

Transcript | How to Translate Your Work Into Strong Examples

Ariana Keyman (Apolitical) 0:16

Hello everyone and welcome. I think we might give folks another minute or so to join because we have people trickling in and we'll get started in about a minute.

Yeah.

Okay, I might just get us started in interest of time. I see people still trickling in. Very exciting. We have such a large group of attendance today and it should be a great event. Thank you so much again for joining. But yeah, hello and welcome to this Career Moves event on how to translate your work into strong examples.

My name is Ariana Keeman and I'm the Director of Philanthropic Partnerships here at Apolitical.

Jenna Kelly 1:23

And hello as well from me everyone. My name is Jenna Kelly. I am the head of events here at Apolitical and I will be co-moderating this event with my wonderful colleague Ariana.

Ariana Keyman (Apolitical) 1:37

Thanks Jenna. Today we're looking at how public servants can turn work experience into strong job application examples. This comes at an interesting moment for the UK Civil Service, as I'm sure many of you know, the success profile framework is being scrapped in favour of a new model

built around skills and expertise.

Ultimately, whatever framework you're applying against, however, the same skill matters, which is being able to show what you did and what changed because of it. So with that in mind, we'll hear from experienced civil servants who've mastered these examples in their own careers, worked their way up from a junior level and coached others through job application training today.

For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, a very warm welcome. Apolitical is the world's largest online network for governments, used by more than half a million public servants and policy makers across 170 countries. Apolitical is a strategic partner to governments, helping them prepare their workforces for the future.

We achieved this by upscaling through expert-led learning programmes and peer communities, as well as by building innovative AI-powered tools designed for and with governments.

It would be great to hear from and about all of you too. So do post in the chat where you're joining us from and what organisation you work for.

Now, I'm going to get into a few quick bits of housekeeping before we get into today's session.

Firstly, I'll mention that this event is recorded for an on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website, so please do not record it yourself. We'll also be using the recording to generate events insights, including with AI-powered software. As the session is running on a Teams town hall, we won't collect your video or audio data,

but personal data you share in the chat may be captured. Contact details for privacy concerns are in the Apolitical homepage footer, and closed captions are available in your own language and can be toggled on or off in your screen settings. My colleague will now post the instructions in the chat.

Secondly, before we get started, I would love to introduce you, of course, to the career development community on Apolitical. It's a space to ask the questions we don't always get time for at work or at these events even, and to discuss the new recruitment process for the UK Civil Service when it drops. This community is a great place to connect with and share your experience from your peers in the public sector.

My colleague will post the link to the community in the chat.

Over to you, Jayna.

Jenna Kelly 4:26

Wonderful. Okay, before we get into the main content for today, which I'm sure you're all waiting for, and before we introduce the speakers delivering that content, we're going to run a few quick polls just to get a sense of where everyone is coming into today's discussion from. So the first poll, it should pop up on your screen. I am sure everyone is well accustomed to MS Teams polls.

It will be, where are you individually in your application journey right now? So options will be, you're exploring roles, you're drafting examples, you're refining for a specific role, you're waiting to hear back about a role, or maybe it's something else. And if it's something else, please do share.

in the chat. I will go silent for a moment to let you think about your answer.

Okay.

We have an all of the above in the chat.

Answers still coming in.

Nearly at the 400 responses mark, over the 400 responses mark, as I was saying that. Okay, so you are still welcome to respond. At the moment, the lead is that nearly half of you are in the exploration phase. You're exploring roles available to you.

And just under a third of you are drafting your examples in that application process. And I'm kind of seeing that about 1/5 in total are either really in that active refining for a specific role or waiting to hear back from a role. So that's really interesting that we're kind of collectively in more of an exploration phase.

For those of you who are further down the process, please feel free to also share your advice for your peers earlier in the process. This is a really nice opportunity to share some peer supported advice as well. Okay, second poll is coming up and this one is specifically leading into the examples, which I know

just under a third of you are doing. What is the hardest part? What is what is hardest about writing a strong example? So the options are picking the right story, showing your impact, not just a list of tasks, keeping things concise, making it sound like you rather than a template that everyone might be submitting.

Again, something else, and I will give you a moment to respond.

Yeah.

Okay.

Again, keep those answers coming in. We're getting lots of all of the above in the chat. We should actually look into the select all options in Teams.

Okay.

Exactly half of you, which I'm sure will change as I say this, but exactly half of you so far struggling with showing your impact, not just your tasks. So sort of the so what at the end of listing out tasks, right? We are definitely here to help with some of that today. 30% of you are struggling with that first step of just picking the story.

which is really interesting. But it seems like we have a lot of people that are great at keeping things concise. So maybe some lessons to be learned there from the room. Thank you for indulging me in those and for taking part in our polls. I am now going to introduce our speakers. We are so fortunate to have

two brilliant guests here today, Gregor Henderson and William Moody, who are joining us to share their insights. Gregor Henderson began his civil service career as an 18-year-old team leader in the Department for Work and Pensions in the UK. He's since progressed to grade 7, holding a range of operational and strategic leadership roles across government.

And he now leads a training team within the Home Office and founded the Scotland Junior Leaders Network, supporting the development of junior colleagues across Scotland. Welcome, Gregor. And Will joined the civil service following a PhD and some time in academia. He joined initially as an intern through the UK RI scheme and has since progressed to a senior policy lead in the net zero strategy team in Desmos. His roles have covered a range of topics from futures and foresight to cybersecurity to decarbonization to net zero strategy. And he's also spent time as a mentor running departmental networks and rolling out carbon literacy training across the civil service.

It is lovely to have you both here. We are so delighted. And we're going to get you contributing and speaking now, not just myself and Ariana, with an icebreaker to kick things off. I'm going to give you 30 seconds to share your responses because it would not be an Apolitical event with some sort of time-bound question. And the icebreaker is,

What genre of music do you listen to when you're writing or reviewing a job application? I'll give you a moment to mull on your answers, and then I'm going to ask everyone in the chat to share their answer as well, because we could potentially make a playlist from this, who knows? I'm going to go alphabetically by first name and hand over to Gregor first. Go for it.

