

Guide to Reviewing and Modernising Job Descriptions and Person Specifications

This Guide should be read in conjunction with the relevant section in the City Council's Best Practice Handbook on Recruitment & Selection. It is set out in two parts: Part 1 focuses on Job Descriptions; Part 2 focuses Person Specifications.

Attached are example Job Descriptions and Person Specifications to illustrate the guidance.

Attachment 1

A scale 5 Administrator Job Description as it looked before being reviewed, and the same Job Description with a related Person Specification after being reviewed and modernised to current City Council standards

Attachment 2

An example of what might be included in a modern Job Description and Person Specification for a second tier senior management job in an (unspecified) area of service.

Corporate Values

It is vital that the City Council's Corporate Values are embedded in the workforce and support the drive for excellence in service delivery. These values are to be used in service planning, service monitoring, self-assessment and, very importantly, recruitment. The values and their definitions are:

Pride in our City

We take pride in our City and the contribution we make to its success. We are committed to continuously improving the quality of life in Manchester.

Community-focused

We recognise that a successful city relies on the success of its neighbourhoods and communities. We want to meet the aspirations of all Manchester citizens by empowering communities and embracing their diverse identities.

People-focused

People are at the centre of what we do. We will achieve an excellent standard of customer service by acting with speed, efficiency and respect.

Responsive and accountable

We value the contribution of residents, employees and partners. We will communicate clearly and openly about our decisions and actions and the reasons for them.

Valuing our employees

We value our employees and we will support and encourage their development in working hard to deliver better services.

How do you build in values?

Values underpin the way we do things. They are not separate items but the basis of service excellence and should be embedded in the main duties of the job - whether the service delivered is for internal or external customers. They inform the key behaviours and performance standards required for successful performance of any job.

Some examples of values incorporated into specific duties as the required standards of behaviour or outputs for carrying out the duties, are given throughout this guide.

Part 1

The Job Description

First Steps

Start by reading the existing Job Description and get a feel for how well it works *as a means of attracting recruits*. Put yourself in the shoes of a someone exploring job opportunities in the City Council for the first time - would it grab your attention?

Check the Length and contents

A good Job Description, whatever the professional area or level of responsibility, should be much less than two sides long. It should consist of a series of clear, crisp statements which express the main duties in plain language.

If the existing Job Description:

- is longer than one side;
 - includes tasks or duties that look lengthy and dense, with multiple sentences, or lists of items separated with commas or semi-colons;
 - does not include performance standards or intended outputs of the job
- it is too long and does not meet expected City Council quality standards.

Cutting the detail The Job Description should not include every task a person may have to carry out under each main duty. Getting to know *in precise detail* what is expected in the job should be part of the induction process

For example: the following statement is fairly typical in traditional City Council Job Descriptions for Administrative positions:

“Assist in checking and processing invoices for payment, including liaison with the Administration/Financial Services Department. Maintain a petty cash imprest account, balancing the account on a weekly basis and requesting reimbursement in accordance with the financial regulations of the City Council”

Instead, it is enough to say:

“Assist in carrying out efficient financial administration for the team, following City Council systems and financial regulations (training on in-house systems will be given)

Build in expected Performance Standards

The Job Description should show not just *what* should be done but the standards of performance required for doing it. In other words, the difference between just doing the job and doing it *well*.

Flexibility, responsiveness, being adaptable to change, customer care, concern for quality and equality, are all core requirements for every employee in the successful organisation of today and tomorrow. Job holders' attitudes and styles of behaviour can be crucial to individual, service and organisational success.

For example, a jobholder may be required:

“To deal with all initial enquiries from members of the public either face to face or by telephone”.

This tells the applicant *what* they would have to do but says nothing about *how* they are expected to do it. Consider this alternative:

“To provide a *courteous and responsive* reception service for all members of the public who contact the office by telephone or in person”

Another example:

“To carry out photocopying”

A person may *do* photocopying but if this is done only at certain times regardless of priorities or urgent need, the jobholder will not be supporting, as intended, the effectiveness and efficiency of the team in delivering its area of service. A rewording may be:

“Meet all the photocopying needs of the team in an efficient and timely manner”

We need to recruit motivated, flexible and committed employees who really want to make a contribution and care about a job well done. Job seekers who have these values and commitments are more likely to be enthused if they can see the styles of behaviour and commitments they value reflected as success factors in the Job Description.

Outputs - not just tasks

Today's organisation is very fluid - nothing is 'cast in tablets of stone'. Job Descriptions need to support this organisational fluidity. To do this, focus on the **outputs** expected from a job rather than only the precise tasks for achieving them. The exact methods used today may have changed tomorrow.

For example:

A Corporate Personnel Officer may be required to:

“Develop initiatives to maximise take-up of City Council employment opportunities by local residents”

This statement is all that is needed in the Job Description about this area of responsibility. The duty will remain important over some considerable time. It is **output based** and links closely to the City Council's Aims & Objectives. It provides the basis for target setting, developing and reviewing the success of initiatives and monitoring outcomes over time.

