The Art of
Brilliance

Transforming government by focusing on
the behaviours that really matter

**Written for SROs,
by SROs**

Contents

Chapter structure

- **The typical challenge** facing SROs drawn from the breadth of research.

- **Behavioural insights** drawn out from the research to support SROs in addressing the challenge.

- **Research based techniques** that provide practical advice for SROs throughout the course of their work.

Case studies from other SROs and the private sector.

Red flags that each SRO should watch out for in the delivery of the programme. These should cause the SRO to stop and think.

Nudges to encourage the SRO to focus on really critical issues.

"Is there anyone so wise as to learn by the experience of others?"

Voltaire

Foreword

The Government's agenda for transformation presents an exciting and challenging opportunity for the Civil Service. To deliver the ambition, significant work is required to translate the bold policy objectives into large programmes that either transform Public Services or the operating model in departments, agencies and arm's-length bodies.

The leadership of these programmes requires a cadre of Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) that can operate in a complex landscape to deliver successful outcomes for the citizen and for the Government. As an SRO, with a letter of accountability, you are empowered and trusted to make transformation happen.

The sharing of insights and lessons learned will help to improve the 'project system' that enables transformation to happen – this is organisational learning. At an individual level, it is critical that the next generation of Transformation SROs learn from those that have gone before and that the community takes responsibility for investing knowledge and experience into those that follow.

"The delivery and leadership challenges faced by Transformation SROs require individuals that are able to lead their people through ambiguity and complexity – core skills that are enshrined in a Brilliant Civil Service.

This book will support you as you chart your course as an SRO, offering you behavioural insights and practical tips from your colleagues as well as the private sector and academia."

Mark Sedwill, Cabinet Secretary
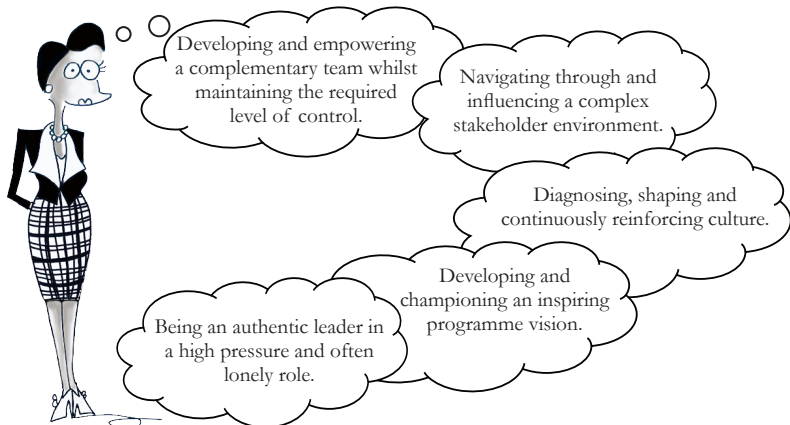
The importance of 'being', not just doing...

This book has been written for SROs, by SROs. The Art of Brilliance unpacks the behavioural characteristics of highly successful leaders of transformation to help move your professional performance from 'good to great'. It aims to complement, and build upon, the formal MPLA course by bringing to life the everyday challenges you will face in a succinct and helpful aid. It has been described by one SRO as a 'pocket sized coach'.

Targeted at the newly appointed SRO, it is intended to be an enduring reference that provides useful insights, prompts and 'nudges' to help you be brilliant every day. The material is sourced from extensive interviews with SROs of previous

transformation programmes and enhanced by research from the public and private sectors. The book provides insight for newly appointed SROs into the most difficult challenges you will face. It emphasises the importance of 'being' rather than 'doing', where behaviours complement technical expertise.

'The Art of Brilliance' recognises that the leadership of government transformation is 'more art than science' and, as the research shows, there is not a single prescription for success. Having said that, the analysis of the insights shows that there are five recurring themes that SROs talk about when discussing the challenges of their roles and these themes provide the framework for the book.

The Transformation SRO

Developing and empowering a complementary team whilst maintaining the required level of control.

Navigating through and influencing a complex stakeholder environment.

Diagnosing, shaping and continuously reinforcing culture.

Developing and championing an inspiring programme vision.

Being an authentic leader in a high pressure and often lonely role.

1 | Getting it right with culture

Culture is a set of values and beliefs that guides activity through shared assumptions and group norms. People and culture issues are the key factor behind the failure of major programmes of transformation.

"Culture change is the single hardest element of any transformation programme."

SRO, Ministry of Justice

"Culture is different from other business topics; it is implicit rather than explicit, emotional rather than rational — that's what makes it so hard to work with, but that's also what makes it so powerful."

The Katzenbach Research Centre

Key behaviours

Actively engaged, accessible, approachable, cooperative, empathetic, measured, observant, open, patient and visible.

Being, not doing...

The typical challenge

The difficulty of changing cultural traits and norms often begins with the establishment of a 'temporary organisation'. This frequently resides within a wider organisational body with its own culture. In addition, transformation programmes bring together delivery partners, each with their own culture. As an SRO you need to diagnose, shape and embed a culture that delivers your vision. There is no set recipe for culture, nor will the same recipe endure for the duration of the transformation.