Che.

Gregor Henderson (AHRO Training Team) 10:08

Good stuff, thank you. Yeah, mine is a bit cringy, so apologies, but for some reason, mine's like focused music on YouTube. So you can get like 2 hours of just like almost the same noise and there's no words or distractions. So when I was listening to words in the past, I'd find they just like weave into my statement. So yeah, focused music, which I'm embarrassed to admit. But yeah, go over to Will.

Jenna Kelly 10:29

There are no judgments here. I listened to White Noise for so long reading a book the other day that I couldn't turn it off because it felt weird. So all welcome here. Will?

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 10:40

Yeah, the white noise gives terrible exam flashbacks for me. I'd have to go one up with no lyrics, but probably just some sort of like, I've got a playlist that's like basically artists that I like, but with no speaking in it. So I think it's probably got to be one of those if you're looking in for an application, can't be distracted by singing along.

Jenna Kelly 11:00

Yeah, I love that.

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 11:00

As I could have to be, unfortunately.

Jenna Kelly 11:02

I'm really intrigued. I can't do it visually, but there are so many responses in the chat that I want to see the like pie chart of the database of this. We've got classical, we've got nothing, we've got lo-fi, we've got Afrobeats, we've got gospel, silence, pop music, metal. Kudos to the person listening to metal while submitting applications.

80s, a lot of classical in there, melodic death metal, deep house, chill. I'm going to spend some time reading this more while I hand back over to Ariana, but thank you for again indulging me in that.

Ariana Keyman (Apolitical) 11:43

Brilliant. Thank you both. And thank you everyone who's continuing to contribute. This is very interesting indeed to see. And I was thinking for myself, and I think it actually oscillates between ASMR focus type music and techno, which is the two very different, two opposite ends of the spectrum. So to each their own, I suppose. Okay, now to get

To get right into things, Gregor and Will have both prepared a masterclass drawing on their careers and experiences in the civil service. As always, we'll leave plenty of time for you in the audience to ask questions after. So please start thinking about those and posting them in the chat as we go. First, though, let's get started with Gregor.

Take us away.

Gregor Henderson (AHRO Training Team) 12:24

Thank you, Arianna and Jenna. So we'll make a start and today we'll talk you through how to translate your work into strong examples. Again, for many of you, you likely already have the evidence and today is about how to pick that evidence and really present it in the best way. So both one and I, we don't know any secrets about what's going to replace success profiles, okay? We'll try our best to kind of answer your questions as we go throughout. But again, if you think back to the change, for those of you who have been around long enough from competencies to behaviour, behaviours, there was a lot of similarities and a lot of kind of lessons learned from both that we can carry forward. So again, we're hoping that today a lot of the same principles, tips and lessons will be similar.

So I'll move on to just a kind of very short bit about me. So I grew up in Dune in Scotland. I can't imagine many of you have heard of that, but home of the Outlander and Monty Python Castle, if

you've watched either of those. As mentioned in the kind of introduction, joined the DWP as an 18 year old and progressed to a grade 7 role at 25 years old. So kind of really fast-paced career development.

fortunate to have a lot of support and mentorship and really kind of great development opportunities to allow me to get to that experience. What I'm hoping to share today is lots of experience for applying for jobs, being interviewed, being the one interviewing and also lots of mentoring as well.

It's also mentioned about the Scotland Junior Leaders Network. I'll kind of post a link in that towards the end of the session, I'm sure, but that is for kind of junior colleagues at grades sort of A to HU or equivalent based in Scotland, where you can access a range of talent development events as well. And really kind of proud to set that up and hopefully kind of help the next generation of talent come through.

bit about myself as well. We got married last year. It's a nice photo of the two of us, my lovely wife on the right hand side, of course, and me in the good Scottish kilt. And just last week was successful in a grade 7 application. So yeah, hopefully getting a good timing to do the session. It was kind of a bit scared that I feel that one and then have to have to be a bit of a fraud doing this, but move forward.

So if I go into talking about selecting your evidence then. So a few things to think about when you are kind of starting to think about your application. You've probably all got a really wide range of examples and evidence that you've thought of, different experiences, different difficulties, challenges and leadership opportunities.

So a few things to kind of think about when you're really kind of picking those behaviours or evidence, whatever that kind of new approach will look like.

One of the first things for me is that kind of scope and skill. And this is something that a mentor taught me sort of early on in my career, is always to consider how big and wide something is. So what was that, whether it was change, whether it was project, policy, operational delivery, was that kind of affecting, let's say, 10s of hundreds of people, thousands of customers, staff, or did it save X amount of pounds?

This will kind of help you identify whether your examples are at the right level as well, and you can compare that to the civil service sort of profiles and the kind of grades that are there for you. You also want to consider your reach within your examples and that organisational impact. So did that thing that you do, did it just affect kind of your own team? Was it your whole kind of site that you sit in? Was it the kind of the whole operation or your whole directorate or department or even kind of wider sort of UK civil service or the general public? So for example, in some of my kind of evidence that I've shared in the past, I've spoke about the being responsible for learning development of over 8000 colleagues, having a budget of 250,000 pounds in learning development to spend, or the delivery of a network over 50 government departments. It just kind of helps me to kind of show that scale and the scope of the work that I've been involved with.

The next thing, and one that's really important, could be number one, I suppose, these are in no particular order, is being aligned to the role and criteria. Sorry, if we just flip back a slide, just still on the selective evidence one. So you want to closely align your answers with the criteria set against your role. You also want to consider what examples best fit with that.

So if you're applying for a project management job for your first time, for example, then again, any existing examples you've got around sort of landing change, delivering it, communicating, they're likely to land a bit better than something that's maybe a bit BAU or something that's not change related as such.

