



Lazy Civil Servant

How to be lazy and incompetent at work and get away with it

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www.lazycivilservant.com



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Our readers speak out

"Essential practical advice on beating the system that you can really use at work"

"An important rejoinder to the pointless hyperactivity of modern public sector life"

"I only wish I'd had something like this earlier in my career - I'd be 15 years younger
by now"

"Read this in the office"

"I'm moving into HR - what could be more lazy than that?"

"My manager is afraid. Very afraid. And that's just how it should be"

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Overview – *strategy and allies*

The world is full of willing people. Some willing to work, the rest willing to let them.

Robert Frost

- Get a public sector job** The great thing about the public sector is that despite all the guff about ‘high performing organisations’ it really does not know how to deal with under-achievement, indolence, responsibility-shirking, scamming and all manner of practices that make life bearable for the lazy worker. Once you are in, you really have arrived in Easy Street. A few tips will help you prosper without effort or ability. That is the aim of this guide.
- Is this guide for you?** Statistics show that up to half of all colleagues are below-average performers. It has even been shown that 20% are in the in the worst performance quintile. *You may be one of these*. If so, you should keep our guide close at hand. But for *anyone* wanting more for less, we think we have something to offer.
- The new ‘contract’ with the nation** There was once the idea that you had a contract, came to work, did something of value for the nation and were well-rewarded by a grateful taxpayer for your efforts and rarefied skills. Thankfully, things have progressed and that salary and lovely final-salary pension no longer come with such onerous reciprocal burdens. Make sure you read the [staff handbook](#) carefully – coded within it, there is an entirely different contract, in which the taxpayer supports all manner of diversions and funds a seemingly endless indulgence of under-performance, incompetence and misconduct. Which is just great for you. Take your time to familiarise yourself with new world. This is much more important than work.
- Your strategy: *know the rules, intimidation, exhaustion and delay*** There are four basic principles that underpin the strategy for an easy life in the civil service:
- **Know the rules.** Most public sector organisation have rules that have been thrown together to deal with difficult cases, to formalise the informal agreements or to create the appearance of being a wise and generous employer. The HR manual establishes the most extraordinary rights and indulgence of you and your funny little ways. Use it! Most gullible employees won’t ‘push the envelope’ of the rule book – if they did, collapse will shortly follow. But *you* can. *You* should. Pedantry and detailed knowledge of this charter of rights, checks and balances and ad hoc protections is your greatest asset and will frustrate and exhaust your manager.
 - **Intimidation.** Managers can be persuaded that dealing with you will be tiresome-beyond-imagining, involve immense personal sacrifice, detailed scrutiny of their professional conduct and record-keeping and distract them from the results they are actually measured on. This is the most elegant solution – prevention being better than cure. This is the norm in the civil service now, so you can expect to get a lot done just with this strategy and the rule-book, as above. If you really are shamefully lazy and incompetent, you might hope to be ignored, moved on or (YES!) promoted.
 - **Exhaustion.** A typical manager will have 4-8 people reporting to them, a draining workload of corporate form-filling, obtuse performance indicators, pointless meetings, impenetrable documents to review and approve... and so on. But if you

know what you are doing, you and your needs can easily take 25% of the manager's time, squeezing out any residual creative or constructive work completely and leaving only the utterly demoralising bureaucratic workloads. This third component feeds into the 'intimidation' strategy – both for your manager in future, and pour *encourager les autres*.

- **Delay.** Play for time. There are so many things you can do to slow everything down – appeals, medical checks, absence, chronic illness etc. Mostly you can cancel meetings or not turn up and they'll just reschedule. If things get nasty, you can launch grievance proceedings against those trying to pin you down – after all performance management is just a form of institutional bullying isn't it? At any point press the big red button marked 'STRESS' and have a couple of weeks out of the game. In the end the manager will move or you will. Because no-one wants to hand over failure or have it handed to them, the slate will be wiped clean.

Human Resources are there to help Your greatest ally in the struggle against pushy management or a striving-to-be-better organisation is the **Human Resources** function – often know as "HR". They are much more important to you than your union. This is because they will be giving bad advice to your managers, whereas your union just gives bad advice to you. Knowing how HR thinks about the world is an invaluable insight.

HR – how it works The thing to understand is that HR acts exactly according to the incentives it faces. It has:

1. Incentives to avoid employment tribunals and workplace conflict with unions or time at ACAS that might involve them in more work or risks.
2. Strong back-covering incentives to apply the rules super-pedantically, take a highly risk-averse approach to its own advice, and to seek even more risk-averse legal advice if there is ever doubt.
3. No incentives to minimise the manager's workload in dealing with a problem – quite the contrary, on account of 1 & 2 above.
4. Incentives to indulge HR fads like work-life-balance etc as these improve HR career prospects and are required behaviours in current HR culture.
5. No incentives to buy in to the manager's objectives and complete indifference to whether these are achieved or missed.
6. No incentives to take responsibility for handling the consequences of its own advice or to take ownership of personnel problems – that is left to the manager.
7. No incentive to end processes quickly or to reach a final decision.

Knowing this, it is easy to see how HR can become a willing but unwitting ally in implementing the 4-part strategy for comfortable civil service survival set out above.

You can help others If you've benefited from this manual or have other insights or case studies you'd like to share, please do let us know – visit our web site or e-mail us in confidence with your observations.

Web: www.lazycivilservant.com

Work-life balance – *choose life*

It's true hard work never killed anybody, but I figure, why take the chance?

Ronald Reagan

- A splendid new fad** The idea is that you have a life, that life is what you do outside work, and that work should not get in the way too much. However, as a public servant you should also be able to claim a comfortable living for the little work you do consent to do from the tax-paying masses, who (fortunately) know little of this. In essence, you should be able to work flexibly – when, where and how you want.
- Flexible working** Implicit in the theory is that you are just as productive per hour of work regardless of how those hours are made up and what happens when you aren't there. One organisation even has a slogan "*anybody, any time, any place*" to convey its flexible approach, almost as if the employee is like a wind turbine: to be plugged into an electricity grid if they happen to have the wind behind them and feel like working. This productivity-miracle-in-reverse will obviously collapse in the long run due to chaos, inefficiency and resentment of those left to pick up the pieces, but for you it offers excellent opportunities to work less, take on fewer responsibilities, transfer onerous work to others and avoid accountability. Some ideas follow:
- Time keeping** Many people work longer than they are contractually required to do, assuming responsibilities without additional reward. *Never do this*. Stick to the contracted hours – you are on very safe ground here. For reasons of vanity, fear, ambition, or even dedication, others will be there to hold the fort, work late if the job demands it and so on. That's their problem, but it's your opportunity. You can even make a virtue of it by passing it off as modern enlightened management (see below).
- Overtime** Though many people work well over their contracted hours, few claim overtime. You should. Obviously, if everybody did, the money pig would go belly up in a jiffy. The most surreal example of this was the government deciding to try performance-related pay on doctors – and pay them handsomely for what they were already doing for free. Suddenly there were humble GPs on £250K and the NHS finances in a tail-spin. It takes the concerted stupidity of a government to achieve that sort of system-wide chaos, but you can still have a go on your own account. Just ask. If they say 'no' to overtime, go back to strict time-keeping.
- Reasons to be late or absent** The most tried and tested method is to have children or caring duties. People go 'ah' and do your work for you. Single or childless people have got used to bearing the costs of other people's families and will generally not complain, even if they are actually annoyed – for who can be against children? Obviously, real caring duties are a bit of a burden, so something like a made-up pet dog with Alzheimer's will demand endless early exits or late arrivals. Other valuable reasons to be absent or pedantically punctual are chronic illnesses, physio, stress counselling, charity work etc.
- Just be late** Sometimes you don't need a reason – come in at about 11.30, a little light e-mail until lunch and then off at 4.30. If anyone tries to do anything about it, just say you are meeting your objectives (see "Performance management – *and how to overcome it*" on page 11) and working flexibly, and what's the problem? Or make out you do a night

shift at home. They might try to make you come in before 10, say. If they do, ignore it or go off with stress.

