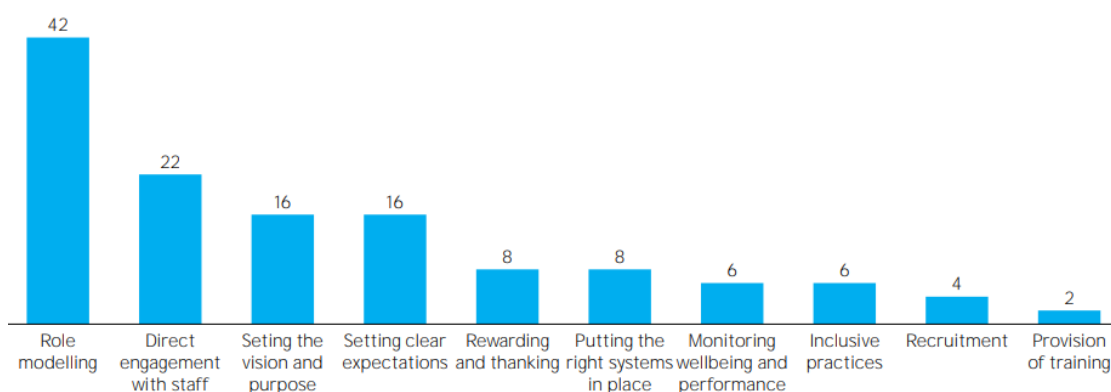
Interviews cited resilience as an important aspect of leadership. A fifth of interviews mentioned the importance of resilience for effective public service leaders. “Not only [for] running big and complex organisations” but also the degree of “political scrutiny, stakeholder scrutiny, and public scrutiny”. Leaders also spoke of low staff morale and work that is demanding “physically and emotionally”. “Social media storms” were a source of stress, and the ability to “not take things personally”, “to be able to get up the next morning” and “endure sleepless nights” was highlighted as being important to survival. Resilience was a theme particularly found in organisations who were struggling to deal with internal or external pressures.

Despite its discussion in interviews, resilience is still an emerging theme in the public service leader literature. A 2013 survey-based study in the NHS found resilience – measured by overall belief the team can achieve their goals – predicted team effectiveness and wellbeing.⁸⁶ An observational study in the private sector finds a similar effect.⁸⁷ The concept relates to the self-efficacy (the confidence to achieve tasks and goals) at the individual-level.⁸⁸ However, we find resilience remains an underdeveloped theme in the quantitative public administration leadership literature.

Our public service leaders reported that the main differences in their role as a senior leader (equivalent to a chief executive) in comparison to less senior leadership roles, were increased decision making power, higher accountability, the risks of media scrutiny, navigating governance issues and the need to make more connections across the community. These areas suggest potential priorities for the initial programmes of the Centre for Public Service Leadership.

Leaders saw their core behaviours of role modelling, engaging with staff, setting a clear vision and maintaining expectations as vital for their role. Figure 5 shows the core behaviours mentioned by leaders as having an impact on their organisation.

Figure 5: Behaviours highlighted in interviews as impacting organisations (%)



Leaders felt that their biggest impact was setting the culture of the organisation.

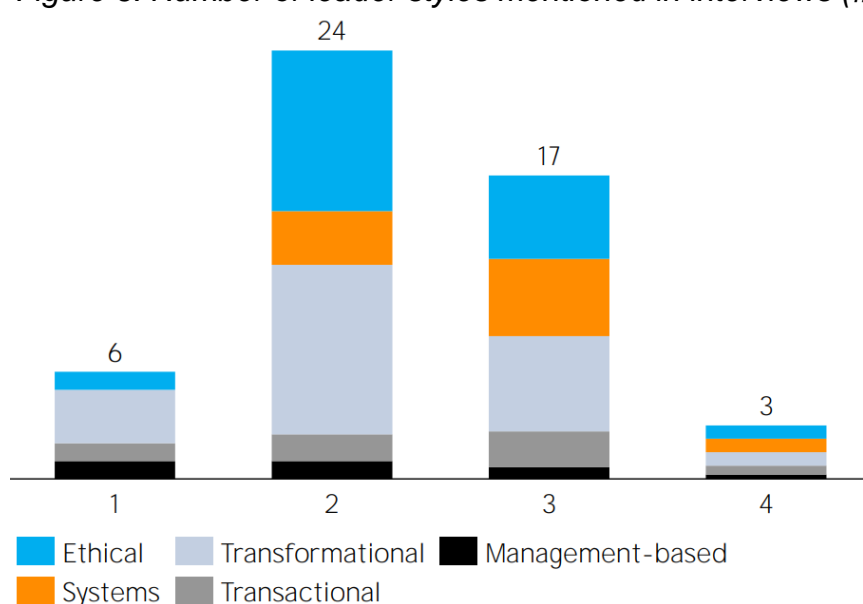
The main behaviours associated with this were role modelling (“almost everything that we do, everything I do every day and every communication that I make, whether it’s face-to-face, online, or email as a way of indicating something about workforce culture”) and engaging with staff (“a leader has to be visible. They can’t sit in their office all the time tucked away, they have to go and do things, be around and set what’s expected”). Leaders spoke of how they make efforts to go out and engage with staff, via “roadshows”, visits to regional offices or using technology to have live Q&A sessions. As a potential gap the Centre for Public Service Leadership could fill, only 8% of interviews mentioned ‘putting the right systems in place’ indicating this as a potentially underutilised organisational lever.

3.2.2 Effective public service leaders combine key styles and behaviours

Leaders suggested that effective leadership is about being able to switch between different styles, with a preference for collaborative styles over command and control. Surveys in public services suggest leaders need to illustrate all aspects of these five dimensions to be successful.⁸⁹ Many of the leaders noted that the key skill to effective leadership is “being able to use different tools”. This means knowing when “command and control is important and being able to enact that, but also knowing where a more free spirited off the leash approach is needed”.

Figure 6 presents the number of interviewees who identified the use of one or more leader styles to be effective. The majority of interviewees mentioned the application of two or more styles and associated behaviours. The most mentioned in combination were ethical and transformational leadership.

Figure 6: Number of leader styles mentioned in interviews (#)




Academic evidence on whether there are relative differences in organisational impact between leader behaviours is weak. Few studies attempt to compare, for instance, the different effect of training in systems or transformational leadership. Therefore, we cannot conclude from the literature whether one style is better than another. One large analysis, where results of experimental studies were combined, attempts to compare the average effect size of interventions based on traditional and new leadership styles (which includes transformational, systems and ethical).⁹⁰ It uses a Cohen's *d* measure - a method for comparing the size of findings across multiple measures and experiments.^a This showed that the average effect size of interventions based on traditional leadership styles was 0.58 and new leadership styles was 0.54.⁹¹ This suggests interventions using these broad styles have a positive effect but that there is no significant difference between the approaches. The results used in the analysis draw mostly from laboratory experiments rather than a natural setting. As a result, we suggest more evidence is required to understand the relative effectiveness of applying different leadership styles.