I'd also really encourage you to storytell. And this is kind of one way that you can really show your leadership abilities and your application is by kind of really telling a good story and by kind of capturing the reader early on. So as we know, all good stories have a really good strong start, middle and end. So always consider whether someone with no knowledge of your area could bring that to life in their own head.

and really want you to speak about the challenges and the barriers that you faced along the way and ultimately how you overcame them as well.

I think this was mentioned in the kind of one of the poll questions as well. The last bit I can get you to think about is that impact and result. So try to select evidence that brought about clear impacts or results in your work. So for example, in that kind of operational role, did you increase your productivity by 10%? Did you save the taxpayer and department X amount of thousands? And again, anything that you can really do to sort of quantify those results and help to really prove the impact that you had will going to go down well with any of your panels.

So if I continue on to personal statements then.

And I'll kind of go through these personal statements and behaviours before going to pass them to Will to talk you through all things interviews. Then we'll kind of open up to a range of questions that you've got. So for my personal statements then, what I always try and do is start with a really powerful introduction to my personal statement. That helps me set the scene. of who I am, what I'm all about, before the reader reads any further.

I also then back that up by setting out my experience and then use the rest of my statement to prove these opening parts. So from one of my most recent applications, I kind of started with, I'm a confident, energetic, learning focused leader delivering purposeful change across the civil service. My passion is developing people and I naturally build strong relationships through my collaborative and supportive approach.

I then backed that up by saying I've crossed government experience and learning, operational and change roles in DWP and the Home Office and currently lead the learning and development of over 8,000 staff in asylum and human rights operations, one of the most fast-paced and scrutinised areas of government. So for me, that's kind of sets the scene really quickly in terms of what I'm all about in my experience. And for me, hopefully gets the reader to kind of pick up that and get a bit excited and want to kind of read more.

For layouts in your personal statements, I've really kind of seen 2 general approaches. And the keyword within this is personal, right? So do what is right for you. But the first is what I tend to use is kind of setting out one or two star examples following that kind of introductory statement. To me, this allows me to kind of hit the criteria multiple times and show that depth and what I'm providing against the criteria.

But on the flip side, I've also seen kind of really good examples where people have addressed the criteria sort of individually. So let's say you have six of them, you have six different paragraphs addressing each one. So again, this is where I kind of struggle a little bit with word count with this and I struggle with that kind of storytelling approach, which I think is kind of a key ability in my leadership and what kind of does me well in applications.

So I tend to go more for the first option, but do what's right for you and try different sort of techniques and layers as you go throughout your kind of journey getting your jobs.

One of the last steps I give on personal statements is once you finish your sort of first draught is get sort of a highlighter, either kind of traditional one or kind of use one on the Word document that you've got in front of you. Sit down and highlight each of the criteria in a different colour, which you might have six different colours on your page, for example. And then kind of look down your statement and highlight what sentences match what criteria.

So let's allow you to quickly see if you've got sort of five really strong points against criteria one, but none against criteria 5, allowing you to kind of adjust and sort of rebalance your statement, but also kind of add to it in terms of any missing gaps that you've got to.

So, if I move on to my kind of last section and on to behaviours.

What I'd recommend is that you always use the star model when structuring your examples. I'm sure many of you have heard the star model. If you haven't, don't worry, we'll kind of go through it fairly briefly. But this is when you go for a structure where you have your situation, your task, your action, and your result. What I've also done in the slides here is provided a bit of a kind of suggested percentages for word count, so the kind of time that you speak for in an interview.

Just to give you an idea about kind of how to structure your example as such.

The key priority is getting in that action and all the things that you did in terms of what you did and how you did it, which is what come on to as well.

When setting out your situation, also try and think about what strategic hooks can I use to kind of frame this in. So did your work support delivery of sort of a ministerial, a government, or real kind of organisational priority? What was the kind of big challenge at the time? This will help set your situation clearly, but also show you your understanding of how your work fits and contributes to that bigger picture.

So I'll give you another example of mine, hopefully kind of somewhat useful for you. One was to deliver the Prime Minister's 10-point plan, including the clearing of the asylum backlog of over 100,000 cases. I rapidly built and scaled the leadership and management training offer to develop strategic capability as the workforce doubled in size. Okay, so kind of link to that strategic hook about a Prime Minister's 10-point plan, and I can part within that.

The next thing we're going to talk about is that kind of what and how within any of your evidence that you provide. So one kind of big mistake that I see is because someone that's shifted a lot of applications, sat on a lot of interviews and kind of led on those is that people often explain what they did, but they miss out how they did it. So for example, a what in the role would be I developed and implemented a new training strategy.

And the how would be more about kind of using a collaborative and evidence based approach to engage stakeholders, prioritise business needs and drive continuous improvement. So that kind of shows both that what and how.

The 4th thing that I cover is around including any challenge that you can in your examples. So think back to that situation. Was there kind of a particularly challenging person you have to work with, whether that was kind of a colleague, a stakeholder? Was there an unrealistic deadline set by a senior leader or someone that just kind of really disagree with your position?

Try and kind of paint that out to the panel that you're kind of up against. Talk about kind of the challenge that's there. How did you overcome that as well? For me, as a sister, that gives me kind of great confidence that if that person then faces similar challenges in the role, they kind of

know how to kind of navigate that. And it really kind of proves those sort of behaviours, especially things like Leadership, for example.

And as I mentioned earlier on about when you're going to select in your evidence, try and really get across the impact at the end of your example. So again, try and include some numbers within that, whether that's numbers of customers, stakeholders or staff that you can have change affected, for example.

Any kind of quantitative numbers that you can use, again, like pound save, the percentage rise in productivity, drop in sickness, whatever it may be, as even more scale and impact to your behaviours. So that's kind of a brief overview from me for a few kind of tips on both your kind of behaviours, your personal statements, and really how to start thinking about selecting your evidence.

I want to pass over to Will now to allow him plenty of time to go through his and then answer all your questions. Thank you very much.