Compressed hours With this fantastic scam, you can work five days' hours in four days and get full pay. Note the beauty of this is that it allows you to work exactly the contracted hours (see above) but without appearing to be a slacker because when you are in, you are in for a fairly long day. If you come in early, you can make it less than a full day. That you spend the first two hours surfing the internet because no-one else is there is a bonus.

Work part time Another up-and-coming concept. Try sending an e-mail to colleagues and back will come a flurry of e-mails saying:

"I am currently out of the office. I only work Monday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings, please contact me during my working hours. Your e-mail has not been read".

Then the person sending it has to find someone else to deal with it. It means that someone else is in charge when you are out – you can't really take responsibility for what they do or be blamed for anything that goes wrong.

Hard-working manager problem? Sometimes a pushy old-school civil service manager, dedicated, hardworking, and steeped in the now faintly absurd public service ethos, can make life uncomfortable for the lazy civil servant. Luckily, HR has come to the rescue and handed you the most sublime weapon in the long war for idleness and comfort. The Cabinet Office 10-point plan for diversity¹ contains this blessed instruction to the top brass:

This senior commitment needs to be demonstrated across the whole equality and diversity agenda, including those strands for which there are no targets, for example sexual orientation, faith, age, gender identity and work life balance. (emphasis added).

In one department, top managers have gone beyond encouraging work-life balance and induced auto-apathy² as they have to "*model work-life balance*" - a mission for which many top managers are undoubtedly highly qualified.

The lazy civil servant demands a lazy manager The great thing about this is that your manager *has to* embrace and encourage all this work-life balance stuff, and not set a bad example by working too much...! They *have to* make you go home early and do the sort of stuff described as a scam above.

And enforce it through 360 degree feedback But what if the manager persists in setting a bad example or demanding excessive exertion from you? Once again, HR rides to the rescue. 360 degree feedback is a stage-managed opportunity to intimidate and marginalise the demanding manager. The great thing about it is that complaints made by subordinates are treated *completely uncritically* – an allegation becomes a presumption of guilt and a *de facto* fault in the manager's performance. The most delicious irony is that 360 feedback informs pay and promotion for managers. So, on the back of your anonymous comments in the 360 feedback, you present the poor bugger with a choice: work less for more or work more for less!

All of which provides excellent gaming opportunities, especially if you can mobilise one or two colleagues to the cause and get consensus in the 360 feedback.

¹ Delivering a diverse civil service: a 10 point plan (see point 4) [[link](#)]

² DfID. *Our people strategy 2005-2008*. p6. [[link](#)] (this document is a goldmine of HR babble by the way)

Absence from work – *maximising of...*

I don't think necessity is the mother of invention. Invention, in my opinion, arises directly from idleness... to save oneself trouble.

Agatha Christie

- Use the HR handbook** It used to be said of civil servants that we were paid to go to work, not necessarily to do anything. Now the first half of that maxim no longer holds true. A most elaborate edifice, codified in the HR handbook, has been erected to create opportunities for time away from the Whitehall office.
- Special leave** You'll find a huge range of opportunities to not come to work and get paid for it, some of them quite unexpected. How about becoming a magistrate, a little voluntary work, staff sporting occasions, do some Open University courses, study leave, court cases, a bit of caring, even better get involved with the Union, or a staff 'network' (and if you don't fall into the usual 'network categories' form a new one). If you're lucky you won't be asked for evidence of your Aunt Daisy's funeral. If you are, and this is Aunt Daisy's 5th funeral in so many years, show offence and intimidate your manager.
- Virtual teams** Join "virtual teams" and you are no longer working for your manager. The optimal number is between three and five. Fewer than three and people might expect to see some work from you; more than five and you will struggle to remember who you are not working for today.
- Home working** "*I get so much more done and can save the travel time*" (nb. For yourself, not for your employer). But who really knows what you are up to? Make sure everyone knows you are not to be disturbed as you are working intensively on a major report, strategic workforce planning, or something of suitable gravity. An early e-mail looks good – you can always go back to bed.
- Hot-desking – insist on it** An absurd and disorientating fad, based on Neanderthal notions of efficiency, but almost always a huge conflict-provoking motivation and productivity drain. *So what else is good about it?* Well for one thing, no-one has a Scooby-Doo where you actually are. You'll also be shielded from those tiresome contract-winning high-five moments like you sometime see in adverts for investment banks or whatever. Insurmountable obstacles (like walls, floors, and roads) will be placed between you and your colleagues, greatly inhibiting the routine interaction, work allocation, questions, calls for help etc that interfere with your Internet shopping schedule.
- Be your own doctor** As an efficiency measure, there is now self-certification. Five consecutive days off before doctor's certification is required. What a fantastic opportunity! Remember, you are likely to be a better doctor than the real thing – they have 7 minutes to decide what's wrong with you, you have hours. If you do need a sick note, research a condition on the Internet and go to the GP armed with the necessary symptoms.
- Choose your illness to avoid scrutiny** Managers will be too squeamish to enquire in depth about: gynaecological, bowel-related, prostate, sexually transmitted diseases (HIV is the heavy artillery – you can always claim a false positive), congenital, terminal... If you find the 'victimhood' of having these things yourself distasteful, establish a bogus carer relationship –

outsource the malady, and be the bloody Florence Nightingale of the story. Drink, drugs and *larging-it* generally are common sources of absence – that's why the invented excuse of 'food poisoning' is so prevalent. One especially creative colleague managed to convince her manager she had a rare contagious disease – she was sent home until tests confirmed her made-up cough was nothing at all.

Medical bankers Great conditions for the lazy civil servant are 'stress' and 'back pain'. Both are easily faked and impossible to verify. Stress is a legitimate reaction to anything that happens in the workplace that threatens your peaceful way of life. So any sign of disciplinary action or excessive performance management, the press the big red button marked "stress" and go off sick. Back pain and potentially stress will be taken enormously seriously by HR and occupational health specialists (it's what they do!) even if your manager knows you are lying through your teeth. All you have to do is mention litigation and the employer's liability, and off you go. Without delay insist on a health and safety audit, and register concern about repetitive strain injury and musculoskeletal discomfort. As a minimum, you can expect a smart new chair.

Tell your manager the minimum Absence rules usually mean you should call in sick, speak to your manager, explain the nature of the problem and say when you might be back. Remember, you don't have to tell your manager what's up with you if it is a 'sensitive' or 'personal issue' (which it will be). Then you can talk to HR, who won't be worried about the loss of work but will worry that you might sue. This is an important part of your armoury. Use it to annoy your managers and make it difficult for them to 'manage' your sick absence. Crucially, you then have the upper hand in any 'return-to-work' interview.