3.2.3 We suggest it is possible to be more specific about habits, skills and processes of effective public service leadership

Whilst a useful framework for developing a broad approach the styles and behaviours that emerge from the literature, listed in Table 4, risk being too abstract and removed from the actual daily life of a public sector leader. A general weakness of the public leadership literature is it often leaves practitioners confused about the specific steps for leadership success.⁹²

At a more practical level, Professor Robert Wood suggests four ways leaders engage and influence organisations to achieve goals: what they do, what they say, how they establish systems and processes and how they define culture and teamwork.⁹³ This, when integrated with styles and behaviours, could offer a more practical guide for a leader. As an example, Table 5 presents what a prototype version of this approach might produce for one leadership style. The example suggested in Table 5 would need development, and evaluation, working with the evidence-base and leaders to ensure it is effective and useful for practitioners.

Table 5: Prototype of style matched with do, say, systems, culture and teamwork

Leader style	Do	Say	Systems	Culture and teamwork
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-design vision and future direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeat vision and future direction to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt continuous improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish collective identity for

^a For Cohen's *d* 0.2 is a 'small' effect size, 0.5 is a 'medium' effect size and 0.8 a 'large' effect size. If means don't differ by 0.2 standard deviations or more the difference is 'trivial'

Leader style	Do	Say	Systems	Culture and teamwork
Sets a shared vision and future direction whilst inspiring the team to achieve change	with organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage immediate team in weekly 1:1s Coach and mentor individuals Be a first adopter for new ways of working 	organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage staff to challenge tradition and suggest ideas for innovation Consistently praise and support teams Show concern for team success and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce mechanisms to innovate across the organisation Ensure managers have tools to support and encourage their people 	organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create environment open to change Expect consistent innovation

Alongside more practical advice on the application of leader styles, observational evidence suggests there may be specific skills of effective public service leaders. An unpublished analysis of more than 150 headteachers in the US finds, for example, having three individuals who act as ‘lifelines’ during challenges and taking time to renew (and turn off the phone at the end of a day) are associated with longevity in position.⁹⁴ A study of 411 leaders of UK academies finds specific skills such as an economics degree or private sector experience lead to better headteachers.⁹⁵ Given this emerging evidence we suggest, whilst acknowledging the diversity of the public service, the Centre for Public Service Leadership could experiment with building, and evaluating, a toolkit of the specific habits and skills of effective public service leaders. Table 6 aims to present a prototype checklist that might be part of a practical toolkit for public service leaders.

Table 6: Prototype checklist of a successful public service leader

For you	<input type="checkbox"/> Have three lifelines that will push and encourage you when in a challenging place (2 outside your management team, 1 outside your region) <input type="checkbox"/> Find 30 minutes for reflection every day (and make time for activities that re-energise you) <input type="checkbox"/> Do [link to test] test to understand your strengths and weaknesses
For the team	<input type="checkbox"/> Spend two hours mapping the near future goals and challenges with your team every quarter <input type="checkbox"/> Co-design targets with your team, empower them to make decisions and have accountability mechanisms for results <input type="checkbox"/> Use [give link to a tool] tool to gather feedback from your team and staff every 6 months

	<input type="checkbox"/> Give precise and real-time feedback to your team emphasising strengths more than weaknesses
For the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Remind organisation of shared vision and direction at least once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Deliberately meet with groups of staff (especially frontline staff) and external stakeholders regularly to understand experience on-the-ground <input type="checkbox"/> Know the leaders of all other major public services in your area and discuss opportunities for collaboration at least every quarter

Table 5 and 6 provide prototypes for how the literature could be used in practical ways by public service leaders. They, we suggest, begin to provide a pathway for how evidence can be combined with a practical approach relevant to leaders. However, the prototypes require further development and testing. We conclude a role for the Centre for Public Service Leadership could be building an evidence-base of the specific habits, skills and practitioner tools that may be universal across effective public service leaders. These should not be constructed to exclude certain leaders. Instead, they could act as a voluntary toolkit on specific actions leaders could take to improve their approach.

3.3 Surveys and service outcomes help diagnose the presence of effective public service leaders

- Effective public services leadership is diagnosed by tying 360 degree standardised surveys to performance outcomes or survey assessments of the effectiveness of leadership
- Interviews most commonly referred to staff surveys, 360 feedback and service outcomes as the best measures of individual leadership
- More innovative techniques, such as text-based analysis and process evaluation (e.g. are certain leadership processes in place) are emerging as diagnostics

Given a definition of effective public service leaders, we should be able to diagnose its presence. Yet, as with definitions of effective leaders, research lacks consistency on the 'what' and 'how' of measurement.⁹⁶ The dominant approach to understanding the presence of effective leaders is the use of single case studies.⁹⁷ However, these lack a common thread for measurement. Meanwhile, academic articles that attempt to diagnose the presence of certain styles and behaviours exist but use a variety of methodologies.⁹⁸ Other challenges include choosing an appropriate time period to measure the presence of leadership or the appropriate hierarchy or institution to

understand how leadership is exercised and where leadership effects are experienced.⁹⁹

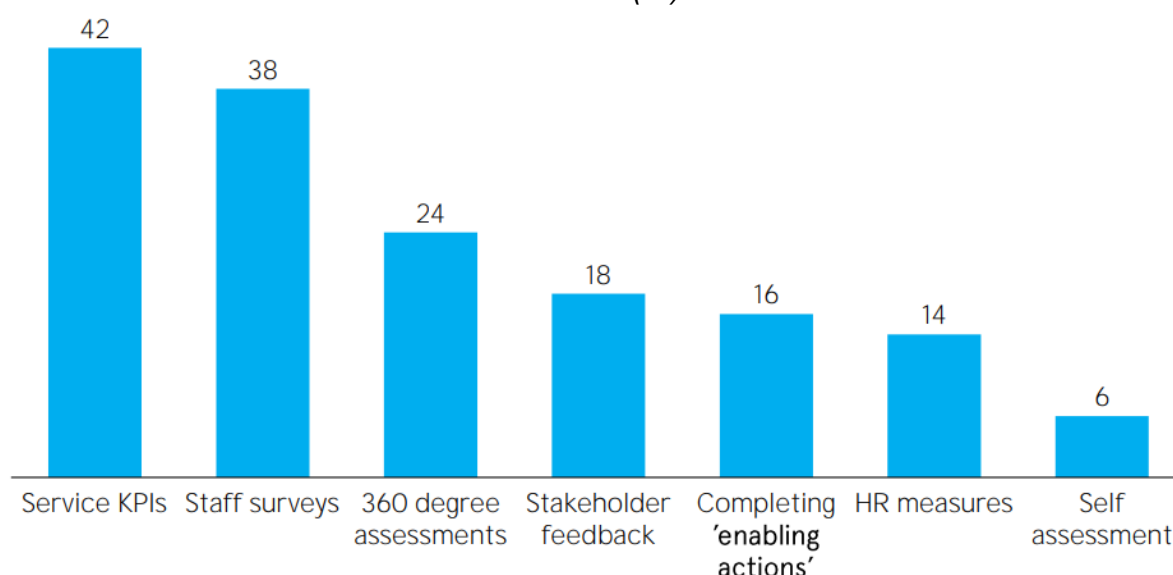
Despite this difficulty, 360 degree surveys are the most used tool to diagnose the presence of effective public service leaders. Generally, these attempt to tie a survey-based measure of leadership to service outcomes and performance¹⁰⁰ or 360 degree assessments of leadership.¹⁰¹ A number of standardised 360 degree feedback approaches to measuring the presence of leadership exist.^{102,103} The most commonly used is the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. This measures both transformational and transactional leadership.¹⁰⁴ Other measures, such as the 'Identity Leadership Inventory' have been constructed to measure new group-based leadership styles.¹⁰⁵ A critique of the dominant approaches for measurement are that it reflects 'heroic' US styles.¹⁰⁶ This led to the development of a scale specifically for UK public sector organisations: the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire.¹⁰⁷