Ariana Keyman (Apolitical) 23:53

Fantastic. That was really interesting. Thank you, Gregor. Well, I'll hand over to you in a second. I just wanted to take a moment to encourage everyone to get your questions submitted in time for Q&A. And please do use the Q&A tab to do so. We've got two experts here with us, so please don't hold back.

There's no such thing as a bad question. Will, over to you.

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 24:25

Great. Thanks, everyone. Thanks for coming along. I unfortunately don't have as exciting of a PowerPoint as that. It's just going to be me talking at you, but hopefully be able to make it slightly more engaging than just a ramble. I'm going to be talking about two words, really, which I think I always come back to when

I think about applications, which is continuous storytelling. And I think we started talking about it just then with Gregor, but wanted to go into a bit more detail about the storytelling element and not only why I think it's important, but also how practically I think it can be super, super useful when you come to think about writing applications, not just writing, but also performing in interviews too. So when I say continuous, what do I mean? It kind of struck me, I think, you knew from the introduction that I come from an academic background. So for me, it's a massive change when you understand the nature of the civil services that you basically have to apply for every job that you get and every promotion that you get, you'll have to go through some sort of application process that's formally

accredited and you will have to probably write something and sit down and talk to someone.

Whereas in academia, it's a bit more, you know, it's kind of based on the number of papers you produce or a bit more, less focused on the individual. So in that sense, I think it's very useful to be thinking about your progression and your applications.

all the time. And I think we've all been there when you've seen a really good job and the deadline's super soon and you basically just pull on a weekender and you spend all your Saturday writing down and hacking away at this application to get out on the deadline. And also, conversely, there's probably been some applications that you've seen that look really cool and

really interesting, but you skipped over because you just quite bother to spend your weekend writing the application, which I think is totally fair enough.

So the thing when I'm talking about this kind of like continuous storytelling mindset is to try and break down those barriers and shift rather than thinking about job applications when they come up to almost have like your repertoire ready to go when you see an interesting application. So it doesn't feel like such a chore and such an effort to have to go through this application process. And yeah, this continuous mindset is really helpful. But what I specifically want to major on is the storytelling element. Because what you want to be doing is continuously think about how to tell the story of you, I guess, because I think the biggest thing that I've learned from job applications is it's not really about forms or memorising reams of texts or like even treating them as exams or tests that they're basically at the heart all about stories. I think every promotion that I managed to get and every great candidate that I've seen in interviews has been able to tell a convincing story, not just about like their impacts, but also their skills and not just where they've been, but also where they're heading. And I think this kind of idea of storytelling is something that maybe we've kind of lost a little bit. I think especially when our day jobs are so intense, you know, you're going from one thing to another, it's very like factual and I think AI contributes this to a little bit, summarising stuff, getting the key points done. And I think our ability to just kind of like breathe and tell stories is a little bit lost. And

I think it doesn't just apply at the written stage. I think it's almost more applicable at the interview stage if you have a little bit more time to talk through your ideas. And I think reframing this whole application process rather than as just a basically a glorified exam is a chance to tell your story. And I think that's just that's really helped me.

And again, we spoke a little bit about behaviours and star and, you know, some people love them, some people loathe them. I won't comment, but I think basically that's just a distillation of what a story is. Like every story basically has some sort of situation, task, action and result.

That's what we really

boring, your favourite story. But yeah, if you, that is the structure of any kind of story and whether whatever happens with behaviours or whatever, I think the core is going to be, you're going to need to tell a story and those stories will major around something like leadership or times when you have had to develop other people or see examples in other areas. So I think when you start to think about stories, it becomes obvious what's important. So I think we just talked earlier about the increasing about challenge. Like every story is exciting because there's challenge to the people involved in it. Like Lord of the Rings would have been pretty boring if you just like, they just went straight to the end and threw in the ring. And that was kind of it, you know.

And likewise, the equivalent, I've seen so many, or been in interviews where you kind of had the equivalent at the result of the, I woke up and it was all just a dream. If it was a good story, everyone, you know, year one in primary school, we were always told not to finish a story like that. And I think it's the same when you think about your examples too. You kind of want to go out with a bang and

use that kind of ending point to really round off a great story and really feel like you have delivered something and delivered something that's been interesting and engaging to the

person reading it. So I guess whether it's the classic, like, tell me about yourself question or tell us a time when, whatever kind of question you're being asked, whether it be written or in a interview. It's all about telling a story, I think. So that's kind of framing it, I guess. How has this helped me? I think being in this continuous storytelling mindset has kind of helped me understand where my strengths are really as a candidate. And to quickly play about what that would look like, I think having done these applications and thought about my story, I think where my unique skills lie is that I have a quantitative background. I did a PhD in cancer research, so I did quite a lot of science and quite a lot of statistics in that. But also I've managed to transition into some strategy roles with the net zero strategy. So that kind of interface between being quite comfortable with quantitative figures, but also having a policy and strategy background has really helped me. And I think it allowed me to apply to my current role, which I actually do a lot of, not only having to think about policy and strategy implications, but also having to understand numbers like carbon budgets, where all the emission savings are. So being able to have that double, that being able to see both sides has really helped me. And I think being able to think about my kind of career as a story has allowed me to see those opportunities where maybe I wouldn't have otherwise. I think on the flip side, it's also helped me understand where I could maybe save some time with applications because I know anyone that's been on civil service jobs, actually, it might be a little bit drier now, but there used to be hundreds and hundreds of jobs all the time. And you know, you'd see, you put in your interesting keywords and sometimes you see something like, oh, I'm interested in this. But then you kind of go through and it's maybe got some skills that aren't quite required. Like I was being able to philtre quite a lot. Like I know, for example, that project management just isn't something that really fits into my story. So as much as I could see a really exciting, interesting looking job, but I just know that that's probably not worth my time applying for and I can focus my concentration and skills and time onto other jobs as and when they arrive. And I think that's also how the behaviours kind of comes into it. There's also for you people that work in policy, there's something called the Policy Profession Standards, which you can look up online. And that's super useful. It's got like, I can't even remember, it must be like 100 different kind of statements and just go through and rank yourself against them and be like, do I feel confident in this? And the examples could be something like, I've had time engaging internationally, or I've engaged with internal stakeholders, or I've had experience using quantitative data in policy development. And that could kind of really help you build up your story and be like, okay, yeah, this is where I have been. have like quite a lot of experience. And this is also where areas that potentially I am less experienced in. And I've used that before to realise that, for example, my external engagement experience was quite poor in my previous job. So I really took it on myself to speak to my line manager and say, this is an area that I would really like to develop as a as part of my professional development and was able to really get into some external engagement calls and by the end of the job really lead them and talk to quite a lot of, they were actually boiler manufacturers and have some conversations with them. So yeah, that was just how kind of thinking about that story has been able to allow me to think about