Escalating Now you are ready to play for time... In most departments, there is an HR 'trigger' at (typically) 15 days of sick absence. But don't worry, managers can't do much. Just another chat – nothing to worry about, especially if you have created a mystery around your condition. Useless HR people will remain indifferent to your absence and more worried about what you might complain about - *nourish these fears*. Set out an evidence trail of e-mails before going sick, blaming the manager / office / workload etc.

In come the experts (but only with your permission) A prolonged period of absence may lead to a request for you to have an 'occupational health assessment'. In theory, these people will sniff out your scam and out you to the management. It rarely happens that way, thank goodness. The point is you have to consent. So don't consent. Your GP has a duty of confidentiality so don't consent to release of any records. Don't say why you don't consent, because that's confidential too. This makes it hard to do much, or anything, about you.

Obstruction (general) The slightest thing can hold up the process for weeks – and you are playing for time here. For example, give the wrong GP address, give the last but one you were with or change GP during the process. HR will be your knight in shining armour. If you go to one of these things, say you really want to go back to work but there is something the managers are doing that stops you. Even better, do make an appointment but then don't turn up (cite sickness) – what are they going to do?

Retirement or sickness? What's the point of retiring early, when you can be off sick? Off sick, and you'd still be earning money and building up your pension, instead of spending it. Aim to qualify for a later retirement (eg. at 65 instead of 60) and then spend from 61 to 65 off sick, whilst refusing to retire – believe it or not, it's been done in real life!

Training and development – *it beats working*

All the best stories in the world are but one story in reality - the story of escape. It is the only thing which interests us all and at all times, how to escape.

Walter Bagehot

Training = skills On of the most accessible escape routes from the daily drudgery is training. Increasingly skills are conflated with training. The extraordinary idea behind this is:

- i. skills are required for any job,
- ii. that training is the way to get skills
- iii. therefore doing a job needs lots of training.

Of course most skills are learnt by doing things and solving problems, which can, however, be hard work. Training on the other hand can involve huge self-indulgence. The National School of Government catalogue is an Aladdin's cave of opportunity and you should keep it by you. It offers weeks at a time of residential courses³, enjoyable play-experiences⁴, image management⁵, voyages of self-discovery⁶ and 'personal development'⁷. Training can be combined with other scams in the lazy civil servant's strategy. For example, you could study diversity⁸ or work-life balance⁹. More strategically, you can use it to become an expert in HR rules – the truly dedicated slacker will do courses to study the grievance procedures¹⁰, employment law¹¹ etc – both becoming an expert and intimidating their management at the same time.

Unsuitability is your asset Demanding more training sounds like the act of a responsible worker seeking personal betterment, but it is really a way of not having to put too much personal effort or imagination into learning at work. Your personal unsuitability for any given role is no longer an embarrassment, it becomes an asset and a passport to leisure time away from the office – and you should work on understanding your unsuitability better and finding roles that will increase it. Whenever you are asked to do anything new, *demand training*. Any criticism of your performance: *demand training and blame the lack of training so far*.

Annual appraisal is your pitch Any appraisal session is supposed to have a 'personal development' discussion. This is where you will get the organisation to spend its money on your leisure, so be prepared with a list of demands for training. Don't be fobbed off with in-job development. Remember any fault identified or new responsibility proposed: the answer is training.

The IIP bluff The 'Investors in People' people will inevitably be around shortly, and they are your ally in securing more training. This is because they are basically bean-counting the way you are treated, and bean-counters need beans. A day of training, no matter how pointless, inappropriate or poor is a suitable bean, and they will wish to count it. Your

³ TMP Top Management Programme – 20 days. Preparing for Top Management – 10.5 days.

⁴ NLP Neuro-Linguistic Programming for Managers. CREA – Creative thinking (includes 'Celebrating your own creativity')

⁵ RCPU Raising Your Profile - Image Management

⁶ PEP3 Personal power: emotional intelligence

⁷ PDM Personal Development for Middle Managers – 5 days

⁸ EQM Managing diversity – 5 days followed by Postgraduate certificate in managing diversity.

⁹ AWLB Balancing Work/Life realities – 3 days

¹⁰ Harassment, Bullying Awareness Training for Line Managers, Welfare Officers and Others

¹¹ Employment law introduction.

managers will have been told not to fail IIP. So by stressing IIP compliance, you can justify more training, and avoid tiresome on-the-job learning, which does not make adequately digestible beans.

Think Big – the PSG system takes this to a whole new level

One of the most fortuitous developments in the rapidly-advancing field of mass time-wasting is **Professional Skills for Government**, an initiative by the Cabinet Office apparently aimed at boosting the quality and breadth of skills. About 300 years after economists discovered the productivity value of specialisation and ‘division of labour’, the motor of government is now heading in the opposite direction. As well as doing what you are paid and recruited to do, you now have to do two other big things as well. So if you do policy, you now also have to do ‘corporate services’ and ‘operational delivery’ too – thereby creating fantastic opportunities for pointless diversions. In DfID for example, several of the senior policy-makers are now doing chartered accountancy exams – an extraordinarily expensive, time-consuming and irrelevant exercise (the civil service doesn’t use commercial accounting rules) that facilitates endlessly rewarding time-off. Of course, these guys are the Whitehall pros, but PSG should open opportunities for *everyone* with a little imagination to go AWOL for at least a week or two each year, and, ultimately, for a couple of years at a time.

Leadership – a passport to leisure

You’ll be hearing a great deal about “leadership” these days and have no doubt been plagued by diagrams like the one below. Luckily most of these tiresome qualities are entirely absent in the top ranks of the civil service – and not by accident, thankfully. The reason you rarely see these skills, is that those cursed with them cause too much turbulence for the rest of the first-class passengers aboard the stately cruise-liner that is Her Majesty’s Civil Service. So, mercifully, they are weeded out well before they can cause trouble for the contented majority that want only an easy life, free of wearying visions, unwelcome challenge, disorientating innovations, troublesome decisions etc.



Pseudo-science

Not content with a barrage of poney aspirational language, the Department of Health HR department has decided that the rigour of *an equation* will lend its ideas greater credibility. Here is the proposed equation:

HIGH PERFORMANCE = (COMPETENCY × LEARNING × WELL-BEING) ÷ OBJECTIVES

The great thing about this equation is that “High Performance” approaches infinity as “Objectives” approach zero. The message is clear.

Performance management – and how to overcome it

Now, I want you to remember that no bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his...

General George Patton on “Managing your Manager” (*surely ‘war strategy’ – ed.*)

Reduce your objectives Objective setting is where the battle is won or lost. Most bosses are hard-pressed and will welcome an offer from you like: “*shall I set out some objectives for the year ahead?*” Of course you should, because it’s much more useful to you than to them. Here you can rule out whole swathes of the potential working landscape as no-go areas, and leave all kinds of advantages to be taken up later...