Google, as part of a project to identify the factors that make teams effective, created a list of ten factors that make a good manager.¹⁰⁸ Google uses the terms 'manager' and 'leader' interchangeably within its training modules.¹⁰⁹ These factors, which are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) are outlined below:¹¹⁰

1	Is a good coach	6	Supports career development and discusses performance
2	Empowers team and does not micromanage	7	Has a clear vision/strategy for the team
3	Creates an inclusive team environment, showing concern for success and wellbeing	8	Has key technical skills to help advise the team
4	Is productive and results-oriented	9	Collaborates across Google
5	Is a good communicator — listens and shares information	10	Is a strong decision maker

As shown in Figure 7, interviewees identified staff surveys and service outcomes (KPIs) as core measures for the presence of effective public service leaders. Using 360 feedback and HR measures such as staff sickness absence and retention were also mentioned. Less common in interviews were references to self-assessment.

Figure 7: Measures interviews suggested for diagnosing the presence of effective leaders (%)



Leadership was thought in interviews to be best understood by 'soft measures' (feedback from staff and stakeholders) in combination with 'hard measures' (service KPIs). As one chief executive said, "[leadership can be measured] with a few things like, how are your investors and people's assessment looking....what's your 360 saying, what's your sickness absence rate...what are your staff turnover figures like." Stakeholder feedback included feedback from service users, the community and wider leadership of the public service. Service performance outcomes, such as financial performance, student attainment, number of patients seen or number of crimes being solved, were seen to be important, as well as the steps being taken ("enabling actions") to reach those outcomes. One leader spoke of changing the appraisal process (an enabling action) to measure both whether and how objectives had been met to, for instance, combat the wider issue of poor behaviour and bullying in the workplace.

Beyond self-report and 360 degree surveys, there are examples of more innovative measures of public leadership. This includes the analysis of organisational reports and process evaluations on the presence of clear strategic plans and missions. One study used CEO mentions in press releases, prominence of CEOs photo in annual reports and differences in cash and non-cash compensation between the CEO and their second-in-command to diagnose aspects of leadership type.¹¹¹ Process evaluations using checklist items (such as articulate a vision, having 'lifelines' for support) could be used to evaluate leaders.¹¹² However, we did not find any rigorous papers using objective process evaluation to diagnose the presence of effective public service leaders.

Despite a willingness to engage in measurement, interviewees also identified its complexity. “It is very difficult to actually measure effective leadership, because a leader will be dependent on their team - the school is not doing very well, but you know that they have got good leader - but if they haven’t got enough people of the right quality and calibre underneath them then you won’t necessarily achieve the objectives of the organisation.” Another leader mentioned a need for a holistic understanding of measures “there is also a back story....you may be achieving those objectives at what expense”.

In general, our research found a lack of robust and validated measures of leadership. The Centre for Public Service Leadership will need to be cautious about applying measurement approaches and ensure it pursues methods for externally validating any leadership diagnosis.

3.4 Interventions to develop leaders can work but they must account for context, offer practical insights and focus on behaviour change. They should also be evaluated to make sure they work in the UK public service

- The literature suggests interventions *can* develop leaders and improve organisational performance
- However, interventions must account for existing relationships and culture, be applicable to the problems faced by organisations and directly focus on behaviour change
- The state of evidence for leadership interventions suggests a need for testing to make sure any interventions work in the UK public service context
- Public service leaders found networking, informal internal support and formal development as the most effective for their development

A vital part of the Centre for Public Service Leadership will be the delivery of evidence-based interventions to develop leaders. Table 7 summarises interventions with good evidence in the literature generally including large observational studies and at least two large randomised controlled trials in a generalisable context. Whilst an attempt is made to delineate interventions it is likely any programme will combine elements of interventions to maximise success.

Table 7: Good observational and causal studies of intervention

Intervention	Description
Leader development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership training with an emphasis on overall development, a strong evidence-based curriculum and implemented well within the context and culture of the organisation is associated with better organisational performance
Peer learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured peer learning among leaders – where leaders meet other leaders and actively share lessons and challenges from their experiences in formalised

	meetings - increases productivity in the private sector • Causal evidence is required to understand specific impact of peer learning in UK public services
Feedback	• Performance management and feedback is associated with increased presence of leadership in public service • Feedback from beneficiaries enhances the impact of leadership performance • Feedback can backfire if focused on weaknesses - caution is needed • Further evidence is required to understand best methods of feedback to improve leadership in the UK public service

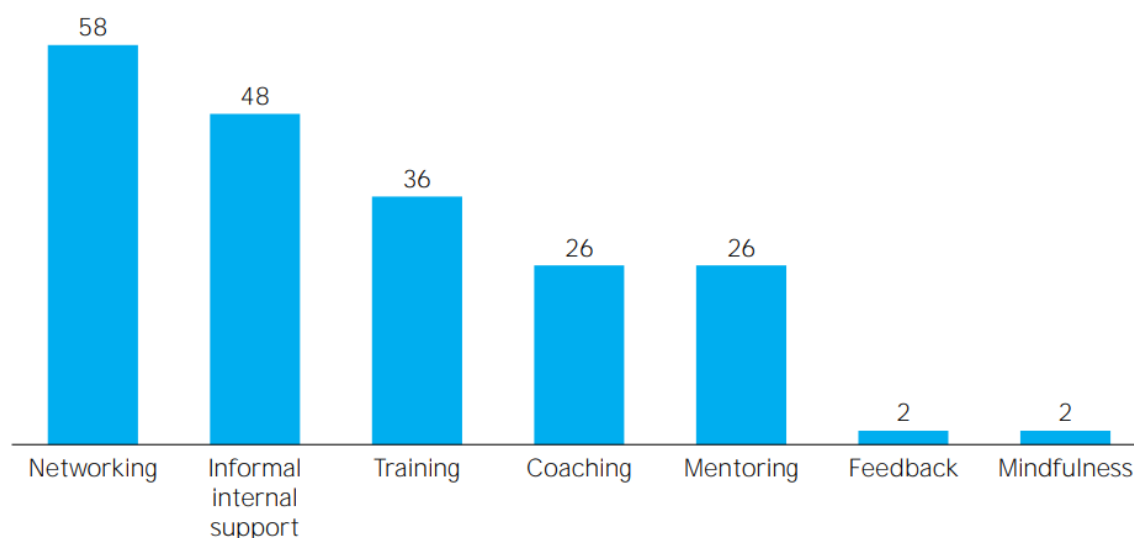
There is directional evidence on the positive impact of mentoring, coaching, mindfulness training and senior team training, especially on individual outcomes, as shown in Table 8. More evidence is required for their impact on leaders and organisational performance whilst the underlying analysis would benefit from further rigorous observational studies and randomised controlled trials.