big bite areas where I could potentially improve. So given that I'm a strategy person, this has probably all been a bit abstract and strategy wishy-washy. So I thought I'd try and transition into stuff that is actually practical tips and how you can actually implement this like continuous storytelling, which sounds like a great sound bite, but

What does that actually mean in practise? So what I've always done is I've always had a space in my OneNotes in kind of like an L&D tab where every couple of weeks I just hold myself to spend 10, 15 minutes writing down what I've done those last couple of weeks in there in a really shorthand star format.

So I don't forget it because I think it'd be quite easy just to go through months and, you know, you achieve loads of great stuff and maybe get shout outs in team meetings, but you don't record exactly what happened, when it happened, what was the result. And I think even just having those little sentences, that really helps as this kind of like evidence bank when you come to thinking or you see an application rather than having to

rack your brains and be like, oh, did I actually do that? And then you have to look back through emails and be like, oh, what was the percentage increase that I saw in this? Having that ready to go really like streamlines the process. And then you can kind of take all those different examples and start categorise them into what skills they're showing. And again, I would have had them in behaviours for my previous application, but.

whatever it is, the kind of universal truths of applications will still be the case, right? You're going to have to have examples where you've shown leadership, you're going to have examples where you've been able to communicate effectively. So an example I guess I've done at that is I remember I wrote a permanent secretary briefing on departmental metrics and the result was we got approval to start a dashboard within the department.

And I basically said that the part of that story is that it shows that my ability to do those cross-cutting pieces of work that I spoke to you about, you know, I was able to be on the policy side, but also use metrics, which are kind of more my quantitative side. That's a great example of me showing cross-cutting skills and also leadership. And that's kind of done. I can bank that and put that into

into my notes. It's also useful as well, as I mentioned earlier, to stop, to find blank spots or blind spots in your story. So you can kind of, once you've had a go at putting those into different categories, you can really be like, oh yeah, what am I missing? And or if I want to be able to do this in the future,

what are the skills that I need to develop? And that's where thinking about those policy profession standards or looking at your behaviours and see where you have those gaps can be really, really useful. I'd also encourage you to have a think about your personal story as well.

Like I've given a very quick example of what

mine might be, but imagine you're just going for like a faceless job. It doesn't matter exactly what the job is, but that kind of first question they ask you when they say, tell me about yourself. What are the unique skills and experiences that you have? And how is that, how are you able to develop that into a story about you, about where you've come from?

and where you want to be going. And honestly, I think, I guess I would say this because I've spoken to you for 10 minutes about it now, but I do think this mindset is incoming and increasingly important, especially in the recruitment that we're seeing in the civil service today,

because I don't know what everyone else's experience has been, but it definitely seems to be becoming faster and more flexible, because I think there's just a lot of Lots of things changing, lots of people dropping out, lots of people having to reprioritize. And we don't really have endless weekends, do we, to write EIs or assignment hubs or temporary promotion kind of applications. So if you already know what your story is and you already have written examples to go in your bank, then you're already in such a strong position. in terms of both written applications but also interviews too. So yeah, I guess just to end on the fact that hopefully what this little chat has showed you is that I'm a big believer in that the application isn't the examples you give or the fancy words you write or the AI, what the AI pumps out, it's the story that you tell. And I think that is the most important thing.

Ariana Keyman (Apolitical) 36:46

Thank you so much for that brilliant presentation, Will. And I'm sure I'm speaking on behalf of many of the listeners that no slide deck was needed because in your words, that was a great story. Good example in storytelling. To folks in the audience, please remember to keep dropping in any questions you have for our speakers in the Teams Q&A. There's a tonne of good questions in there already.

So thank you for those who are adding to that. And just before we dive into your questions, I want to let you know that we've also created a great follow-on resource to today's topic that we think you'll find useful. It's a short lesson from one of our courses on what makes a job application stand out.

and how to turn your experience into strong writing. To receive your link to the lesson, you can go to the career development community after the event and leave a comment on the post pinned at the top of the page. It's your opportunity to share what you'd like to learn in our future career moves events as well. We'll send you the resource by e-mail after the event, and my colleague has also posted a link to that thread in the chat. Thank you. Jayna, over to you.

Jenna Kelly 38:00

Wonderful. Thank you, Ariana. And thank you so much, Gregor and Will. I think everyone seemed to take a lot away from that. I was reading the Q&A, I was reading the chat, I was seeing a lot of reactions, hearts, thumbs up and laughing faces here and there. So thank you so much for taking the time to do that. And I actually think there's almost a theme there of, obviously, will kind of storytelling came through really strongly in what you were sharing and great storytelling while you were at it, not to have slides and unhold the room. But also, Gregor, you were sharing a lot around being able to bring yourself into the role. And I thought you shared your kind of opener of the personal statement. And I think that told us who you were. And so maybe there's almost a step before all of this, which is everyone here who's in the weeds of quantifying and translating into impact, actually understanding what your story is, which can be easy to lose sight of when you are a bit further down and feeling in the midst of what can often be quite a stressful process. So thank you for bringing that to the forefront.