Avoiding the “SMART” issue An irritating recent fad has been emphasis on *SMART* objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, & Timed). Obviously, there is some good in ‘achievable’ and ‘realistic’, but the other more quantitative things are improperly inflexible for your purposes. So build on the good ideas in the *SMART* concept but refocus these into *ARSE* objectives:

Agreeable: *They must be achievable, but easy requiring minimal or no effort*

Resourced: *Lots of staff, consultants and budget to do any residual work*

Subjective: *They must not be open to objective verification*

Evadable: *They must be collective and allow blame to be spread to others*

Take it on then pass it on Take things on willingly, but don’t actually do them. New initiatives attract greatest kudos and excitement, but only for a few days or weeks at the outset. It is during this phase that you should be keen and willing as this is what will be remembered. Once interest dies down, quietly move on, transfer responsibilities to colleagues or subordinates, and push yourself to the forefront in the next big thing. It’s always best to be in early, but if you are still there when it goes casters up, you’ve got work to do.

In the run up to your appraisal People find it very hard to criticise or downgrade those they like, so invest in this – be raffish, waggish, buy drinks, smile a lot and laugh at your manager’s jokes. You’ll probably only have to sustain this for a month or so before the appraisal because most managers have a very high mental discount rate, both looking forward but especially looking backwards. Another way of approaching the run-up to appraisal time is to spend a lot of time sick, caring or otherwise away and invisible. That way you can argue that disruptions to your working life are to blame for your poor performance.

Set expectations excessively high Obviously, not high expectations for work, but for your appraisal. Most people really hate to give colleagues bad news... so make it clear in advance that you are expecting the highest possible grading this year, and that your performance has been outstanding (nb. *against agreed objectives* – see above). Obviously, given your inevitably lamentable track record, you should stop short of making yourself look absurd to point of appearing to be delusional and mentally ill, but self-boosting is an important piece on the grand chess-board of your campaign for an easy life.

Prepare your counter-offensive If the manager does actually have the brass nuts to confound your faked expectations, then be ready with A Big Ask... come in behind the bad news with a well-constructed package of training, self-learning, review of objectives and workload, secondments,

coaching, new computer, better chair, more home-working, a new PA, better staff etc. Even if you get your way, don't let the Big Ask go to waste. Most managers will be delighted to get the awkward bit over and progress the appraisal interview towards unthinking acquiescence to the wholly unreasonable package of demands from you.

If things are looking bad... You may have the misfortune to be managed by someone that sees through all the stuff above and insists on a pound or two of your flesh. Worse still, some sort of 'capability process' might be invoked, with you stretched out on the rack of everlasting box ticking and solemn interviews. But don't worry.... HR is at hand. We recommend escalation in four waves, throughout which your interests will be carefully guarded by HR while your manager is stressed to breaking point:

Wave 1: Blame the manager Amazingly, the system requires you to collude in self-criticism by signing your own negative appraisal – a technique made popular by the Spanish Inquisition, the Khmer Rouge and Chairman Mao. You should resist this on the basis that it foreshadows genocide and refuse to sign. Argue you were given no feedback during the year, no guidance, no training, no support, and that the requirements against which you were judged were outside objectives (which you carefully managed down). Demand minutes of documented meetings at which you were told your performance was slack and your work rubbish. Keep a note any time anyone says anything positive to you, for example about the work of others that you have taken credit for. Insist on pedantic and lengthy editing of the appraisal text – time is on your side as most managers have targets for completing appraisals.

Wave 2: Appeal and deploy pedantry Deploy the pedantry strategy – you will find that HR has established all kinds of rights that allow you to foul up the system. Though mostly designed to prevent rare and genuine cases of abuse, they are nevertheless at your disposal and you should play them to the letter. An appeal is really a scrutiny of the manager's diligence in documenting your performance and what was said at meetings rather than what you have actually been doing. Usually a threat of appeal will be sufficient to bring the pushy manager back to the negotiating table – it's a straightforward cost-benefit analysis for them – huge costs, no benefits. In this poker game, you can afford to raise the stakes remorselessly because you can't lose, but there is a high chance they will fold their weak hand. Demand time off and seek union support to prepare your case – such luxuries are not available to the manager as HR will courageously stand back from the conflict or assist you.

Wave 3: Play the bullying and harassment card If the pure reason of waves 1 and 2 don't work, it's clearly personal. So alas, and more in sorrow than anger, it's time to play the bullying, harassment or diversity cards. Argue that the negative appraisal arises from a relationship breakdown. You must take the high ground and sound reasonable by claiming that

"we just don't get on and that [your manager] is an excellent technocrat but just doesn't have the emotional intelligence to get the best of 'creative people like me"

... you could even find a course they should go on¹². Like bad 360 degree feedback, these complaints trigger a presumption of guilt on the part of the manager and will leave them with sleepless nights, an impossible burden of proof, pedantic scrutiny of their behaviour and a Herculean penance mucking out the vilest of procedural stables.

¹² PEP - Personal Power Emotional Intelligence.

Wave 4: stress and sickness There is a big red button marked 'stress'. If it all gets too much, press the stress button and go off sick. If they have put you on some sort of enhanced scrutiny regime, then that in itself can be enough to induce excessive stress, so you have a perfect Catch-22 in the making. Once you go sick, all the performance bother will stop and HR will erect a protective cordon around you – mostly to shelter them from litigation (which you should always hint at but never do). Your GP will, of course, be a willing collaborator in this scam as they hasten you out of the seven minute consultation while you are still describing how your early childhood contributed to this sorry state of affairs. Your manager will be increasingly desperate as your absence counts on their headcount and so leaves an unfillable gap, but *there is absolutely nothing they can do*. HR will keep them off your back and you may be able to insist in having no contact with the abusive tyrant that once managed you.

Divide and conquer – the important role of your boss's boss If you look like trouble, most people involved with your employment will run a mile and leave your direct line manager to drown in the ocean of solids that constitutes the typical performance process. Second and third line managers will close eyes, block ears and insert their head in the nearest dune. To them you should appear as a fount of pure reason and sweetness. They can be deployed to define the problem as wholly or partly down to your manager – a fantastically divisive and undermining thing to do to the poor loser that is your boss. They might be tempted to come over all managerial and masterful and try to fix things... Luckily, they are bound to cock it up. They'll make you inappropriate promises or skirt around the official process riding on false hopes of a successful result, over-confidence in their conciliation skills, and a gross underestimate of what a waste of space you are. The well-meaning but arrogant second line manager will think they can wave a wand over the dispute and bring peace and harmony. But in doing so, they will create lots of lovely delay, disorientation, and actionable process failures that will add to the misery of the person giving you grief.

At any time... go for a move At some point in this escalation you should request a transfer. You must judge the timing carefully by the lines on your manager's face and any signs of impending mental collapse. The relief will be palpable and you will speed on your way with an anodyne but not uncomplimentary report. Promotion is not unknown – to expedite your exit, draw a line under the affair, and begin with a fresh start.

Diversity – not rubbish, just different

Even if he is mediocre, there are a lot of mediocre judges and people and lawyers. They are entitled to a little representation, aren't they?"

Richard Nixon on failed Supreme Court nominee, Harold Carswell

Get a difference White, male, English, able-bodied and middle class? You probably think it's just so *over* for you. But maybe not... Diversity offers a cornucopia of strategies for the lazy - and it can encompass just about anything: gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability, family circumstances and desire for flexible working... somewhere there is a diversity card *you* can play.