Research strongly indicates that SROs and other senior leaders do not engage with this challenge early enough, and their diagnosis and understanding of the subject is not as comprehensive as required. This has significant implications on the success of the programme.

Five of the eight most common causes of transformation failure are areas related to people and culture aspects of change.

Harvard Business Review

Key behavioural insights

Be patient, observant, measured and empathetic, and understand the history and 'how things are done' before embarking on change.

If you are the SRO of a temporary organisation **be cooperative**, understand how your culture sits with the department and suppliers.

Be open to understanding 'how things are done around here' through walking the shop floor and engaging with staff at all levels.

Once the culture is defined, **be visible, actively engaged, approachable and accessible** by 'modelling the culture'. **Be driven** in your commitment to influence and embed it.

The best performing transformations tend to have **open**, collaborative learning cultures where there is space for failure leading to highly engaged employees.

"Culture eats strategy for breakfast."
Peter Drucker, Author

"Successful SROs of transformation are ambassadors for the culture they need and they invest to create lasting cultural change."

SRO, Home Office

Research based techniques

Diagnose the culture

UK Government research showed a 30% gap between programme board level and workforce perceptions about culture. **The whole workforce should be engaged in the diagnosis of culture** through focused inquiry.

Develop **informal employee networks** to help you diagnose and change the culture. Research from the private sector highlights the value of CEOs finding a **'trusted few'** from all levels in the business to act as catalysts for cultural change.

Create the **right leadership structures** for your cultural diagnosis. The creation of the Chief People Officer by Public Health England's Science Hub programme demonstrated the leadership's commitment to making people and cultural matters a high priority.

Shape the culture

Continue to use your informal employee network to **distill and build upon a discreet number of traits and behaviours**, learning from the legacy culture, to shape the required culture.

Empower colleagues to do the right thing within a safe environment where lessons are **genuinely learnt from setbacks**. Private sector research shows that changing mindsets in this way positively improves performance.

Future Farming Programme – diagnosing culture
The Future Farming Programme set up a 'change readiness' function to examine both organisational and farm readiness. A key workstrand, sitting alongside policy and project delivery, was the culture change necessary to deliver their vision.

"Create an open environment. Don't let people feel that if they make a mistake then they are on their own."

SRO, Department for Education

Embed the culture

Be **deliberate about your behaviour** to continually reinforce the culture. Kegan Schouwenburg, CEO of SOLS, a New York based tech startup, removed C-suite offices in favour of co-location with her workforce to live the collaborative culture she wanted to embed.

Spotlight examples of positive actions that contribute to embedding the culture. Call out publically the star performers of a story, encouraging others to follow. In addition, have the courage to call out inappropriate behaviours that do not fit with the culture you are trying to create.

Monitor the culture of the programme. After relocating 50% of the workplace and merging distinct research and management groups, the Science Hub Programme began conducting regular pulse surveys and focus groups to understand staff's perceptions of change. This helped them quickly address any potential issues before they became wider cultural problems. Combining survey data with that received from indirect sources, including informal employee networks, has been shown in the private sector to create a robust basis to determine how the culture is being embedded.

HMCTS Reform – engaging with geographically dispersed staff

'One conversation' was an engagement tool in a box developed with key programme messages. Local managers used Town Halls to deliver the material in their own words. This facilitated two-way engagement, giving staff space to talk about concerns and fostering a much stronger ownership of the cultural shift.

Universal Credit – using the cultural interview

People who were interested in becoming part of the programme team undertook a technical and cultural interview. This helped assess the cultural alignment between the programme and new recruits to create a more unified team.

"Culture change begins when leaders start to model the behaviour they want the organisation to emulate."

Jim Whitehurst, Red Hat

Pulling it all together...

Red flags

- No evidence of a culture change plan at the beginning of a transformation. Ensure culture change is a constant factor in the programme plan and adopted by frontline operations.

- Members of your leadership that talk about culture a lot but where there is no proactive work being undertaken to take it forward.

- Assuming that cultural change will come as a result of a changed business model – this has been a common assumption in many failed transformations.

- Underestimating the level of effort and time required to achieve lasting change – use heuristic problem solving techniques and speak to other SROs to find out how much effort you need to invest.

Nudges

- Focus effort on understanding the critical few behaviours and traits in the organisation which are the cornerstone of your culture – these take precision and analysis to identify.

- Build a network of informal leaders to help you develop the culture across the whole programme – you will not be able to do it on your own.

- Get support from behaviour experts to develop the culture with a cross section of support – it is not easy to get right.

- Be consistent in prioritising cultural change throughout the life of the programme – it needs continual focus to reinforce and embed.

Summary

80% of SROs interviewed spoke of personal challenges diagnosing, shaping and embedding the culture needed to deliver their transformation. Many spoke passionately about the criticality of getting it right with culture and their recognition of the impact and influence of their own behaviours. Culture change requires sustained effort from you – patience, cooperation, accessibility and active engagement in the culture that will deliver transformation. Start early in your tenure and be persistent with culture.