We've had a lot of questions in the Q&A. If your question was posted in the chat, I urge you to repost it as Ariane has already shared in the Q&A tab so that we don't lose it. There is a question which has had the most upvotes, so congratulations to that question asker. But the question is,

What advice do you have if your examples are not quantifiable? I'm going to hand to Gregor because I know that you were talking a little about quantifying here. So I'll hand to you 1st and Will, obviously if you have anything to add, do jump in.

Gregor Henderson (AHRO Training Team) 39:34

Yep.

But.

Yeah, of course. So first challenge I give yourself back is just to kind of double cheque that is it quantifiable or not? So what was the kind of impact of your role? Sometimes I think we can play a very small sort of role or small cog within the civil service and trying to kind of understand what impact was there. That's kind of important.

Outside of that, I think there's kind of other things that you can include in most of that sort of result section. So it could be, did you gather any sort of feedback from colleagues? What did that kind of tell you? What was the kind of the key strengths, the things that you can have learned from that as well? One of the things that Scottish Government actually did was they kind of had a 4th, 5th letter on their kind of star and it was a R for reflection.

So again, it's almost kind of thinking, what would you do differently next time? How would you approach that? So again, I always thought that was quite a useful one as well and kind of include that in my kind of interviews now when I've got a bit more time to think, right, what would I do definitely next time? But yeah, probably that and the kind of the feedback and yeah, the kind of other impacts that you can have on the system as a whole is always kind of good to include.

Well done if you got any other thoughts.

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 40:41

No, I definitely agree. I think, yeah, definitely throw back the challenge of, yeah, it doesn't have to be quantifiable as in pounds. I think there's so many different outputs and impacts that your work can have. And I also think as well, this is quite a science thing to say, but don't ever be afraid of a negative result, like just because it doesn't feel like you've achieved something at the moment, exactly like you say, there's reflection and there's, I think especially in interviews as well, you have

I think some of the best people that I've interviewed are reflective of their examples. Like, I don't think people are expecting you to save the government like 20 billion pounds and we can all go home and be happy. Like, there's going to be, there's going to be give and take. And I think, yeah, just being effective is something that I think you could probably use in. in that example, or using more qualitative feedback, as Greg said.

Jenna Kelly 41:32

Yeah, I think that's a great kind of duo of advice and definitely encourage that kind of critical thinking about almost applying creativity to quantifying examples. That doesn't mean

augmenting what you did. It just means challenging yourself to understand what you actually did do.

There's lots of ways to display numbers, not that you should do it rapidly, but yeah, just a challenge to yourself maybe there. I also think the, there's a question here which almost leans into what we got into at the end of that answer through you, Will, which is what if you don't know the quantifiable impact. So you know the kind of general impact, but you can't quantify it. And I think that's sort of what you what you were both getting at, but Will, what you sort of ended at. So is there is there like a next step? So if someone does know the general impact, is there a way to display that more strongly, even if not with kind of the length of time, the percentage, the money saved. Is there a stronger way to communicate that?

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 42:40

I think you can, it can also be, you can think about like internal structures, like you could do something really successfully, which is just linking up teams or creating a forum for people to discuss things, even if, yeah, because I can imagine some people might have examples and I certainly have some on my sheet of paper that's kind of like, set something up with the idea that it will then deliver something maybe in a couple of years time. So I think don't be afraid of that. I think especially for what you used to be seeing, the bigger picture, that's exactly what that behaviour is all about. It's about trying to get cross-departmental working and get people thinking outside of their individual boxes. So I say definitely don't be afraid of that. Or if it was developing a member of the team or getting feedback and changing the way that process is done, I think that's still equally equally positive.

Jenna Kelly 43:31

Yeah, I think that's great. And I also think there's things that carry a lot of weight as well in projects that you might have proximity to, you know, ways that you've worked, systems within which you've worked. So actually that kind of impact can go beyond just quantifying. We have a question which has soared in our boats while we've been chatting. which is how can we best demonstrate readiness or suitability for promotion when applying or kind of, I guess, in the process leading up to application. And Gregor, it feels given your recent months, I imagine, or how long it took, Right, to come to you on this one. So I might ask for any tips you have on demonstrating readiness.

Gregor Henderson (AHRO Training Team) 44:17

Yeah, I'll give it a call. I think, well, a few things. I think there's a lot of kind of like practise and experience that goes into us as a bit of kind of an art and applying for jobs, going to go in for interviews. I think that's kind of part of it as well is that, don't get me wrong, I've kind of had a very fast-paced career, but many failures along the way as well. And sometimes that's the most useful way to learn from that.

In terms of kind of demonstrating kind of that readiness and suitability, I think sometimes for me it's kind of doing things above and beyond just my role. So whether that's kind of something wider within your team, your directorate, I kind of spoke about some of the kind of cross

government work that I'm involved with. I think sometimes that's always been a good advantage to have and when I can compare myself to someone else that's kind of an a similar position that just might give me that little slight edge of advantage this was. But yeah, I think there's also part of you that sometimes you want kind of self-limiting beliefs. You might not ever feel sort of ready and confident to go for the role as well. So things like kind of temporary motion, doing that kind of shadowing of others, all those types of things would encourage you to do that as well.

and would really encourage you to get kind of a mentor as well, to kind of have those sort of reflective conversations, think about kind of what are your strengths, what are the areas you need to improve on and ultimately they'll be able to kind of give you a really honest reflection, hold that mirror up to you about that kind of readiness and sort of suitability for promotion.

Jenna Kelly 45:36

Yeah, I love that. And actually, now that you've brought up mentoring, we had quite a few conversations, questions about mentorship. And I might ask you both this question and you may not have had it, but has there been a piece of advice or feedback that either of you have had in the process of applying? Maybe it was from a mentor, maybe someone else. that's been like a tough thing for you to kind of accept and use in action. Maybe something that another set of eyes reviewing your application taught you about yourself or critiqued that you kind of had to push through, but that's helped you. I know that's quite a big question, so I'll. Leave whoever wants to jump in to do so first.