Table 8: Directional evidence for positive impact – more evaluation required

Intervention	Description
Mentoring	• Mentoring programmes can increase profits in the private sector • Mentoring is likely to work better when targeted at less experienced leaders • Causal evidence is required to understand specific impact of mentoring in public services
Coaching	• Weak meta-analysis finds positive association between executive coaching and enhanced effectiveness of leaders • Causal evidence is required to understand specific impact of coaching in UK public services
Mindfulness	• Mindfulness training is associated with improved individual outcomes such as lower stress and propensity for burn-out • More evidence is required on impact of mindfulness training on leadership and organisational performance
Senior team development	• Observational studies show teams are more important than star performers for organisational performance • Possible leader training and development programmes should include team development • Causal evidence is required to understand impact of team development on leadership and organisational performance

Despite the focus on training and development in the literature, interviews mentioned peer learning and informal internal support as most important to assist their leadership skills (see Figure 8). Leaders of services experiencing severe challenges particularly mentioned the need for the support of family and friends and guidance handling complex governance issues that arise after a crisis. This finding suggests there may be a role for the Centre in providing support to leaders during times of acute stress in public service organisations. The role of informal internal support is particularly notable as it highlights the need to see leader development as involving both an individual leader as well as their wider team and organisation.

Figure 8: Types of support valued in interviews (%)



Before reviewing the evidence for each intervention, we note organisations are dynamic systems with overlapping structures, processes, backgrounds, policies and processes.¹¹³ The culture of an organisation matters. Interventions are likely to fail if the organisation is arrogant, does not accept challenges, is short-term focused and lacks transparency.¹¹⁴ The best intervention will have little effect if the wider organisation cannot handle change or a leader's relationship with their team has broken down. Organisations often make the following mistakes when introducing interventions to develop leaders¹¹⁵:

- underestimate the importance of the leaders internal relationships and the organisation's culture;
- distance the intervention from the real problems faced by the organisation;
- do not grapple with the difficulty of behaviour change and closed mindsets; and
- do not test and adapt programmes based on evaluating what is working.

To avoid failure, any new programme must address these four challenges before launch. For example, a 2001 report on leader development by the Cabinet Office found evidence of a blame culture in the public service.¹¹⁶ They suggest there is a lack of tolerance for failure which dampens innovation. This stems from the media and politicians being more likely to 'penalise failure than to reward success'.¹¹⁷ Clearly, if the Centre for Public Service Leadership cannot explore and suggest approaches to grapple with a blame culture its participants will struggle to enact change when they return to organisations. Therefore, we suggest the Centre must attempt to understand the specific challenges of its leaders and their organisations, create a practical and

applied curriculum and activate leaders to engage with materials during the Centre's programme and enact change when leaders are back in their organisations.

3.4.1 Leader training and development

Leader training – with a focus on overall development – can improve leadership across all levels of an organisation. An estimate based on a large meta-analysis finds the largest pay-off for mid-level managers and executives.¹¹⁸ However, training and development is no panacea. It can easily fail if poorly constructed and implemented or if it fails to take into account the operating constraints of organisations.¹¹⁹ In the following section we will explore the evidence on whether training is effective, the general syllabus of successful training programmes and the need for continued evaluation.

First, the most common form of intervention found in the literature to improve leadership in public service organisations is training. Table 9 provides a summary of randomised controlled trials - generally regarded as the gold-standard of evaluation - related to leadership.¹²⁰ All involve a training intervention. All find a positive effect from training. However, most (apart from the Danish study) involve relatively small samples that will not be generalisable in different services or cultural contexts. The Danish study, whilst offering a robust methodology, is not peer-reviewed.

Table 9: RCTs studies using leader training as an intervention

Research question	Country	Organisation	n
Impact of leadership programs (transformational leadership, transactional leadership, a combined approach) on employee ratings of leadership ¹²¹	Denmark	Schools, daycare centre, bank and tax units	506
Impact of transformational leadership training on self-reports of attitudinal variables ¹²²	UK	Military	152
Impact of beneficiary contact and self-persuasion intervention to enhance performance effects of transformational leadership ¹²³	Italy	Hospital	138
Impact of management training for principals on student achievement ¹²⁴	USA	Schools	58
Impact of transformational leadership training on follower performance ¹²⁵	Israel	Military	54
Impact of leadership training and counselling feedback on subordinate perceptions of transformational leadership ¹²⁶	Canada	Health care	40
Impact of transformational leadership training to enhance subordinate rating and improved financial outcomes ¹²⁷	Canada	Bank	20

Three quasi-experimental studies in Australia, the United States and the UK provide further evidence for the positive impact of leader training for public service managers and the military.^{128,129,130}

Best-practice techniques for training in public service leadership can be drawn from the literature. For instance, the successful Danish trials consisted of four modules (whole day classes) scheduled over 12 months. The four modules focused on:

- **Goals and vision:** Ability to translate overall organisational goals/visions to their local organisation and own style;
- **Communication and implementation:** Tools for communicating and sharing goals and vision to employees and implementing these goals/visions in practice;
- **Sustainment and credibility:** Continuing efforts to sustain leadership strategies in maintaining clear goals/visions, thereby enforcing credibility; and
- **Development during change:** Participants' abilities to navigate when new goals/visions are introduced.

Activities were developed to give leaders practice in giving and receiving feedback, reflecting upon their own (and others') context, experience and leadership and translating and transferring knowledge across organisations. After the course, participants were sent reminders about lessons and goals via text message, completed an exam, received feedback from employees (reflecting pre- and post-training views) and were encouraged to maintain the network from training. These post-training interventions reflect the complexity of leadership interventions with aspects of traditional training, workplace learning, networking, coaching and feedback. The scale of intervention is focused on full development – rather than a single training event. The interventions also highlight a careful behavioural approach addressing initial activation of leaders to ensure they are ready for training, a credible and practical experience whilst on training and continued engagement with leaders when back on the job.

Interviews highlighted the need for training in basic management and business skills alongside ongoing professional development. Four leaders stressed the importance of having basic skills in management and business administration - for instance to “quickly read and understand a financial spreadsheet”. One leader highlighted that a culture of “just get on with it” is not helpful. They suggested they had a growing appreciation for formal leader development programmes. NHS leaders found action learning sets - where leaders reflect on a practical challenge faced in their role - helpful, whilst the leader of a local authority suggested training in crisis

management helped him adapt his natural collaborative style to a more transactional approach needed in crisis situations.

Finally, we note caution is required when constructing leader training programmes. For instance, evidence from the private sector shows businesses do change as a consequence of management training but this translates into only small changes to revenue and profit.¹³¹ As such, well-evidenced and evaluated programmes are required to ensure training is effective in the UK public service context.

3.4.2 Peer learning

Emerging evidence suggests the potential of using peer learning to develop leaders and improve organisational performance.

Based on observational data, evidence from the private sector suggests business networks improve access to credit¹³², investment performance¹³³ and access to valuable partnerships.¹³⁴ Two recent papers explore the value of business networks in a developing world context using randomised controlled trials.¹³⁵ They find positive effects from the use of business networks on management capability and firm performance.

Formal and informal support networks both internal and external to an organisation were important to leaders. Leaders value networking with leaders outside of their organisation for a number of reasons: providing “other role models”, “information and knowledge that broadens horizons”, to help with “thinking about innovation”, to “share stories” and to “look at solutions together”. Support from a leader’s internal team was also critical: “colleagues who are good at their job are the best form of support”. The importance of the team for being challenged was also highlighted - a police commissioner spoke of setting up an internal panel to check and challenge ideas.