And the good news is that you probably are a minority in *something*, and if not, you can simply assert minority credentials. Many of you will be women, and that's a good start. But if you are a man all is not lost: you could make a transgender, religious or mental illness claim. Scottish in England is gaining in popularity. Failing that, just about anybody can now pass themselves off as disabled, given enough patience with the NHS - indeed this is the main occupation in parts of the North East. Most of us are mentally disordered in some way, it's just a matter of getting official recognition.

Diversity advantages Achieving diversity status opens a goldmine of valuable diversions – there will be diversity training courses, diversity networks, extra efforts made to advance your interests and make up for your short-comings, reduced scrutiny, less competition, more photo-opportunities and so on. In terms of our lazy civil servant strategy, it offers excellent prospects for intimidation, exhaustion and delay (see below).

Quotas and positive discrimination The Cabinet Office has established diversity targets for the civil service (see below) backed by a [36-page 10 point plan](#). It looks like the diversity targeting-setting was done with a pleasing absence of analysis –as these seemingly innocuous 'stock' targets (ie. to reach a certain proportion of the workforce) translate to huge 'flow' objectives (ie. a very high proportion of qualifying minorities getting promoted or recruited). That minority advantage is likely to increase as the civil service shrinks and there is less movement in and up – so a higher proportion of those that are moving in and up will need to have minority status.

Impressively progressive targets!

	Oct 2003 (Baseline)	2008 Target
Women senior civil servants	27.5%	37%
Women in top management posts	23.9%	30%
BME staff	2.4%	4%
Disabled staff	2.1%	3.2%

The 10 point plan failed of course (though they seem *coy* about admitting that), but not before many people with a diversity play had been hauled into rewarding new positions. And failure is just a reason to try again - now there is to be a new plan covering the next five years, with new targets. Not quite as silly as the last lot, but still highly advantageous if you can swing a minority claim.

Intimidation and exhaustion It hardly needs stating, but a minority status can contribute to the intimidation and exhaustion components of the lazy civil servant strategy... you pull me up on my slack

performance, and I'll have you for¹³ [family unfriendliness][racism] [sexism] [homophobia] [anti-Semitism] [vegan-hostile Rich Tea biscuits][add your minority status here]. At every point, there'll be reason to scrutinise the manager's conduct for signs of anything but perfect political correctness. HR will be your willing ally and will always fall for this.

Now you can do the bullying It's always worth noting down any faintly ribald workplace banter made by your manager. At some point these jokey *bon mots* will make an excellent dossier-of-shame with which you can mount a po-faced counter-attack, pretending to be 'shocked' and 'offended'. In fact, almost any words or behaviours will do, as long as you claim to be offended. You will be believed and the standard of prudishness will be set at about the level of Blue Peter in 1958.

Jargon If you are going to play the diversity card, you need to bone up on some diversity Newspeak that will help you explain to your majority colleagues why your minority preferment is not bad for them – even though it really is a zero-sum game. It will have come about through *positive action*, not positive discrimination; the targets are *objectives* but not quotas, though they must of course be met; there will be *equal opportunities*, but not for everyone; *difference* will be celebrated, but not differences in ideas, argument or analysis; *diversity awareness training*, will instruct you in how to say the right thing and think something quite different.

No-one will argue Even if you a middle-aged white bloke that can't be arsed with it all, go along with it anyway – attend the training sessions, fill in questionnaires, have opinions, simulate a revelation. Everyone will see you modernising yourself and discovering your inner global citizen – and you won't be doing any work.

¹³ Delete as applicable. The authors of this guide recognise there will be occasions where there are genuine and wholly unacceptable cases of prejudice and bigotry and that the civil service is excessively "pale, male and stale" and, yes, *something must be done*. However, our focus here is on the potential for the diversity apparatus to be captured in the service of the leisure-orientated scams, in which we are attempting to instruct the reader.

Reorganisations – an easy life amidst the chaos

We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising: and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress, while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation.

Caius Petronius, Roman Consul, 66 A.D. or Petronius Arbiter, 210 B.C maybe¹⁴

Something must be done

The department you work for has been roundly found out. A ‘capability review’ has shown your colleagues to be *incapable* in the realms of analysis, strategy, delivery, and – much to the discomfort of your top management – it has found your department to be utterly devoid of leadership. The Permanent Secretary long ago gave up on understanding what the department does or why, and followed the rest the top tier into an obsession with corporate matters. So what are they going to do? Easy... pick up the phone to Parasite & Partners Consulting Inc. and make that £6 million call.... it’s time to get the consultants in. The costs will be astronomical, but it will morph their managerial weakness into the appearance of leadership and all at taxpayers’ lavish expense. Yes, it’s time for a re-organisation. As a committed lazy civil servant, you should crack open a bottle. A treasure trove of work-avoiding opportunities is about to be laid before you.

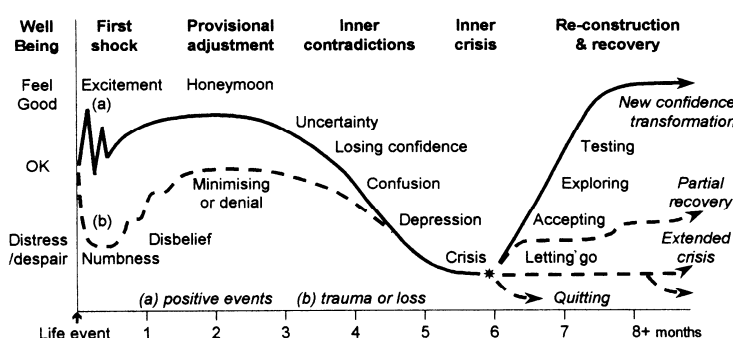
Anyone for a Renaissance?

Let us now imagine a hypothetical departmental reorganisation... they are taking it so seriously that branding consultants have been brought in and declared this not to be any ordinary reorganisation. It will henceforth be known as ‘**Renaissance**’ and will have its own logo, and a slogan from HR: “we’re crying out for change!” This should do it...



Crying out for change!

Change – how it creates distress and despair



Insights into how change drives everyone to despair - see dotted line ending in ‘extended crisis’

Source: *Eos Life-Work Resource Centre*

Reorganisations – general

As a bare minimum expect a few months of confusion and distraction around you as everyone jockeys for position and tries to work out what it all means. Eyes will be off balls, ducks will be not be in rows, and acts will not be together. You will be told of the

¹⁴ The only problem with this quote is that it is made up and falsely attributed to Petronius in the 1970s by a second-rate management guru. But hey! The lazy civil servant isn’t bothered about accuracy and veracity.... and it is all over the internet.

'cycle of change' (see diagram above) and why people never like changes at first but eventually come round to it once they have no choice. There will be "town-hall" meetings, Q&As, a thousand pages of bewildering PowerPoint, appointment of "Change Champions" or "*Renaissance* Apostles", training and indoctrination sessions, computer stuff to master, launch events – endless stuff to take you away from the dull business of escaped foreign prisoners, VAT loopholes, job-centre consolidation or whatever you are supposed to be doing.

Overall strategy Your overall strategy: go with it and be an enthusiastic participant. Be a *Renaissance* Apostle. Three reasons for this...