Gregor Henderson (AHRO Training Team) 46:21

Do you want to go for it well or do you want me to have a pop, have a try?

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 46:23

Yeah, I mean, I can I can have a go on that one, I think.

Gregor Henderson (AHRO Training Team) 46:26

For sure.

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 46:28

I think, yeah, maybe applications I can remember from a few years ago when I first started, I think somebody just said it like that, that just doesn't, that doesn't sound like you, which I think was helpful. Because I think sometimes we can get so obsessed with the word limit. And then this is what I was trying to get at maybe with the storytelling, we get so obsessed by like word limit, we've got to include this many examples, and then you try and condense all the like all your points into the shortest possible sentences and get it all under 500 words and it just kind of reads a bit like a like like a box written it effectively. So yeah, I think that was that was definitely a hard truth and almost having to just go back to the drawing board and try and just let maybe some of the examples breathe a little bit and see if you can be a bit more clever about

certain example showing multiple skills or just because it says leadership one, something else on another, like you could potentially just use, you could show leadership through another

example and save yourself some words. So I think, yeah, maybe just being a little bit less prescriptive.

and trying to be a bit more like me, but something that's really helped me.

Jenna Kelly 47:38

I actually wonder if there's something in that about what we were talking about. There's almost this kind of...

balance between meeting what the, you know, aligning yourself to the role, understanding what the role needs, the key words, quantifying your impact, demonstrating, but also retaining yourself in that, not going so far to what you believe you need to do that you kind of lose that unique essence of who you are. So that's really helpful.

Um, Gregor, what was your what was your hard truth?

Gregor Henderson (AHRO Training Team) 48:06

Yeah, so I think, yeah, I think slightly kind of related to applications, I kind of draw the comparison, I suppose, but was going to go in through a development programme. I think got to kind of a choice where I could kind of stay in a sort of somewhat similar role or go into kind of like a large operational role. It was like 150 people and it was really daunting and terrifying at the point of that sort of conversation.

That was the kind of conversation I had with a mentor at the time, was just going to say, right, that's where you're going to go and grow more, that's where you're going to go and learn more, to kind of go and do that scary thing. And I think that's given me a lot of confidence in terms of kind of being able to lead large teams and things like that as well. So again, that's kind of then played out in my applications as well and given me that sort of diverse range of experience that I can then share with panels as well. So

Yeah, I think sometimes those kind of like sideways moves and doing something that's a little bit more scary, you know, you're going to grow more as kind of a good tip to take forward as well.

Jenna Kelly 48:56

Yeah, that's great. We have had a question in the chat that is, how do you get a mentor? And Gregor, I might come back to you on this one because I know you specifically mentioned you've been involved in these schemes before. So any tips?

Gregor Henderson (AHRO Training Team) 49:14

Yeah, so if you're based in Scotland, then reach out afterwards and we can work something out with the kind of the network that we've got in terms of the mentoring structure. I think other than that, kind of have a look on your sort of departmental intranet sites. There's sometimes sort of mentoring schemes that are there and that are kind of open and you can sort of apply for them. What I found kind of most valuing, I suppose, is when I've kind of seen sort of a leader that's more senior than me, been really impressed by how they kind of lead to the mate, kind of lead a bit differently to me as well. And just kind of reaching out to them and asking them, right, do you have time for a quick chat, sort of understanding sort of their leadership style, their approach, what sort of lessons they can share. So yeah, be bold if there's someone in kind of your area or you can

see someone on a session like one of these, then kind of reach out to them afterwards and kind of ask for their support. Even if that's just a one-off conversation that leads to something more than that, then that's kind of something that has always tended to work well for me as well.

Jenna Kelly 50:09

Nice, thank you for that advice. I believe we hosted an event on Mentorship Apolitical a while back, so I will try to find it and share it with everyone that registered in case there's any helpful tips in there that people need. We've had a question that is about, obviously, all of the tips and the pieces of advice that you have shared today have been

super well received, but there's always going to be one example or a few examples where people have tried some of these and are kind of struggling to get through a certain stage. And the specific question I'm thinking of is, someone said they've done 29 applications, all of them have been checked by senior leaders before they've submitted and none of them have passed the SIFT.

And their question is, basically, do you have any suggestions for how to cheque the applications before submitting, given how many different viewpoints and perspectives and different types of brains are involved in this? And I guess that's, yeah, a tough question, but will any advice on on that kind of checking point before submitting, given that.

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 51:17

Yeah, I guess, yeah, firstly, I'd say definitely feel that question. I think it's a really rough time to be doing applications at the moment. I think more so, more so than ever. And I think there are so many competent, capable, incredible civil servants that are, that have been at a certain level for probably quite a while now. And because of recruitment freezes, civil service shrinking, it's just a lot harder to find opportunities. And I mean, I line manage one incredible SCN and I know he's so capable of taking the next step. It's just the case of trying to find it. And yeah, I guess my plea would be please

don't give up or don't be disharmed. It can be such a soulless, especially on that horrible civil service jobs website that's so soul destroying and everything. There's not even a single picture to lift a smile. But yeah, I would just say, please keep going. And it will get better and there will be more jobs coming. Like there's been quite a lot of voluntary exit schemes around the departments. I think there's quite a lot of movement going on, obviously, a new government too, there's probably going to be new priorities. So I think we have been through like an incredibly rough patch. And yeah, just please don't.

give up and please don't feel like you're not capable of it, because I'm sure you are. And I'm sure everyone has great stories to tell. And yeah, you just got to, and it is really horrible because I've been there before. You just got to keep going and keep believing that you are worthy of the promotion. And

It will come one day, I do promise, if you want it, of course. I'm sure it will.

Jenna Kelly 52:59

I could not plus one that.

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 53:00

So that's not very practical, is it? But that's more of a, yeah, just feel everyone that's in this position.