2 | Living the vision

"The vision is a compelling picture of the future that aligns stakeholders around the purpose of the transformation, the scale of the ambition and the nature of the benefits."

The 7 Lenses of Transformation

"Many executives don't understand how to craft a compelling vision for change that will gain widespread commitment within their organisation."

MIT Sloane Management Review

"Being able to tell a story of overall change, where you are and where you are trying to go is essential."

Director, Cabinet Office

Key behaviours

Creative, committed, driven, focused, inquisitive, inspiring, open-minded and passionate.

Being, not doing...

The typical challenge

As an SRO, the team and external stakeholders are looking to you to be the custodian and primary champion of the programme's vision. Therefore, it is necessary for you to really own and communicate it in a compelling way.

If defining the vision for the first time, the complexity often lies in designing a vivid, detailed and inspiring description of the future, when the landscape is mired in uncertainty. If a vision already exists, it can be difficult to adopt and communicate it in a way that resonates with and energises people.

Private sector research shows that challenges can occur when key stakeholders, such as citizens and programme staff, do not have a shared understanding about the purpose of the transformation.

Key behavioural insights

Be **open-minded, inquisitive, creative and passionate** when co-developing the vision with stakeholders. Be driven to develop a vision that sets the tone and 'charts the course' to deliver the required outcomes.

Be committed to achieving the vision and realising key outcomes, even in periods of uncertainty. Be pragmatic in your approach to delivering the vision, as your plan will almost certainly need to change over time.

Be focused and **inspiring** in the communication of the vision, choosing **creative** mediums to energise and excite people. This will help you to develop a collective momentum for delivery.
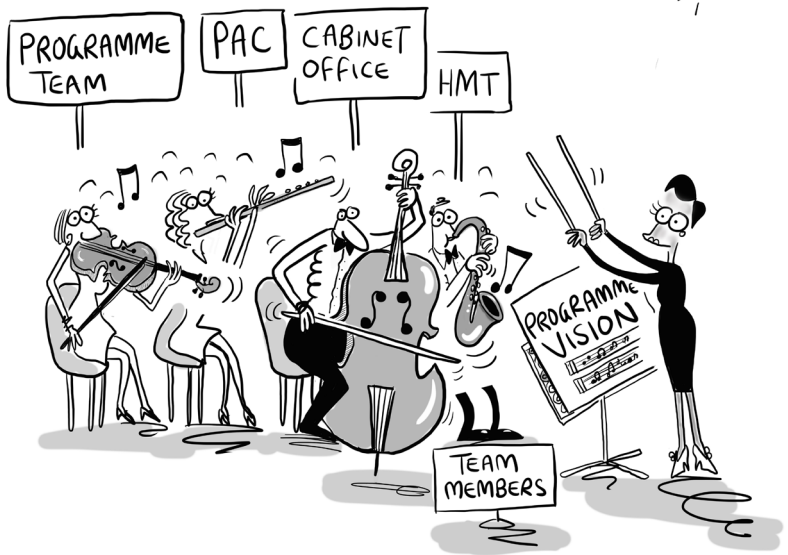
> 48% of executives thought their organisational and transformation purpose was better understood in some areas of the company than others.
>
> **Harvard Business Review**

"The vision should be owned by those at the top but created by people who represent the breadth and diversity of the business."

7 Lenses of Transformation

"Focus on what the destination is and constantly remind people."

SRO, Home Office

Research based techniques

Develop the vision

Private sector research shows that there is no single way to develop a vision. What is important is that you consider why the programme exists (purpose), who it is for (intended beneficiaries) and what you want to achieve (outcome).

It is vital that you have **open and engaged** conversations with key stakeholders to ensure buy-in and gain collective ownership of the vision.

Some 'tried and tested' approaches include: holding workshops with staff to build vision statements, walking the shop floor to gain context about operations and holding stakeholder interviews to gather candid feedback.

It is critical to **design for trust** to gain commitment from everyone who is part of your vision, including end users. Joe Gebbia, the co-founder of Airbnb, has highlighted it as a key success factor for the company. It requires the collection of data about customer journeys and behaviours, a focus on first impressions, and using the information to test and refine the transformation vision and design.

Live the vision

Communicating the vision should be a **passionate** and **authentic** endeavour. Successful leaders have found creative ways to launch and continue to reinforce their vision. **Storytelling** has long historical ties and recently has seen a resurgence due to its power in conveying messages. Using programme events to tell your story and to encourage others to tell their version of it is a powerful way to live the vision.

Embed your vision – **create a narrative using pictures and words** – see the one we created for this book on pages 42-43. Once created, continually reinforce the vision in a way that is vivid and appeals to people's emotions.

Refresh the vision

Successful SROs are **in tune with the relevance of their vision**. Changes to the external circumstances around the programme or internal disengagement may warrant a refresh of the vision's content or signal a need to change the way the existing vision is communicated. For example, scope changes are one of the reasons a **vision may become obsolete**.