1. you can endear yourself to top managers by being one of the few that appears to back their ideas or even understand them. Sycophancy is more than usually valued by managers while they actually are trying to do something;
2. previous poor performance on your record will be scrubbed clean as you can claim shortcomings in organisational design held you back. If there weren't shortcomings, why are we changing? *Renaissance* has liberated you and you are its first success!
3. there will be endless work-avoiding activities available as set out above, and privileged access to these will go to those that are most compliant - you might even be able to star in a propaganda video.

Consultancy model where there are no consultants Because it is dreamed up by consultants, *Renaissance* will borrow heavily from what consultants understand – and that is, er, consultancy¹⁵. So expect *Renaissance* to be designed with several false premises based on the optimistic view of human potential that comes of being a consultant: that everyone is high-powered, highly motivated and well paid; that work demands change rapidly and people are so clever and flexible that they can switch effortlessly between very different roles; that poor performance either doesn't exist or is rooted out instantly and, finally, that getting to know a subject in depth is a waste of time. Consultants are in with a flash of brilliance and out in a puff of smoke. None of these things apply in the civil service... *and chaos will surely follow*.

Chaos - the great leveller This is all good for the lazy civil servant because most of your colleagues will be completely lost in a new system based on these assumptions. Most will have spent years building up baggage that they know as 'expertise' or 'experience' or 'contacts' in some narrow field of ever-diminishing importance. Making inflexible people simulate flexibility will have the beneficial effect of levelling performance – bringing it down closer to your level and making it less likely that you will stand out.

Activity without doing anything Your days will no longer be days bounded by sunrise and sunset. They will become 'activity packets' within work inception and work termination. By dividing your time into daily packets, you can be scheduled to work on just about anything. In theory, you could be doing telecoms deregulation today, benefit cheats tomorrow and pet passports on Friday. In practice, no one will know what you are doing.

Schedule yourself into a quiet corner Work will be scheduled through an impossibly cumbersome system that supposedly maps the available personnel, their skills and available days onto the resources needs of projects. Sounds implausibly optimistic? It is. *It just obviously is*. Only HR people

¹⁵ This is based on a presentation made by a real department. Identifying features have been changed to avoid embarrassing those responsible.

that have never done real work could ever think that something this mechanically complicated would work. You can register an outrageous portfolio of made-up skills on a database and rush from job to job doing little more than arriving and departing. But that is high risk. So alternatively, you can beat the system by registering no skills at all, and no availability. Then you just wait – hoping that you can find a backwater of solitude and tranquillity.

**Career manager – a
godsend for the lazy
civil servant**

Because the system is designed with the assumption you are never reporting to anyone for more than a few days at a time, a whole new management structure will be needed. For starters, there will be many people to manage your work. These are ‘work managers’ who will handle the ‘activity packets’ that you commit to your ‘project portfolio’. They are like old-style managers, in charge of stuff happening.

But also you will need someone to manage you – the person, the human being. Let’s call them a ‘career manager’. Here’s an interesting thought – in the interests of fairness your work manager can never be your career manager – even if you only have one job and one work manager. Fantastic! Someone who knows little about you and doesn’t bear the costs of your laziness and incompetence is now in charge of your appraisal and performance management. It should make you want to do a little dance!

**Career managers and
how to get the most
from them**

First of all, understand their incentives.

- You don’t do work for the career manager, so your performance doesn’t affect them. Apart from their self-aggrandising loyalty to *Renaissance*, they don’t have any reasons to tackle you simply because you are rubbish.
- You do take their time though, so if anything appears to be turning against you start to take up a lot of their time. Just start by disagreeing with what they say and asking for evidence, then work up to a complaint. Or complain about your work manager – use someone who doesn’t know you to intimidate someone who does.
- Because they don’t work with you, they don’t know what you actually do, and they have to rely on your work managers to tell them. Not only does this create spectacularly wasteful chatter between managers, it means they are never quite confident in what they say. So just push back – exhaust everyone in the process.
- Rather than tackle you, which they will soon understand comes at a cost to them, they will find it much easier to take on the work manager, which can be done with minimum effort for them - and at great cost to the work manager.
- Why would they ever give you a poor appraisal rating? Why would they ever go into the dark endless tunnel of dealing with your performance – everything to lose, nothing to gain. They won’t. Their incentives are to minimise the work they have to do in return for the corporate ‘tick-in-the-box’ they get for going along with all this.
- Meanwhile note that the people you do actually work for will now find dealing with your poor performance even more difficult than before – they now have to do it through a third party who has no incentive to co-operate – quite the opposite.
- If in doubt – slow it all down. The new machinery is even more cumbersome and badly designed than the old. The delay strategy will work a treat!

By now, you may be thinking you’ve heard all this before. Yes you have! The career manager has a very similar incentive structure to HR (see *HR – how it works* on page 4). So the same strategy applies: know the rules; intimidate; exhaust; delay.

For the senior civil servant – *a place of rest and reward*

Success is going from failure to failure without a loss of enthusiasm.

Winston Churchill

- No way down** At some point you will progress to a level in your career where you have been promoted out of harm's way, brown-nosed your way up, and been successfully dull, unimaginative, sycophantic and utterly unchallenging. You now occupy an important foothill in the commanding heights of the British Establishment. At this point, you never need work again.
- Keep it corporate** You've probably noticed that the top people in the civil service know less and less about the things they are in charge of, and appear to care still less. Why tie yourself up in all that tedious complexity of reducing carbon emissions, making poverty history, improving life expectancy, building three million houses, dealing with underachieving chavs, solving congestion or reforming the police? Now that the top brass move between departments, they can hardly hope to acquire a lifetime of insight into the things they are in charge of. So, the simple answer is to go corporate: concern yourself only with HR policies, diversity, leadership coaching, building the top team to be like you, absurd deckchair shuffling in the name of reorganisations, branding, and things like 'promoting excellence in delivery' (whatever that means). Of course, this was British management in the 1970s, when people who knew nothing about cars ran British Leyland. But remember, *they prospered*, even if the cars and the firm bombed.
- Yours is the work of others** It's obvious, but worth saying anyway... *don't try to do too much yourself*. The more you do, the more you expose yourself and your half-baked work to scrutiny. Much better to be a 'commissioner' of work from those who work for you or, better still, expensive consultants. Then you can carefully pick and choose what you would like to pass off as your own, claim to be the inspiration for or conversely pass on blame to. Your boss will be no wiser and would probably like to do the same. Similar arguments apply to high-level exposure (to ministers etc – make sure you are fronting the good stuff and shielded from the cross).
- Gigantic cock-up?** You're a top gun of the civil service, but you make a complete mess of whatever it was you were put in charge of? Well it's just too difficult to fire you now, isn't it? You probably have a letter somewhere showing the permanent secretary or Secretary of State told you to do something and so they are now responsible. So it's six-figure salaried gardening leave prior to vast pay-off for you, probably with a comfortable second career as a consultant advising the government on "complex IT projects" of the type you have just completely balled up.
- Onwards and upwards!** British public life is littered with managerial catastrophes... But ask yourself this: who was behind these amateurish bungles, and where are they now...? No name, no shame! Think of the undignified exit of from the ERM at a cost of £3.3 billion. How about the Child Support Agency? The numerous dodgy assessments on Iraq? The Dome? The Rural Payments Agency? Railtrack? Bursting prisons? Millions of lost IDs? Tax credit payments fiasco? Failure of banking regulation? Can you name the civil servant behind it? This must tell you something... *keep moving*. Be in at the beginning when there are few risks and move as soon as the solids starting flying. The

incomer will be credited as 'the fixer', but you will not be labelled 'the failure'. That's because the fixer has just failed at something else, and, well, it just wouldn't work if everyone played the blame-game.