If the Job Description went on to detail all the ways this might be achieved, the effect would be to:

- limit the scope of what might be done to achieve the intended outputs,
- fix activities to the way things are done now,
- stifle innovation
- introduce tedious length into the Job Description.

Be direct about what employees are expected to *achieve*. If it is a duty of the job to "develop and deliver best quality services which are responsive to the needs of Manchester residents", say so.

Don't build in introductory phrases, like "To ensure that..." If the duty will be the direct responsibility of the postholder. This turns the sentence from active to passive and seems to remove the responsibility from the individual concerned.

Employee Development

Organisational success depends on continuous improvement - continuously looking to do things better. Job Descriptions should make clear the need to continuously develop self and skills for the job.

- **All management jobs** must include the duty to develop and motivate staff.
- **For all staff:** Make clear in simple terms the need to continuously develop self and skills for the job. For an entry point job, for example, it would be enough to state:

"Contribute to ways that the team's services can be improved;

"Take an active interest in your own development and take full advantage of training provided".

Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion

These are mainstream issues for all jobs and, again, relate to Corporate Values. Responsibilities relating to these organisational priorities should be incorporated into the body of the Job Description. It's not enough to rely on a standard equality statement at the end of Job Descriptions.

Revisit The Main Purpose of the Job

Having reviewed the main contents of the Job Description now reconsider the explanation given in the Main Purpose section. This should be a clear and straightforward summary of the job purpose. Could this now be improved or made clearer in any way?

Layout and formatting

Follow the format shown in the examples attached. Use upper and lower case throughout and avoid table format as this does not reproduce well on *Jobs Update*

Online or when candidates download documents using alternative software.

For the heading, simply entitle the document Job Description, followed by the Job Title and grade. Do not add anything further (see attachment 2A), unless it is *necessary* to help explain the job and this is not given elsewhere in the advertisement or supporting information. Use only a short paragraph to add information on the relevant service area, reporting lines or the main contacts (see Attachment 1B). Otherwise, move straight to the Main Purpose, followed by the Main Duties.

Standard Statements

The following statement should be included at the end of the Job Description:

“Where the postholder is disabled, every effort will be made to supply all necessary aids, adaptations or equipment to allow them to carry out all the duties of the job. If, however, a certain task proves to be unachievable, job redesign will be given full consideration”

Note:

None of the work above should radically alter the role or value of the job. It is simply a matter of updating or amending small changes that may have occurred since the job was last filled and, **most importantly**, improving and modernising the quality of the document, fit for purpose as a job marketing tool. It remains the same job. If in doubt, contact your personnel officer to discuss whether your review may have effected the role or value of the job.

Part 2

The Person Specification

Critically review all existing Person Specifications

Modern City Council Person Specifications are clearer and simpler in format and content than those used in the past.

They incorporate not just the hard skills, knowledge and abilities needed to do the job, but also the styles of behaviour, personal commitments and values a person needs to bring to the job for effective performance. In the modern Person Specification, these are listed under the heading: “Personal Styles and Behaviours”. Even if your Person Specification is new and has not yet been used for recruitment, you need to review it in line with the guidance below.

Format

Follow the format shown in the examples attached (1C and 2B). Use upper and lower case throughout and avoid table format.

Head the document with the Job Title. The panel may feel it helpful to commence the list of criteria with a simple explanation, such as “The person we are seeking for this job will have: ” For jobs attracting experienced jobseekers this is not necessary. The only other heading that should be included is for “Personal Styles and Behaviours”.

Don't include methods of assessment in the Person Specification. Your aim is to simply tell candidates what the criteria is and therefore what you are looking for from candidates.

Length, style and contents

Modern Person Specifications are less than a side and a half of A4. Less than one side will be sufficient for most jobs. If it is much longer than one side, the requirements are definitely too detailed and need to be simplified.

It should be in plain language, free from jargon, buzz phrases, acronyms and 'management speak'. When you have drafted the Person Specification, consider your target market again. Is it appropriate, clear and helpful for this pool of applicants? Try to read it from their point of view.

Key Considerations in Producing the Person Specification **Go back to the Job Description.**

As a panel ask: What makes a person able to do that task, deliver that output, perform that role?

This involves translating the role and duties of the job into the various skills, knowledge, experience, qualifications, styles of behaviour, commitments, values a person needs to *bring* to the job to perform the role effectively. It is not the same as listing duties from the Job Description with the words "able to.." in front!

Keep focus on the job level and the recruitment pool

City Council Person Specifications should be clear to people regardless of whether they have a Local Government or public sector background. We need to attract good recruits from across the employment market.

Measurable Criteria

Everything included in your Person Specification must be clear, valid, job related and measurable by an objective method of assessment. Try to put yourself in the applicant's place and think through how they could show that they fulfil the criteria.

Avoid excluding particular groups

Equality legislation requires that only requirements that are actually necessary for effective performance are used to decide whether someone is appointable.