In 2014, the Universal Credit programme redefined its vision to be 'customer focused' rather than 'technology based'. This refresh was a necessary step for the SRO and the senior leadership as the context and scope of the programme had changed. The new vision was created with significant input from front line operational staff to make sure it had resonance with those that would see the greatest change.

Diplomacy 20:20 – gaining collective ownership
When developing the vision, the senior leadership team of the Diplomacy 20:20 programme met with the CIO of Foreign & Commonwealth Office on a daily basis to discuss the department's operational needs. As a result, the original vision was refreshed to expand the scope based on operational requirements. Other key stakeholders have been continuously consulted, including the CIO Network Board and the Foreign Office COO Board. This has ensured that the vision remains relevant through the proactive engagement of key stakeholders in the programme.

"It is vital that SROs are bold in pursuing their vision and go after it at a fast pace."
Director, Cabinet Office

Pulling it all together...

Red flags

- A lack of unity within the senior leadership team about the purpose of the transformation and how it links to the overall vision.

- Lack of focus on the citizen and staff in the development and communication of the vision.

- The vision is not being communicated and reinforced consistently by the leadership team and is not co-owned by staff.

- The existence of a current programme vision is overlooked when taking up a post.

- Proceeding with a vision that is either undeliverable or insufficiently challenges the current service model.

Nudges

- Look for signs the vision is not resonating, is not relevant or needs reinforcing.

- Be a champion for the vision, finding creative ways to energise and demonstrate the delivery of the vision over time.

- Continuously revisit the end user (citizen and staff) to develop and test the vision throughout the programme lifecycle.

Summary

Living the vision of your transformation is important to get right. It is an activity that starts at the beginning of a programme and it is a commitment that endures for the length of the programme. It requires consistent drive, passion and creativity to generate a vision and then communicate it. The use of visual images and a consistent narrative are key elements of a successful vision. If the context of your programme changes, do not be afraid to revisit the vision – the best SROs can sense this point and take action accordingly.

3 | Showing up whole and being resilient

Showing up whole and being resilient focuses on the need for SROs to adopt a human approach to leadership. They need to manage stress proactively, be balanced in sharing parts of their life outside of work and take time to develop genuine relationships with their team and key stakeholders.

"The SRO role can get quite lonely."

SRO, Ministry of Justice

"Fortitude requires resilience. It's about finding our way around things as much as enduring them. It's about seeing obstacles as temporary and seeing ourselves as capable agents in our lives rather than helpless."

Constance Dierickx, High Stakes Leadership

Key behaviours

Accessible, authentic, brave, calm under pressure, emotionally intelligent, open, personable, resilient, self-aware and visible.

Being, not doing...

The typical challenge

> 64% of senior business leaders suffer from mental health conditions, mainly linked to pressures at work and 58% feel that their seniority makes it more difficult to talk about the challenges they face.
>
> **Bupa Global Study**

Government transformation programmes have high degrees of uncertainty and attract scrutiny. As the SRO, you shoulder this pressure resulting in a role that can feel quite lonely.

The high pressure environment, combined with the breadth of responsibility could, if not managed appropriately, have negative implications on your mental health.

Given the visibility of the role, you are consistently on show, setting the tone and pace of the programme. Leaders report often finding it hard to show up whole in this environment.

Key behavioural insights

Successful SROs deal with the intense demands of the role by proactively investing in their wellbeing and, in doing so, strengthening their **resilience**.

Top performing SROs are **self-aware** and **brave** enough to be **authentic** and ask for and accept support when it is required.

Be **personable and show up whole**. It is important to demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence and adapt your communication style or behaviour to achieve results.

Feedback from experienced SROs emphasised the importance of being **visible** and **accessible**. They have **strong listening skills**, prioritise building relationships and are **open** to new ideas.

"I had an SRO that was quite aloof. He was ineffective and did not seem very people oriented."

Programme Director
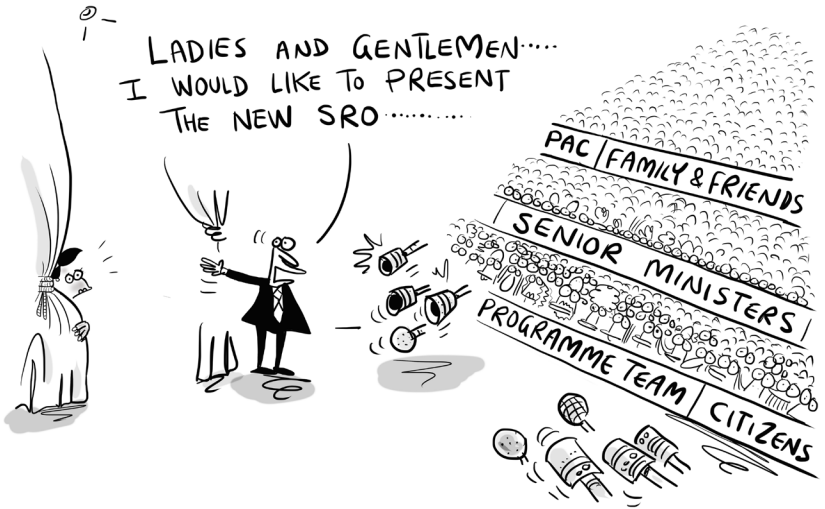
"SROs should recognise that when they are in a programme that has public interest and external scrutiny, the smallest issue will be disproportionately attacked and attract interest."