Ministerial accountability Luckily, the constitution provides a human shield for most official incompetence. One of the seven principles of public life is:

Ministers have a duty to Parliament to account, and be held to account, for the policies, decisions and actions of their departments and agencies;

Because ministers do, you don't.

Choose a place of rest What if your reforming zeal is matched only by your incompetence? If you are truly hopeless, the range of sinecures is quite outstanding – British public life is built around graceful exit routes for the high-level under-achiever, including the House of Lords, foreign missions, advisory bodies, inquiries, boardrooms, consultancies and many other places where your contacts will matter more than your record or what you know.

Quangos – get in early Something new about to be set up? A new quango, agency, task-force, inquiry etc etc. Make a dash for it. All slates will be wiped clean. Your erstwhile employer will be glad to see the back of you, and you can rely on new recruits to the new body being as keen as mustard and that no-one will expect much for about 18 months. And most of these things are set up to park problems that will be forgotten in a few months.

Honours Just stand still long enough and someone will be pinning something on you – and it won't be blame! Supposing you had a more junior role in the NHS financing fiasco, it looks like yours will be a CB. UK misses its climate change target by a mile, you can expect similar. UK presidency and EU budget negotiation a farce? Expect a gong. Usually a sign that a graceful exit is too awkward.

Coaching Let's face it, you were the swot at school, you're socially autistic, you live in fear of being shown up, you have few useful skills, less knowledge and no experience, and you have been inappropriately promoted by a long-standing friend in high places. Your work is a catastrophe, your reputation is in shreds, and no-one wants to let you near even the most junior outsider. What next? Exit? Demotion? No. *Oh, heavens no...* The answer is *coaching*, and we mean expensive executive coaching. Lots of lovely time on the couch talking about yourself, being talked up and having your swirling storm of anxieties calmed. It can go on for years delivering soothing hours away from the desk. And the reason you'll get it is that your sponsor in high places can't afford to see you fail – so the problem (you) needs to be fixed. This is a special case of the training techniques described above but applicable to senior managers. If your appraisal is heading into the red, then coaching should be part of your Big Ask.

Leadership The development section of our guide covers this. But 'leadership' is a subject that is discussed at length, but very rarely seen in the top reaches of the civil service. And that is an important clue to securing an easy life. Talk about it a lot, act with bogus decisiveness and exaggerated self-importance, but do not for heaven's sake attempt real leadership. You are only likely to fail, as lifetime of professional obsequiousness as a career civil servant is hardly a grounding for leadership of any type, and you are not where you are by accident. You'll only draw attention to yourself and invite failure and unwanted attention.

Should the worst happen – *when you go all the way*

The only risk of failure is promotion

Scott Adams

- An inspirational case study** We all need to be inspired, so here is one way to chart your way through the system as a super-low performer, whilst drawing a comfortable salary and spending little time at work... with HR offering a helping hand throughout¹⁶.
- Probation** You were already rubbish a month into your probation with unusable work, terrible timekeeping and a great deal of absence, but HR stops the manager booting you out or extending the probation. You already have these scaredy-cats on the run.
- Contract gained** Now you have serious rights! And boy do you know how to max them. Special leave, diversity network, time off for sporting events, work-life balance... etc. You also become a union rep, which gives you the multiple benefits of other ways to spend your time, namely the acquisition of in-depth HR knowledge and learning by doing.
- Workload management** Your work is a disgrace and you are completely unreliable. The beauty is that your team adjusts around you and so people don't give you much to do and would give you less if they could. Take a spectacular amount of sick leave for medical problems that you refuse to disclose.
- Manage your performance** Minimise your objectives, lower expectations and resist signing off objectives for as long as possible. Then demand endless and exhausting clarity on what is expected: "*I don't know what you want and I need more support*" should greet any request, however banal. Demand documentation of everything and respond in writing to challenge anything that is unflattering – this is laying down a vital evidence trail that you will return to later.
- Propaganda** Start complaining about your manager and lay the ground work for the bullying and harassment offensive – you are grooming witnesses. Spread false gossip, rumour and innuendo about anyone trying to tackle your hopeless performance and unacceptable. Insist on a mentor, buddy or adviser to widen the theatre of conflict.
- Unions** Involve throughout. Even if the manager is in the union, the union will still work tirelessly to make their lives miserable, and the dumb manager will continue to pay subs on the off-chance they need the same treatment handed out their bosses. Your dreadful performance and behaviour might be annoying and frustrating dozens of your colleagues, all of whom might be desperate to see the back of you and all of whom might be union members, but the union will back you and stuff them. Unions will do the shouting, chest-beating and knuckle-dragging for you. They will coach you in making grievances and suspend disbelief as you spin them the most ludicrous yarns.
- Conciliation** Suggest that it's a relationship break down and professional counselling for you and the manager might restore harmony – amazingly this will be taken at face value. But for you, it's an occasion to make endless 'more in sorrow than anger' accusations about the way you have been treated.

¹⁶ An amalgam of four real-world case studies

- Escalate** Initiate bullying, discrimination and diversity complaints – and always go over your manager’s head...this causes your manager to be investigated and treated like a suspect and accessory to discriminatory crime. Their managers will turn against them in fear and cowardice of blame spreading to them. The second line manager is even less likely to take responsibility, trying to stay out of the blast radius of anything nasty that might be kicking off.
- Consider moving** Start the procedure to get a move – and be bold, go for promotion. You can even forge a reference and not be fired when you are found out!!¹⁷ At some point the move will come off, your old manager will be desperate to see the back of you, your new manager won’t have the zeal to pursue you, you can start again or at the very least enjoy a new ‘honeymoon period’ while your new team figures you out.
- Go sick gradually** If more time is needed before your move, initiate self-certified sick leave and push this... aim for 60 days in a year. But never take more than 5 days at a time. Any trouble and your GP should help out with a sick note or letter that backs you up but gives nothing away.
- Long term absence** Introduce longer period of sick leave – but delay any sick notes or certification. Only reveal the condition to HR, who will helpfully keep your manager in the dark and ensure you aren’t bothered. You can try to go on like this for 9 months or more. Refuse to leave contact details or an address – it’s not a surveillance state. HR will go along with all of this and encourage you.
- Occupational health** Resist occupational health assessment as long as possible – but consent eventually and have a well rehearsed condition. Disclose nothing and do not share medical records. When appointments are made, don’t cancel them, but certainly don’t keep them.
- Stress** All this is stressful. Your GP will give you a note. At this point you don’t need to work and HR will erect a protective cordon around you. Nobody knows what to do about alleged stress – least of all your GP, who knows nothing of your circumstances except what you tell them and just wants to see the back of you.
- Dismissal threatened** Your managers recommend dismissal – and now things actually improve. You appeal, get union help and are now *suspended* rather than sick. If you stop sending in sick notes you revert from sick pay to full pay because now it is the managers that are stopping you coming to work. Fantastic! Make it clear that you will go to Employment Tribunal even if your case is absolutely pathetic – they just can’t face the hours of meetings, endless paper trail and internal scrutiny. The departmental lawyers might be sucking their teeth saying well we should have offered them conciliation after 90 days.
- The dénouement** Now it’s a staring contest.... *and be assured they will blink first*. You are going to Employment Tribunal, but it’s all bluff on their part. You have no money, and they have plenty. No matter how ludicrous your claim to hang on to your job, they will wish to avoid the day in court. So late in the day, offer to settle but haggle. You should walk off with £5K or more and no troublesome court action on your record.