We will explore the main components of one of the randomised controlled trial studies to illustrate the potential of a peer learning programme.

Cai and Szeidl launched a networking programme with microenterprises and small and medium sized businesses established in the preceding three years in Nanchang province in China.¹³⁶ A total of 2,800 firms expressed interest in the programme and 1,480 owner-managers were randomly selected into meeting groups with 10 managers each. These leaders met every month for a year, visiting a member’s business at each meeting and spending several hours in discussion. The authors organised the first meeting, provided basic business relevant materials to both treatment and control groups, ensured a group leader was allocated to each group and sent a research associate to take notes at each monthly meeting. A certificate

was provided to firms for participating in the surveys and networking sessions. This certificate was viewed as being prestigious, a signal of firm quality and associated with a willingness-to-pay of 0.7% of baseline profits in the treatment group.

Participation in networking increased firm revenue by 8.1% and increased profit and management score.¹³⁷ The primary mechanisms were learning and partnerships. The effects persisted one year after the networking programme ended. Leaders were more likely to share information when not matched with direct competitors whilst the impact of networking was better when leaders were matched with higher-performing peers. Finally, the nature of conversations mattered. When leaders discussed 'management, partners, or finance' they improved more in that domain.

We have not discovered a similarly robust study for the impact of networking in a public service setting. We suggest the findings from the private sector - even from a developing world context - may apply to public services. Indeed, in an unpublished trial BIT found peer messages were effective at influencing headteacher behaviour to sign-up to become a 'systems leader' within a school network. However, further evidence and evaluation is required to understand the impact of peer learning interventions in the UK public service.

3.4.3 Feedback

Feedback can drive improvement in public services. Generally, leaders benefit from three types of feedback: colleagues, service users and performance comparisons.

First, in workplaces, frequent feedback from colleagues help employees make ongoing adjustments to their behaviour, enabling them to work more efficiently and effectively. Feedback has been shown to be associated with higher levels of individual performance and engagement.^{138,139} A meta-analysis of research papers showed that feedback had a moderate-sized positive impact on individual performance.¹⁴⁰ The use of structured performance management by municipal organisations was found to be associated with an increase in reported transformational leadership behaviours.¹⁴¹ As mentioned earlier, the use of 360 degree feedback is common for measuring the presence of leadership and providing feedback to leaders.^{142,143} Many organisations, with Google a public example, find value in providing leaders with feedback from their teams – especially when it is not tied to monetary reward.¹⁴⁴ In general, leadership development programmes involve the use of feedback from colleagues of the leader.

Second, evidence shows that more direct contact and feedback from work beneficiaries can improve productivity in public services.¹⁴⁵ For example, after university fundraisers met a student whose scholarship was funded by their work, they spent more time on the phone and raised 171% more money than a control group.¹⁴⁶

Finally, personalised feedback on performance, especially when compared to peers, can increase leader productivity. In a study with airline pilots, personalised targets and feedback increased implementation of efficient flying and taxiing techniques by 3.7 percentage points and 10 percentage points.¹⁴⁷ BIT has used feedback and peer comparison to shift behaviour in a number of settings such as reducing over prescriptions of antibiotics and increasing tax collection.

Feedback can also negatively impact leaders. A survey-based study of some 19,000 employees and managers found a focus on weaknesses in feedback sessions reduced performance by up to 27%.¹⁴⁸ The study suggests a need to focus on direct and prescriptive feedback rather than a vague or subjective approach.¹⁴⁹ A review of 131 studies testing the use of 360 degree feedback found a weak positive effect on performance.¹⁵⁰ In one third of the studies, however, the impact of feedback was negative. Finally, an assessment of leadership questionnaires in the NHS found the use of instruments with 'poor psychometric properties, inadequate theoretical grounding and unknown validity'.¹⁵¹ In summary, evidence exists for the provision of feedback in the public service to enhance public service leadership. However, significant care must be taken when constructing feedback to ensure it boosts, rather than reduces, performance.

3.4.4 Mentoring

Mentoring seeks to transmit knowledge between networks. As in networking, it is a general finding that learning from others can improve private sector performance.¹⁵² However, less is known about the impact of leaders learning from a selected mentor.¹⁵³ A meta-analysis found mentoring has a positive impact on individual outcomes (such as motivation or career outcomes) but did not study the effect on organisational performance.¹⁵⁴

Whilst randomised controlled trials find positive results in a youth setting on the impact of mentoring on individual outcomes, we have not found any studies looking at the impact of mentoring in UK public services.¹⁵⁵ A recent paper from Brooks *et al.* examines the impact of mentoring for microenterprises in Kenya.¹⁵⁶ It finds mentorship causes a 20% increase in profits over a 12 month period. They suggest this is driven by access to local and market-specific information such as 'what location has highest demand, what supplier sells at lowest cost or what products can be sold for the greatest profit'.¹⁵⁷ This suggests any mentor programme should be domain-specific and localised in application. The paper suggests a positive role for mentoring on organisational performance in a developing world context. In general, however, evidence suggests mentoring is useful for individual outcomes but there is little evidence of a link with organisational performance in a developed country setting.¹⁵⁸

Mentoring (and coaching) were seen by interviewees to support self-development and resilience. Leaders value having someone who is outside of their organisation who they can be open and honest with, who will not “[negatively] impact their career”. Coaching and mentoring was seen to be especially helpful when new in a role or when facing a particular challenge, such as managing a difficult staff member.

More evidence is required on the potential impact of mentoring in the UK public service. Emerging literature suggests it could be a useful intervention if constructed carefully to focus on young leaders and provide the transfer of directly applicable and localised information between mentor and mentee.

3.4.5 Coaching

Executive coaching is a form of learning driven by one-to-one conversations aimed to improve the capabilities of a leader. It includes goal setting, feedback and the ability to work through complex and underlying problems for the leader.¹⁵⁹ Good coaches provide the benefits of feedback in an individualised setting. For example, Professor Montgomery Van Wart suggested feedback is particularly powerful when provided in a 1:1 session with an executive coach who understands the individual and can help craft strategies for improvement.¹⁶⁰

Qualitative reviews dominate the executive coaching literature with a lack of pre and post studies or randomised controlled trials. A recent meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials using coaching as an intervention to improve individual outcomes identified 11 studies - many by the same authors - with sample sizes ranging from 18 to 197.¹⁶¹ This indicates a need for caution about results. The meta-analysis finds a moderate significant positive effect on individual outcomes (such as performance, wellbeing and goal-orientation) from coaching. However, even this small meta-analysis found confusion over practices used with large variation in coaching interventions and a lack of mapping improvements to organisational outcomes.¹⁶² Further, coaching is expensive as it requires a labour intensive approach and it is difficult to find high-quality coaches that leaders can respect.

In summary, the empirical evidence suggests some positive effect for the role of coaching on leaders. However, the scale of impact is, as yet, unclear for individuals in UK public services and not proven for organisational outcomes as a whole. Care, proper evaluation and a clear focus on quality of coaching and coaches is required to construct an evidence-based coaching programme.