SRO, HM Revenue & Customs

Research based techniques

Prioritise self-care

Prioritising self-care requires a **high level of discipline** and an ability to set **appropriate boundaries around work**. Self-care should be considered a necessary factor in managing professional performance.

It is critical that senior leaders are attentive to the impact that their work has on their emotional, mental and physical wellbeing. They need to recognise warning signs and hold themselves accountable for addressing causes for concern by **delegating or deferring, taking time to rest and having honest conversations about their needs**.

Build a resilience and self care strategy. Understand why and how you respond to high pressure and adapt accordingly. Several SROs interviewed recommended a mentor or support network to openly discuss issues and be reminded of the bigger context.

Build relationships

Highly effective SROs **master the art of listening**, they take genuine interest in the people they work with and often **take a more informal approach** to building strong relationships.

There are numerous examples from the private sector where CEOs have used this approach: Brent Smart, CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi picks 20 employees from different departments to take out on family dinners each month. Similarly, Nihal Parthasarathi, CEO and co-founder of CourseHorse, **organises regular games nights**. This style of leadership fosters an environment of openness and direct engagement, which enables you to engage on a human level. Appearing 'whole' and authentic to your staff places you in a stronger leadership position, so it is important to reflect on what impact you have on your colleagues.

"Invest time in your relationships with core members of your team… understand what drives them."

SRO, Department for Work and Pensions

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEAM.....

"You have to be confident and resilient enough to say I am really good at this but I have made a mistake."

SRO, Ministry of Justice

Jamie Dimon, CEO of JP Morgan Chase – resilience in overcoming setbacks
Jamie Dimon, who is widely perceived as one of the most successful financial executives in the world, demonstrated high levels of resilience when he was unexpectedly made redundant after 16 years at Citigroup. Key behaviours that allowed him to rebuild his career were: he acknowledged his mistakes, showing humility by admitting he had got things wrong; and he went out of his way to learn from other senior leaders who had experienced similar challenges. This allowed him to build his own reserves of resilience through sharing with peers.

Pulling it all together...

Red flags

- Isolating yourself and overlooking the benefit of having a supportive network. There are others who share similar challenges with you and who could provide valuable guidance – make sure you reach out.

- Sharing too much, when you are no longer professional and don't have clear boundaries about what is appropriate to share at work.

- Ignoring the signs of burnout. Be aware of how you and your team are feeling and the impact it has on your decision making. Do not allow a culture of sleep deprivation and long working hours to become the norm.

Nudges

- Put self-care high on your agenda. Commit to it, lead by example and make space for others to do it.

- Really listen to your leadership team and members of the programme team and take an interest in them as individuals.

- Develop trusted support networks inside and outside of government to share, reflect and contextualise your feelings and pressures.

"Trust is in fact earned in the smallest of moments."

Brené Brown, Professor

Summary

Interviews with SROs highlighted the often lonely and challenging nature of the role. It emphasised the need for SROs to be confident, have a long term perspective and learn to thrive in the face of high workload pressures. This is supported by academic and private sector research, which encourages leaders to be disciplined in prioritising their wellbeing, be brave enough to bring their whole self to work and develop genuine relationships with their colleagues and key stakeholders. This helps to build a supportive environment where they can be their best.

4 | Balancing delegation and control

Building and leading a high performing team requires the right blend of complementary skills in the senior leadership team. To deliver effectively, it is essential to maintain a control system around the team that empowers individuals to perform while maintaining the right amount of oversight, in a sense, the role of the SRO is similar to being a CEO.

"The relationship between the SRO and the Programme Director is critical to success. At times it can feel like an arranged marriage."

SRO, Department for Work and Pensions

"The CEO should bring together a diverse range of people from the different categories of leaders, including growers and fixers, to support a transformer."

IMD Global Board Centre

Key behaviours

Agile, confident, courageous, decisive, inquisitive and thorough yet not overbearing.

Being, not doing...

The typical challenge

The breadth of accountability of the Transformation SRO is synonymous with that of a CEO.

To deal with the scale and complexity of transformation, you have to build and lead a team that has the right complementary skills and styles.

Delivery of transformation requires a blend of programme, policy, deep frontline operations experience and commercial acumen on your board.

Complex programmes require an effective 'control system' in place to balance your delegation and oversight. It is likely that you will have to extend a degree of control over staff that are in the wider department, sitting outside of your programme team.