¹⁷ True story...

And finally, if you work in HR

So much of what we call management consists in making it difficult for people to work.

Peter Drucker

You're not at Goldman Sachs

In some organisations, the HR people are paid to develop the stock of human talent, enable the managers to manage, and to make sure the poor performers and laggards improve radically or exit. If you've taken an HR job in the civil service, none of that applies to you. You are effectively a benefits administrator in what has become an extension of the welfare state. Keep this difference of purpose in mind, and you won't go far wrong.

Your game-plan

Remember you are in a position to have the easiest life of all. Here's what to do:

- Never make a final decision – other people make decisions, usually in the face of over-cautious advice from you.
- Never accept responsibility – you are an adviser. Other people do the managing.
- Take the time of managers – they are working to make your life easier, so insist on interviews, extensive documentation, evidence of feedback going back two to three years.
- Be a hyper-pedant – you lose nothing by demanding a gold-standard process, after all it's not you that has to do the work.
- Indulge in HR fads – these improve your career prospects and create the impression that there is something clever and specialised about your role.
- Side with the underdog – people will like you more. It's a David and Goliath thing, and you need to be rooting for David.
- Everything is in scope – if there's a problem person, take everything into account – home-life, mystery illnesses, criminal record, drugs etc – each one can open new avenues for interesting and fulfilling delays and complications.

Incompetence-based interviewing

Occasionally, you may be asked to advise on recruitment or performance assessment. You should absolutely rule out any questioning that involves actual knowledge. For example, a manager might wish to ask an interviewee:

- *Can you explain what a hyperbolic discount rate is?*
- *How do you see the rise of China affecting African geo-politics?*
- *What role does methane play in the carbon cycle?*

Absolutely not. This sort of stuff just makes you feel foolish and might discriminate against people who are unsuited for the roles in question. You must stick to one set of tediously predictable questions that will suffice for all interviews:

- *Describe your approach to team-working?*
- *What do you understand by leadership?*
- *Explain your commitment to health and safety in the workplace?*

Managers will undoubtedly be annoyed because interviewees will attend with bland

stock answers to bland stock questions. But it does keep your workload to a minimum (one appraisal form for everything) and avoids the risk that you'll feel silly.

Remember... PSG is about your self-esteem

You owe a huge debt of gratitude to the HR people in the Cabinet Office that dreamed up “Professional Skills for Government”. The great achievement here has been to put corporate services, like HR, on a par with policy work and delivering important things.

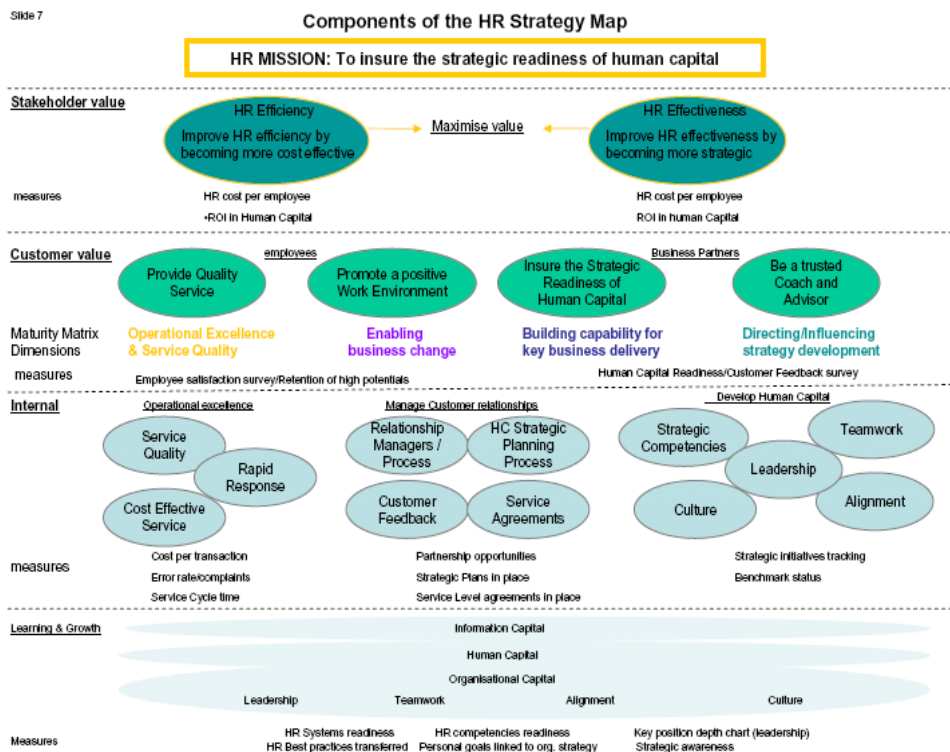
“Career development will be taken forward within three career groupings: Operational Delivery, Policy Delivery and Corporate Services Delivery. These will have parity of esteem and all will provide routes to Board level. (emphasis added)

After years of treatment as an inferior species by conceited Oxbridge high-flying types, you are no longer just a means of supporting the careers of such people (well you were never that anyway). It means you are Important In Your Own Right. It also means you'll get to have a crack at policy work at some point, which will undoubtedly be fun, *given you have absolutely nothing useful to contribute.*

Add complexity...

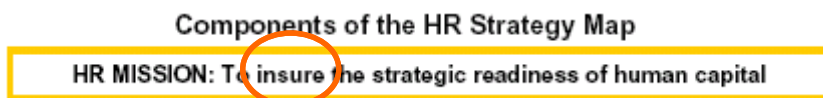
Your job is nothing without contrived complexity and jargon. Fantastic efforts can go into planning and idealising your role and its place in the organisation. You can create, or adopt, truly baffling models, for example on [Aligning HR and Business Strategy](#) – an extract is provided below for inspiration.

...with things like this...



Though do try to get it right....

Obviously, if you are going to present such self-promoting and grandiose visions and missions, do make sure that you know the difference between *insure* and *ensure*. Otherwise you risk looking as though you are big on jargon and PowerPoint, but ever so slightly stupid.



About the Lazy Civil Servant

There's a lot of mediocrity being celebrated, and a lot of wonderful stuff being ignored or discouraged.

Sean Penn

Why produce this guide? Most civil servants are hardworking and dedicated, even if universally despised. Most are now frustrated by the near impossibility of dealing with lazy or incompetent civil servants and see management fads and feeble human resources policies as a barrier to making the civil service better. Many will have seen or experienced the techniques of this guide at first hand.

Can you be contacted? Yes, through our web site www.lazycivilservant.com

Who are you? We wish to remain anonymous.