Jenna Kelly 53:04

You know, sometimes motivation is everything people need. I think there's, I mean, by a show of thumbs up, how many people have felt the sentiment of that question? You know, you've submitted a lot of applications and you're not getting the answers that you want. And this isn't a very formal form of data collection because I don't know how many of you are here, but I'm seeing lots of thumbs up. So I'm sensing there's not just a handful of you that have felt that. So motivation can be extremely practical as well. So thank you for that, Will. I'm going to try and get a few quick questions in before we very sadly have to wrap up on interviews, because there's a few things sitting here around interviews. And

I won't ask for more thumbs up again. I sense a lot of people in the room don't love interviews. They're not a universally admired activity. One of the questions is, how do you fit examples into the interview questions if you've only really prepped examples that don't neatly fit? Like if you had an option, should you shoehorn the example in or should you...

try something else or is there another answer there? So Gregor, you're nodding. I'm going to throw that one to you.

Gregor Henderson (AHRO Training Team) 54:16

Yes, I think in any conversation, right, we tend to just reply immediately. I think within an interview setting, take a bit of time to pause when you get those questions. Sometimes think about kind of can you adapt your answer towards that question. I was fortunate enough in the kind of the recent interview that I had, the questions were sent in advance. That could be something that comes in future as well and gives you a bit more time to prepare and really provide your best answer. But

In the times where I've not, I think kind of having your sort of really good examples and having those kind of aligned to the behaviours as best you can, that's the best approach. But I've always kind of had one or two in my back pocket just in case, I suppose. But I think just kind of taking that time to just sort of pause and reflect on the question, if it's about, let's say, the picture about difficult stakeholders, how can you then translate that to a change that you made within your team while your stakeholders, actually the team members?

For example, so sometimes you can kind of weave those questions back into your answer would be would be my investment.

Jenna Kelly 55:11

Yeah, I think that's a great suggestion. And yeah, breathe, take a beat is also a very impactful action. I'm going to end on this question, Will. I'm throwing you another one that could end in a motivational speech, but

I guess, do you have a tip for people, you know, a lot of the people on this call today have said that they're in the exploration stage, mostly of applying for these roles or kind of just one stage further. And given what you have shared, I have no doubt that everyone who is looking for a new role and wants a new role will find something that suits them.

But when you get to that interview stage, in terms of preparing, is there something that you think is like the number one or #2 most important things to do when you're preparing? You have no idea what you're going to get asked. So maybe just an addition onto Gregor's advice there. What do people need to do to prep for an interview once they're at that stage?

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 56:13

Yeah, good questions. I think there's, yeah, there's like practical and like mindset things, I'd say. I think like on the practical, I think the idea that I was talking about where you just kind of have this bank of examples, I think it's always good to have practise your kind of killer examples in great detail, set it in front of the mirror, done all that good stuff. But I also think it's good to have

Jenna Kelly 56:14

The.

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 56:36

a backup. And if you've always got this idea of where you've come from and where you're going, you've got this list of potentially examples that maybe aren't your best, but if you have to adapt it and move it into another example, I think having that backup just gives a bit more of a safety net. Now, I think in terms of mindset, I think, yeah, I think they can be really stressful, but the best

interviews I feel like I've performed in, I've been much more calm than normal. Like sometimes you get a bit jittery and you know, don't have that third coffee before the before the interview. And I think it's just about, yeah, it's just about like a calmness and having a conversation with someone and again, going back to like the storytelling thing, that's what maybe trying to get up there. It's not.

It's not an exam. You're not sitting down. It's not going to be your life determined by your A-levels or whatever. It's a chance to talk to someone. They want to find out about you. You probably want to find out about them too. So yeah, try not to put too much pressure on yourself and too much pressure on it. Because again, going back to that previous question, I know that by maybe number, once you start to get to the multiple digits, it can start to feel like really

Jenna Kelly 57:33

Yeah.

Moody, Will (Energy Security) 57:34

draining and demoralising, but I'd say, yeah, just try and relax as much as possible. And I think that's almost as important as the physical prep you do for that, the mindset in which you go into the room. And yeah, even if that means, as somebody told me the other day, even if it means turning up like a minute or too late, but you're calm rather than rushing into the room really stressed and bringing that kind of energy, I think

That's that that kind of like entry in and being being calm is really, really important.

Jenna Kelly 57:59

Yeah.

Amazing, wonderful point. We're out of time. We had hundreds of questions between pre-submitted and live. Wish I could have asked them all, but I'm going to hand over to Ariana now.

Ariana Keyman (Apolitical) 58:13

All, thanks everyone. That was such a good session and thanks for the incredible wisdom from our speakers. And I'd like to ask you all to join me in giving Gregor and Will a virtual round of applause. I see that's already happening, so that's great. And most importantly, thanks to you and audience investing in learning and being so engaged in this topic makes these sessions that much more enjoyable. So our team is going to pull up a quick poll to find out how you felt about today, which will help us continue improving our content. And we would really appreciate your responses. So if you could take a look at that poll and take a second to respond, that would be really appreciated. And before you go, and while you're responding to that,

I want to share a few more events that you can register for to join us again soon. If you're not available to be there live, remember that you can always register for the event in order to get sent the recording and catch up whenever suits you. So on Thursday this week, we have top lessons from a successful government AI project.

on what public servants can learn from government AI pilot successes and failures using our new government AI navigator tool, which is available on the Apolitical platform. Next

Wednesday, we have how to adapt your writing for any audience on shaping your message for whoever is reading it, from senior leaders to the wider public.

And in September, we have how to stay motivated when priorities keep shifting, on protecting your focus and momentum when direction changes constantly. I think many people in this room probably feel that acutely right now. And with that, that's all we have time for today, folks. We hope you found it helpful. And we want to say, again, a huge thank you to our speakers.

to everyone who's made today happen, and to you for taking time out of your busy days. Keep an eye out for the e-mail coming your way with today's recording and resources. Don't forget to comment under my post, and we hope to see you at another Apolitical event very soon. Have a great day.

Right.

Jenna Kelly 1:00:17

Bye.