Knowing when to engage with the detail and when to empower others to get on with delivery is cited by transformation SROs as a difficult balance to achieve.

From the research, over 80% of SROs identified the need to have a trusted and respectful relationship with the Programme Director as a critical success factor.

Key behavioural insights

You should have the **confidence** and **courage** to let go of your past, particularly if you have been a Programme Director before – effective SROs 'leave their baggage and ego at the door', focus on outcomes and make space for their Programme Director.

Build trust by **empowering your team** to be responsible for their output. Openly and visibly showing that you trust others, through consistent action at boards and at meetings, increases staff engagement and empowerment.

Be inquisitive and understand the commercial realities of your programme; SROs of transformation are rarely deep commercial experts, so understand your main contract and augment this knowledge with high quality commercial input to your programme board.

Be thorough, but not overbearing. Build a reputation for asking good questions; **admit you don't know** – these are key traits of successful SROs.

"Only do, what only you can do."

SRO, Home Office

"SROs need to recognise when to dive deep and when to stay on the surface."

Programme Director, Ministry of Defence

Research based techniques

Set yourself up for success

As a new SRO, **be clear on the boundaries** of your role. You may find it helpful to write down the responsibilities of the role and the interface with the Programme Director and then communicate it to the wider leadership team.

You should review your span of control and how your SRO role fits with your overall job. A number of SROs are dedicated to a programme, while others have wider responsibility and value the separation that keeps them out of the detail. It is important to recognise that there is not a perfect model, but you need one that works for you and for your programme.

Be accessible, but don't be too available. This appears counterintuitive, but HBR research showed that when senior leaders of complex organisations are not available for short periods, their teams work out the problems themselves and grow in the process.

Build the right team

Remind yourself it is okay to be an 'incomplete leader'. **Use personality assessment tools that help you build the right team around you.** Some SROs choose to have a trusted 'lieutenant' as a supporting confidant within the team or wider department.

Don't start without the right team – be determined and persistent to get the necessary resources. Be clear with your Accounting Officer about what you need to deliver your outcomes.

"My SRO is quite protective of his team and won't let them go under for nonsense, but at the same time he will hold people's feet to the fire."

Programme Director, Ministry of Justice

Establish the organisational control mechanisms

You need a control mechanism that gives you **access to the detail you require to make good decisions**.

Establishing effective oversight and governance of your programme, with appropriate delegation, requires you to **consider the full range of organisational design elements**. Using a recognised organisational framework, such as the **Galbraith Star**, will help you to think about the balance between the interrelated elements of the temporary organisation that you are leading.

Empower your team through '**mentoring in hindsight**' – HBR research shows mentoring is an important role of leadership and helps to develop staff within the organisation. However, they learn much less when advice is given on the front end than they do when they have the opportunity to experience their own successes and failures and discuss them with their boss later.
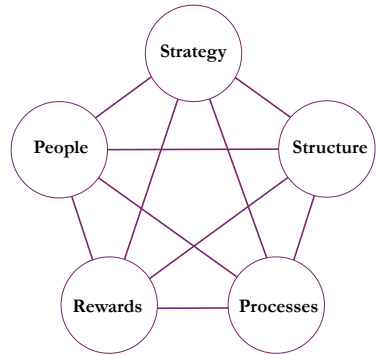
The Galbraith Star

Setting the right tone at your board meetings will create the right conversations and lead to better outcomes. Research on corporate boards shows that conflicts around judgements or tasks can be helpful, yet conflict based on a difference in values or style is potentially harmful for board cohesion. This means that **being mindful of values and styles is essential for members of your board.**

"Delegation is the secret weapon of successful CEOs, yet it's one of those things that people just assume you know how to do as you move up the ladder."

Forbes

Pulling it all together...

🚩 Red flags

- SRO and Programme Director are too aligned and there is no opportunity for healthy challenge.

- A lack of clarity on the SRO's span of control. This can lead to duplication and frustration.

- Being too deep in the detail and holding too many actions. Empower and delegate to help your team to develop and give you space.

- Have an 'open door' but not 'open all the time' policy.

- 'Adding too much value'. If you consistently amend and add to others work, they will lose the engagement and ownership.

💡 Nudges

- Building the right team takes focused effort – the best SROs place this high on their agenda.

- Make time to speak with team members that are not direct reports. Use the sessions to test the empowerment and control mechanisms in the organisation.

- In your recruitment, look not only for complementary skills and experience but also diversity of thought and approach.

- Check that your control mechanisms are balanced and appropriate. Focus on doing the right things, not things right.

Summary

Balancing delegation and control starts with having a clear understanding of your role and its boundaries. It is essential to build the right team with specialist expertise by considering the needs of the transformation and your own skills and experience. Highly effective SROs are accessible enough to their teams, but empower their staff to get on and solve problems without their personal involvement. They build the control mechanisms that allow them to dip into detail when required, but have the ability to stay detached from the day to day issues. A challenging, but supportive board and a positive working relationship with the Programme Director are critical success factors.