3.4.6 Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment. It is recommended by the NHS as a technique for improving mental wellbeing.¹⁶³ The former Director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre has said that “*mindfulness isn't the answer to everything*”,¹⁶⁴ but the practice of mindfulness has been shown to meaningfully improve health and wellbeing outcomes in some circumstances. For example, a 2013 meta-analysis involving 12,145 participants across 209 studies concluded that mindfulness-based therapy was an effective method for treating a variety of psychological problems, particularly anxiety, stress, and depression.¹⁶⁵

Importantly, mindfulness training has already been trialled in the public service. A 2015 study involving 116 US military veterans found that mindfulness training helped reduce their post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms.¹⁶⁶ A 2015 pilot study involving 43 US police officers found that mindfulness-based resilience training improved resilience and reduced stress and burnout.¹⁶⁷ An unpublished 2017 pilot study involving 62 police officers in Bedfordshire found that people who attended a mindfulness course reported lower burnout afterwards.¹⁶⁸ The US Army has spent \$125m developing a resilience program and the Ministry of Justice is now offering resilience training within its leadership programmes.¹⁶⁹

In summary, there is reason to believe that a well-delivered mindfulness intervention could improve the resilience and wellbeing of UK public service leaders. Further work is required to understand its interaction with the effectiveness of leaders and organisational outcomes.

3.4.7 Team training and development

Evidence is emerging on the importance of team experience - how much a team has worked together - on performance. In hospitals, financial services and on basketball courts the experience of a team working together is associated with success.¹⁷⁰ Yet often leadership interventions focus on individuals rather than the team.

Team development interventions cover team training, leader training, team building and team debriefing.¹⁷¹ Interventions take place with all members of the senior team. Two meta-analyses find moderate positive outcomes from team-based interventions.¹⁷² Outcomes measured include satisfaction with training and organisational results. The literature indicates interventions targeted at senior teams, rather than individuals, could be an effective method for enhancing leadership and organisational performance. For instance, observational studies show co-operative

teams are more likely to reap the benefits of having a diversity of individual perspectives.^{173,174,175,176} However, we found a lack of robust randomised controlled trials or large interventions to test the impact of team-based interventions on leaders and organisational performance.

Given the increasing focus on systems leadership, we suggest team-based leadership interventions is an interesting and growing area for trialling new interventions but more evaluation is required.

3.4.8 Lessons can be learnt from the private sector

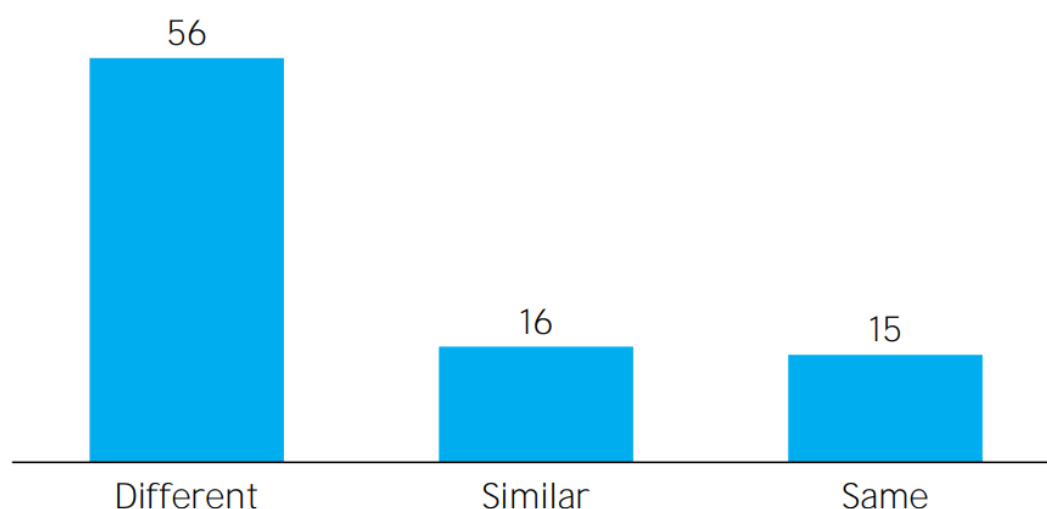
A rich debate exists about whether lessons in developing private sector leaders can be applied to the public sector.¹⁷⁷

One side notes public services tend to have higher goal complexity and ambiguity, higher levels of bureaucracy and that stakeholders can exert higher control over public sector leaders.¹⁷⁸ In contrast, the private sector is driven by competition, focused on the customer and has a short-term horizon.¹⁷⁹ These differences cause a requirement for different leadership approaches. Additionally, large scale studies using survey data highlight behavioural differences between leaders across the two contexts. For example, private sector leaders are found to be more motivated by power whilst public sector leaders tend to be more motivated by achievement.¹⁸⁰ This thesis also notes that we should be aware of the impact of adoption of any leadership style. For example, evidence suggests the adoption of private sector techniques in the UK education system improved efficiency and service but *may* have reduced equity.¹⁸¹

The other side notes public and private sector leaders are (and should be) more alike.¹⁸² Overall, there is little empirical evidence for core differences between public and private sector leaders. The literature finds examples of the application of private sector leadership theories to the public sector - especially transformational leadership - with positive results.¹⁸³ Leadership diagnostics developed for one sector tend to work equally well in both.¹⁸⁴ For instance, Bloom *et al*'s work on the positive impact of management and leadership draws similar conclusions from both public and private sector settings.¹⁸⁵

Most leaders stated there were differences between leaders in the public and private sector. As shown in Figure 9, roughly three-fifths of leaders interviewed stated that they believed there to be notable differences between leadership across the private and public sector. A third suggested leadership was similar but distinct or, simply, the same. The remaining interviews did not have a view.

Figure 9: Views on difference between public and private-sector leadership (%)



Key differences to leading in the public sector in comparison to the private sector, noted by interviewees were complexity of system, political dimensions, public scrutiny, risk of failure and constraints to the reward structures. Despite these stated differences, it is difficult to say these would not exist in a private sector setting. Leaders of private sector companies have lost their jobs because of failing to address system complexity, political pressure, shareholder scrutiny and failure of essential infrastructure.¹⁸⁶ A third of our interviews saw little difference between the sectors. One chief executive who had worked in both the public and private sector, stated - “the divide is artificial...and the skill set is absolutely the same...in the private sector you still have to set a clear vision, and you need to create the right context and environment, and you need to identify areas of collaboration”. Another interviewee highlighted how the increasing “commercialisation” of councils and “the need for efficiency, effectiveness and value for money” in all businesses meant that the boundaries were becoming “blurred”.

The depth and variability of challenges and roles in both the private and public sector suggests a significant focus on differences in leadership approach is unlikely to be helpful. Instead, we conclude lessons from both public and private leadership contexts can be applied as long as they take into account the environment of UK public services.¹⁸⁷ Figure 10 provides a case study, drawn from a study on leadership by the Cabinet Office, of how this approach might apply based on private sector leaders joining the NHS.