5 | Navigating and influencing the landscape

Government transformation is conducted within a complex stakeholder landscape. The SRO is the bridge between the programme and the external stakeholders. Political acumen and relationship building is central to navigating this landscape to drive the programme forward towards delivery of its vision.

"The most difficult part of the job is dealing with senior stakeholders."

SRO, Home Office

"CEOs who deftly engage stakeholders with an orientation on delivering results were 75% more successful in their role."

CEO, Genome Project
Harvard Business Review

Key behaviours

Authentic, courageous, dedicated, intuitive, open, politically astute and strategic.

Being, not doing...

The typical challenge

The landscape around government transformation programmes is quite unique in its complexity and scale – this sets it apart from the Private Sector. As SRO, you need to engage with this external environment and provide the link between the delivery team and outside stakeholders.

Promoting, defending and championing the transformation to stakeholders requires a strong understanding of the landscape and the political savvy to know how and when to react.

The most difficult challenge faced by SROs lies is the range of views and motivations held. Each stakeholder is likely to hold a different perspective on what a successful outcome looks like – this is normal, but can be unnerving for a newly appointed SRO.

Key behavioural insights

High performing SROs are **politically astute, strategic and dedicated**, developing **authentic** relationships with external stakeholders, enabling them to both 'influence' and 'navigate through' the broader landscape. They continually seek a better appreciation of the external factors that can impact transformation outcomes.

Be inquisitive and use your **intuition** of your stakeholder landscape to address concerns quickly and decisively. **Be courageous** in speaking truth to power and build confidence amongst the community.

A common pitfall is to try and 'line up' programme stakeholders to have a common view when actually, a degree of tension is useful and healthy. **Be open** to external challenge and get comfortable with some tension amongst your stakeholder community.

"Tell Ministers what they can have, not what they can't have."

SRO, Home Office

"Understand what the major incentives are for the key individuals around your programme – ranging from peers to ministers and people on the ground."

Director, Cabinet Office

Research based techniques

Understand the landscape

New SROs should take steps to understand the motivations and perspectives of each key stakeholder. Use face to face meetings during the first few weeks in post to **understand their motivations and perspectives on your transformation** – views will typically range from supporters to skeptics. Then, **develop a tailored approach to managing each stakeholder.**

A DWP Transformation SRO interviewed for this book shared his **'three rings diagram'** that he used to articulate the landscape around his programme. At any one time he planned to keep a minimum of two of the three groups aligned to his programme vision and supportive of the outcomes. Should that number drop to one it would act as a signal for the SRO to take urgent action to gain wider support.
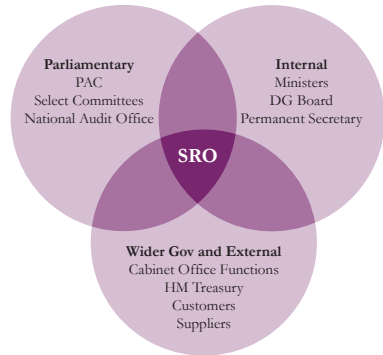
Three rings of stakeholders

Navigate the landscape

Having access to a small number of **trusted advisers or confidants** that can both support and constructively challenge you is recognised good practice to help with navigating through the stakeholder environment. Attending PAC hearings and select committees can be particularly challenging and therefore **reaching out to more experienced SROs for mentoring and advice** is highly recommended.

"SROs should develop a strong pool of critical friends."

Programme Director, Ministry of Justice

Influence the landscape

Over-communicate to get your programme narrative understood. It is important to engage stakeholders in open, honest communication through the use of multiple media channels. Be prepared for your stakeholders to develop their own narrative about the programme. To compensate, use **frequent and consistent messaging** about your transformation – the use of digital channels through social media is essential.

Establish allies amongst the group by **inviting key stakeholders onto the programme board** to improve their visibility and achieve greater buy-in. Research shows that it is necessary to **be mindful of how people can present information in a way which either assigns or avoids blame** in the landscape; beware of stakeholders that are looking to find a scapegoat or connect to a particular part of a policy objective for their own gains.

"Influencing skills and small 'p' political skills are as important as technical skills."

SRO, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Pulling it all together...

Red flags

- Underestimating the impact of political change to the programme vision, strategy and outcomes.

- Neglecting a stakeholder or group that could threaten the programme. Maintain a continual awareness of your external stakeholder landscape and a 'finger on the pulse' of individual motivations and perspectives.

- If all of your stakeholders are aligned on their view of the programme, you will lack sufficient challenge.

Nudges

- Maintain a consistent narrative about the programme and communicate frequently.

- Develop peer relationships to provide support and advice as you navigate the stakeholder landscape. Offer advice and support to other SROs.

- Build a network of critical friends from across the stakeholder landscape to challenge your thinking and drive the programme forward constructively.

Summary

Operating in the unique landscape around government transformation is one of the most complex and difficult challenges that SROs face. To successfully understand, navigate and influence programme stakeholders requires deft handling skills and consistent effort. Key behaviours displayed by the best SROs are: strong political acumen, authentic relationship building ability and dedicated commitment to communicate in clear and concise messaging. Finally, it is important to recognise that it is highly unlikely that all stakeholders will share the same perspectives on the transformation programme as the SRO.