Figure 10: Private sector leaders in the NHS¹⁸⁸

In 2001, the Cabinet Office wrote a case study of how private sector leadership performed in the NHS. Positively, it found private sector leaders had significant

experience and the operational skills to run large organisations. However, they concluded that many leaders failed to meet the demands of the role and quickly left the service. Evidence is only anecdotal but the case study finds key abilities possessed by private sector leaders who succeeded in the NHS included:

- understanding the culture and stakeholder environment of the NHS;
- taking time to build credibility with professional groups; and
- use of influencing, rather than directive, techniques to handle conflict.¹⁸⁹

When these abilities were present interviews suggested leaders were able to gain the trust of their teams, organisation and stakeholders. The case study illustrates how private sector leaders and leadership lessons can be useful in public services as long as they take into account the prevailing culture and environment.

3.5 Public service leaders want the Centre for Public Service Leadership to act as a central hub for evidence on best-practice leadership and involve peer learning alongside training and development

We asked interviewees what they would like to see offered by the Centre for Public Service Leadership. Networks, training and sharing of best practice were the most cited, as shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Views on what the Centre for Public Service Leadership should offer (%)



Leaders were most interested in making connections with other leaders across services and sectors, particularly in their geographical area, as well as establishing better connections with policymakers. As one school principal noted

“there are just such complex, frightening, and enduring issues and its only leadership from all sectors working together - I am thinking of our most vulnerable children - we alone, that one sector cannot make that difference.” Similarly, another interviewee said “people are dealing roughly with the same issues but in different contexts - it is useful to understand how other organisations are dealing with it and being able to bring it back to inform your own practice.”

The importance of regional connections and links with central government were also highlighted: “these are wicked problems that require system solutions, and system solutions require central government and different local services, and communities to work together in designing solutions and recognising them.” One chief executive felt that “the government is overseeing the programme of cuts, but it isn’t working in partnership on the people who have to deliver them.”

Leaders called for more cross-sector training opportunities, with some identifying a need for certification. Whilst many leaders expressed interest in cross-sector training opportunities to “create some efficiency around training”, a few also noted how this could also create more opportunities to “share staff” across organisations. As one medical director said “in terms of the future of public service leadership, developing that plasticity in senior public leadership roles outside of the civil service is something to look at.”

Another theme that emerged from a minority of leaders was the need for more structure around demonstrating certain skills: “it is interesting that our chief financial officers, and chief legal officers and various others have to do CPD requirements and so many hours a year, but chief execs don’t. And whether there is something that should be more formal about how we are demonstrating that we are up to date.”

Leaders want a centralised hub of best-practice leadership to ensure evidence is easy to access, understand and share. Interviewees highlighted the need for more “evidence led demonstrations of success” - and that whilst evaluations of leadership programmes are occurring, some felt that “no one is pulling out bright ideas.” This linked to the sentiment that greater sharing of knowledge was needed: “there is lots of innovation in local government but we tend to keep it to ourselves”. An example of what might be useful was a clearer definition of leadership and how to measure it: “a common set of principles around what is good leadership – and then within each category a subset of behaviours and talents against which one could be measured”. Finally, the importance of easier access and signposting was also raised: “I still go back to this thing about signposting and what is available. There is a myriad of courses and it’s really confusing. I wouldn’t know where to send my staff to receive the right training with the stuff that is available”. To support easier access, a more structured approach was suggested - “you have to make quite a lot of effort to go and get [coaching], and I do think we could do better and be more structured about that -

you know, you are new in post and we will give you a coach for three months or something.”

Leaders identified talent management as a gap, with a need to focus on improving diversity amongst leaders. As one leader said, “I think what we should do is put more talent – early talent work and start to create pools of people we see who have leadership potential and they aren’t always necessarily managers.” Whilst three leaders explicitly expressed the need for greater efforts to support the progression of under-represented groups, roughly a fifth of our sample spoke more generally about the difficulties faced by underrepresented groups and the need for more diverse role models.

4. Limitations and areas for future research

There are three areas of weakness for the current study: difficulty summarising a diverse literature, our focus on senior leaders and general weaknesses of methodology in public leadership studies.

The literature on public service leadership, and its linked interventions, is wide and diverse. Through our search methods and contact with experts, we attempted to ensure all relevant journals and articles were read. However, as noted by various scholars in the field, the diversity of approaches in the literature does not make summary straightforward.¹⁹⁰

Our interviews were with leaders and senior executives not workers. This may create a skewed view of effective leadership based on a top-down vision of organisations. We suggest more work is needed on the specific curriculum once the scope of the Centre is confirmed to develop ideas and ensure it meets the needs of the UK public service.

There are clear weaknesses in the public administration leadership literature for the purposes of this study. First, many of the randomised controlled trials on leadership are conducted in different contexts to the UK public service. Further, studies on leadership often rely on a male-dominated sample and in the case of North American papers – argued by Professor Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe – a more charismatic-style than would apply in the UK.¹⁹¹

Despite these limitations, we suggest we should not discount the body of evidence that exists. Instead, we need to build on the evidence and test it in the context of the UK public service.

Finally, because of its scope this study did not explicitly apply the use of behavioural insights to the topic of leader development - though it was central to successful

interventions. We believe a behavioural approach will be vital to driving adoption and persistence with any leader development programme. From activation of leaders, to engaging them through the programme and back at their desk, a behavioural approach provides useful guidance. As the Centre for Public Service Leadership takes shape, we suggest behavioural insights and rigorous evaluation of programmes forms a core component.

5. Conclusion

Public service leaders are working every day to improve the lives of UK citizens. They matter. Observational and causal studies show leadership interventions can have a positive impact on employees and organisational performance.

Our review found there is no simple definition of an effective public service leader. Every organisation will have opportunities, quirks and challenges that require a unique approach. However, broad themes emerge from literature and interviews. This indicates effective public service leaders drive performance, set expectations, develop people, ensure a shared vision, work across the community, embody authenticity and integrity and create a culture that can sustain success. Whilst general styles and behaviours are useful, we suggest more can be done to supply practitioners with a toolkit of specific habits and skills they can use in the field.

Training, peer learning, feedback, mentoring, coaching, mindfulness and senior team development could develop leaders in public services. It is essential, however, any development programme takes culture and behaviours into account. If these areas are addressed, well-evidenced interventions to develop leaders are likely to lead to positive employee and organisational outcomes. Any interventions should be evaluated to make sure they work in the context of the UK public service.

Interviews suggested caution about a centralised approach uncoupled from the issues of public services. However, public services leaders saw a role for the Centre for Public Service Leadership providing cross-service peer learning, development and an evidence hub for best-practice leadership.

Based on interviews and our literature review, we suggest a gap exists for a programme of evidence-based leadership interventions that are rigorously evaluated in the context of UK public services. A well-designed programme could make a real difference to our public services.

Acknowledgements

BIT would like to thank the 50 public service leaders who took time to share their insights and perspectives on effective leadership for this Evidence Report.

The Centre for Public Service Leadership Taskforce members and working group provided useful feedback, challenge and direction for the research.

Thanks to Professor Robert Wood, Professor Montgomery Van Wart, Professor Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe, Professor Lotte Bøgh Andersen and Octavius Black for providing advice, criticism and comments.

We are grateful for support in writing this Evidence Report. All responsibility for findings and errors are our own.

Appendix A: Statistics on leaders interviewed

Table 10: Sample characteristics by public service type¹⁹²

Public service type	Proportion of public service employment according to ONS statistics	Number of interviews (proportion of sample)
NHS	32%	12 (24%)
Education	30%	8 (16%)
Public administration	12%	20 (40%)
Other public sector	12%	4 (8%)
Other health and social work	5%	3 (6%)
Police	5%	3 (6%)
HM forces	3%	0 (0%)
Construction	1%	0 (0%)

Table 11: Sample characteristics by region¹⁹³

Region	Proportion of public service employment according to ONS statistics	Number of interviews (proportion of sample)
London	14%	11 (22%)
South East	12%	5 (10%)
North West	11%	2 (4%)
Scotland	10%	0 (0%)
Yorkshire	8%	5 (10%)
West Midlands	8%	1 (2%)
South West	8%	5 (10%)
East	8%	0 (0%)
East Midlands	6%	4 (8%)
Wales	6%	1 (2%)
North East	4%	2 (4%)
Northern Ireland	4%	0 (0%)
National*	-	10 (20%)

England and Wales*	-	1 (2%)
North*	-	1 (2%)
South*	-	1 (2%)
London and Scotland*	-	1 (2%)

* Regions reported by interviewees, but do not fit standard categories used by the ONS.

Appendix B: Interview guide

Interviews for Centre for Public Service Leadership

Structure of the interview

Main objective	Purpose of section	Guide timings
1. Introductions and background	Explains the purpose and ground rules for the interview.	4 mins
2. Understanding their role	To get to know their role in their organisation.	5 mins
3. Understanding how they define leadership	To get an understanding of how they define leadership.	10 mins
4. Effective leadership	To find out what they think makes public service leadership effective.	10 mins
5. Organisational impact	To gauge whether and in what way they think that leadership can have organisational impact.	14 mins
6. Support and conditions that allow public service leadership to thrive	To find out what discrete support and conditions the individual believes support effective leadership.	14 mins
7. Close	Thank you and close.	3 mins

Topic guide

1. Introductions and background	4 mins
<p>Introduce yourself – explain that all information gathered will be confidential and no-one will be named in any subsequent write-up of this research.</p> <p>Explain the aim of the discussions; this is a joint HM Treasury - Cabinet Office project on public service leadership- a Public Service Leadership Taskforce has been set up by Government and part of their remit is to better understand the leadership of public services. We (the Behavioural Insights Team) have been commissioned to interview people who work in public services, to find out what they think about leadership.</p> <p>Get verbal permission to digitally record and take notes.</p> <p>Explain that recording enables the interview to be transcribed for analysis alongside other interviews. Responses will be anonymised and combined with others', so they should feel free to speak openly.</p> <p>Record the following information: Name, male/female, name of public service organisation, (if agreed) other characteristics</p> <p>Once you have consent, start the voice recorder.</p>	<p>Orientates respondent and gets them prepared to take part in the discussion.</p>
2. Understanding their role	5 mins

<p>Explain that this section is about understanding a bit more about their role and what they do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you tell me a bit about your organisation and what it does? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Services they provide? o Are services provided by the public, private or third sector? o How many people approximately employed in the organisation? o What's it like as a place to work? • Could you tell me a bit about your role at your organisation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How long have you been in that role for? o What's been the main change you have noticed in moving from a senior role to being the main leader of an organisation (e.g. a CEO / Director role)? 	<p>Understanding a bit more about their role and what they do.</p>
<p>3. Understanding how they define leadership</p>	<p>10 mins</p>
<p>Explain that this section is to get a sense of how they understand and define leadership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does leadership mean to you? • How would you define effective leadership? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Are there any leaders who you have come across who you think are/were effective? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ if so, who are they and why do you see them as effective? • What do you think makes a leader effective? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What qualities / attributes? o What behaviours? o What specific actions? • What does public service leadership mean to you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Do you see it as being different to leadership in other areas? If so, why and in what way? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ wider public service (e.g. NHS, children's services, transport, the removal of waste) ▪ private sector o <i>Could you elaborate a little on what makes it different, e.g. Do you think different skills or attributes are required in public services?</i> • What are your thoughts on leadership versus management? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o In what ways are they same/different? o Do you think this is a useful distinction? 	<p>Understanding how they define leadership.</p>
<p>4. Measuring Effective leadership</p>	<p>10 mins</p>
<p>Introduce this section by explaining that it aims to understand their thoughts on how to measure effective leadership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think effective leadership can be measured? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o If yes, in what way? o What would be better measures / worse measures? 	<p>Understanding their thoughts around what makes a leader effective.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Are these measures discrete? e.g. can we say if you do X it leads to more effective leadership? o What are the difficulties in measuring leadership? o Prompt to think about some different measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 360 feedback? ▪ Self-assessment/self-diagnosis 	
5. Organisational impact	14 mins
<p>Introduce this section by explaining that the questions are intended to understand whether they think a leader can have organisational impact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think leaders can have an impact on organisations, such as on employee wellbeing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o If yes, in what way? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What aspect(s) of leadership might be linked to this outcome? o If no, how not? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What areas do you think leaders have less impact on? • Do you think leaders can impact employee productivity? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o If yes, in what way? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What aspect(s) of leadership might be linked to this outcome? o If no, why not? • Are there any other aspects of an organisation that you think a leader can impact? • Are there any aspects of an organisation that you think a leader <i>cannot</i> impact? 	<p>Understanding whether they think a leader can have organisational impact.</p>
6. Support and conditions that enable leadership to thrive	14 mins
<p>Explain this section is to find out what factors and conditions help or hinder a leader's effectiveness, and what discrete support the might help effective public service leadership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of factors (whether to do with the person or the organisation) do you think might prevent a leader from thriving in their position? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What specific things have you experienced first hand, either in your role, or someone else? • Do you think it can be difficult for leaders to hold tenure for long periods of time? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o If yes, why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have you experienced this first hand (whether yourself or someone else)? ▪ How much of a problem do you think this is? o If no, why not? • Do you think people are ever put off applying for leadership positions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o If so, why? 	<p>Understanding what discrete support and conditions support effective leadership.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Again, have you experienced this first hand (whether yourself or someone else)? ▪ How much of a problem do you think this is? o If not, why not? • Thinking about your current role, what kinds of support have helped you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ has there been any training that you found especially helpful? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if so, what was this and why? ▪ coaching / mentoring etc? • Again, thinking about you in your current role, is there anything you wish you had come across sooner that would have helped you in your leadership role? Whether a: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o particular skill or form of training o a particular person o some other organisational 'lever' you could pull to create change / impact (e.g. a process or initiative)? • Do you know of any forms of support that currently exist for leaders in public services? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What are they? o Have you used any? o What do you think of this support? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is it effective? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if yes, how? • if no, why not? • Is there anything you think public service organisations can do to better support leaders? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What do you think are the main barriers to this taking place? o What are the current gaps in the support available? • What central government interventions would support you in your work as a leader? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Is there anything we can learn from previous interventions in this space? o Are there any relevant international comparators that the UK can learn from? • Do you have any further recommendations about what can be done to support leadership in the public sector? 	
7. Close	3 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there anything else that we haven't touched on that you think would be useful to mention? • Do you have any questions on what we have covered in the interview? <p><u>You can round off the interview by summarising the main points you learned and ask the respondent if they want to comment.</u></p> <p>Thank them for their time and reassure them on the anonymity of the responses, as explained at the beginning of the interview.</p>	

Endnotes

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