6 | Tools and supporting insights

Tools and supporting insights

This chapter signposts you to key resources recommended by SROs. It also includes suggested reading selected from academia and the private sector.

Develop informal relationships with your fellow SROs, understand how they have tackled similar problems, seek advice and share solutions to core challenges. The **Transformation Peer Group** offers a network group for SROs of transformation. Run by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) and Government Digital Services (GDS), it is an excellent forum to share challenges and insights with peers. Contact CEO IPA or DG GDS for more details.

> "Find a confidante for the tough times – one who will give friendly advice but also challenge you."
>
> **SRO, Home Office**

The 7 Lenses of Transformation and its **Maturity Matrix** gives guidance on how to frame and assess the key elements of a transformation programme.

The MPLA provides a number of highly useful frameworks and techniques – SROs frequently reference the **Galbraith Star** as a model for organisational design. Maintaining a support network through an **Action Learning Set** or similar peer group provides an opportunity for ongoing learning and development.

The **Suite of Cabinet Office Functional Standards** provides guidance on how programmes should operate. This includes resourcing, processes and important policies. A key document from the IPA is the **SRO's Guide to the Key Project Delivery Roles**. The guide provides a helpful delineation between SRO and PD roles.

> "Sometimes you need to trust your instincts about what really needs to be resolved now, as opposed to what you need to let go or give some time."
>
> **SRO, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs**

Chapter 1: Getting it right with culture

'The Critical Few' – written by The Katzenbach Center provides further reading on how to diagnose the culture of an organisation, how to work out what traits need to change and finally how to build the frameworks and informal networks in your organisation to effect the shift.

Financial Reporting Council's work on Corporate Culture and the Role of Boards provides insights on what leadership and stewardship look like when attempting to shape an organisation's culture. Specific reference is made to a tailored question set, encouraging senior leaders to diagnose culture as they **'walk the floor'** of their company.

"What counts is the actual behaviour of the organisation and its top people. This is far more significant than a hundred statements about a company's culture or its ethical policy."

Chairman, Sainsbury's

Chapter 2: Living the vision

A number of departments, such as DWP, have a **specialist Behavioural Insights Team** that can be accessed to support boards and SROs with behavioural insights in organisations, departments and also in citizen groups when transformation affects the citizen interface.

'The Four Building Blocks of Transformation' – written by David Lancefield offers further reading on the concept of **'Designing for Trust'**, exploring the link between motivating principles and employee engagement and the impact on beliefs and behaviours.

"Expect people to behave as human beings, no matter how sophisticated the programme engagement people will always have their own human emotions and are driven by similar things."

Director, Cabinet Office

Tools and supporting insights

Chapter 3: Showing up whole and being resilient

Brené Brown's **'Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts'** is based on research with a range of senior leaders from the public and private sectors – it is focused on being mindful and showing up whole.

> "Have resilience and know how to manage your emotions."
>
> **SRO, Department for Education**

Chapter 4: Balancing delegation and control

The 'Adding Value' Dilemma – Lt. Gen. Nugee outlines the risk of continuously adding value at all levels of an organisation and its impact on personal ownership and empowerment.

The Future of Boards: Meeting the Governance Challenges of the Twenty-First Century has a chapter on the importance of **recognising negative boardroom dynamics**. It is a useful reference to help with the composition of boards and building senior leadership teams.

Chapter 5: Navigating and influencing the landscape

In the **'Blame Game: Spin, Bureaucracy, and Self-Preservation in Government'**, Christopher Hood explores the positive and negative impacts of blame culture within government institutions.

Public Accounts Committee training course – Civil Service College run a 1 day personalised training course to prepare senior officials to appear before the committee. The course can be tailored to your needs and helps you maximise your performance in front of the committee through a fully interactive session.

> "You have a lot more power than you think you might – make sure that you use it."
>
> **SRO, Department for Education**

Closing thoughts...

Developing the insights and content for this book has been an incredibly powerful learning journey. But, it is only the start.

We welcome your continued feedback and input on:

- how 'The Art of Brilliance' has supported you in delivering your transformation programme

- how you would like to see collaboration networks evolve

- what other tools and training opportunities you have leveraged to support your work that could be useful to share with others.

Contact us at:

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Acknowledgement

This book would not have been possible without the generous support of the government transformation community, working in partnership with PwC. The highest levels of energy and commitment from those surveyed and interviewed has generated an incredibly powerful set of behavioural insights that will help the next generation of Transformation SROs. Pages 42-43 show a visual representation of how we built the book through a co-creation workshop. We would like to say a huge thank you to all of the contributors working on complex and challenging government programmes for their time, honesty and encouragement to make 'The Art of Brilliance' possible.

Personal notes and reflections

"Leadership is a series of behaviours rather than a role for heroes."

Margaret Wheatley, Author

HM Government