- Asking for a driving licence when the job can be done without driving will exclude a disabled person from applying who could do the job but is unable to drive because of the nature of his/her impairment.
- Requiring in-depth knowledge of specific Council policies and procedures would exclude external applicants.

Think about the whole job

Many requirements may be relevant to a range of duties of the job and trying to deal with each separately can be unhelpful and lead to an over long list of criteria.

What to include

i) Skills/ abilities/ aptitude

When specifying skills, discuss the requirement, and develop shared understanding of what you are looking for. Pitch your criteria at the right level for the job.

Essential skill, or aptitude to learn?

Is the skill something an applicant has to possess before starting the job, or is it something that can easily be learnt once in the job, through induction training? Particularly for jobs at entry level, panels should not be looking for recruits who can “hit the floor running”!

Example: Part of a clerical job may involve using a pc to carry out word processing and data inputting. Therefore, the appointee must be reasonably comfortable (not afraid of) and have some basic familiarity with using information technology.

But they don't need prior experience of using the specific software packages used in the office, nor to have done this type of work before. This can be covered as part of planned induction. For assessing at interview, the panel might explore what the applicant has used at home, for study, for leisure or in a voluntary capacity, for example, programming the home video.

ii) Knowledge: Include only knowledge which the new recruit has to *bring to the job*. Is it something that can easily be learned in the job without effecting performance within the necessary timescale? Don't require knowledge of internal systems, rules or regulations.

For example it is not fair to expect candidates to have knowledge of the City Council's equal opportunities policies - this isn't useful and places external candidates at a disadvantage. Instead:

For many jobs, for example, manual or craft jobs which involve working inside people's homes, it may be best to require 'commitment to good customer services taking account of individual needs and circumstances'. This will enable the panel to explore simple equality related issues as part of the interview

Alternatively, for entry level jobs it may be most appropriate to require an 'understanding of why equal opportunities is important'.

For higher level jobs it is more appropriate to require personal commitment to equality and an understanding of what this means in practice

For management jobs you might require demonstrable commitment to equality in employment and service delivery.

For senior management jobs candidates should be required to demonstrate achievements in promoting and integrating Equal Opportunities into all aspects of employment and service delivery

iii) Qualifications: Only include essential qualifications and never simply for the panel's own convenience, to save having to assess whether the person has skills

and knowledge which it is assumed they will have if they possess the qualification.

A qualification may be essential, for example, because it is a national requirement at that grade in that profession, or because the job is a traineeship and it is essential for entry to the relevant course.

Supporting staff to attain qualifications may be important for improving professional standards across your service, so it is fine to require that candidates either

- have the qualification,
- are currently studying towards it, or
- are willing to study to attain the qualification

iv) Experience: Is it essential, and if so, which part of the job do applicants need to have experience in and what type of experience?

Employee Development There are new standard requirements for assessing applicants to all management and supervisory positions, to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and commitment to effectively develop the staff they manage.

- **For supervisory/ first stage managerial jobs** applicants should be required to demonstrate 'understanding and commitment to staff development'.
- **For higher level management jobs** applicants should be required to provide demonstrable evidence of having developed staff in the past

For all non-management staff, the need to participate in their own development should also be an element of the Person Specification. For basic grade jobs it may be sufficient to require willingness to undertake job related training. For many jobs it may be appropriate to require 'an active interest in own personal development'.

Work related Circumstances

Think about any requirements that the employee will need to comply with in line with City Council policies, or due to the nature of the role. This should include: willingness to comply with the City Council's no smoking policy.

Residency

If the job is at Scale 1/2 or is a traineeship you must include the requirement: "Must be permanently resident within the City of Manchester". If it is a traineeship targeted at people with given qualifications, for example, Graduate Trainees, you may add to the requirement "... or be studying at a City of Manchester Educational Establishment".

Personal Styles and Behaviours

Think about the job again, its purpose, how it fits into the service, how it contributes to service and organisational goals and relates to Corporate Values. Focus on underlying competencies such as commitments, values/ styles of behaviour/ softer skills needed for success in the job. These underpin performance and make the difference between simply doing the job and really effective/ superior performance in the role. Consider qualities like:

Styles of behaviour/ values/personal attributes/commitments:

- Positive outlook, enthusiasm

- Personal motivation to achieve results
- Flexibility
- Adaptability to change
- Responsiveness
- Empathy (e.g. for customers experiencing crisis or distress)
- Energy and drive
- Commitment to customer service
- Concern for people (essential for staff motivation, customer care, team building, all direct service jobs)
- Concern for relationships (essential for team working, partnership working, coalition building, jobs involving negotiation)
- Quality orientation (essential for service management, service planning, monitoring and delivery (internal or external)
- Commitment to equality and social inclusion
- Commitment to continuous improvement, of self, of staff, of service (see 'Employee Development' section below)

Underlying competencies/ softer skills, for example:

- Creativity
- Emotional resilience under competing demands
- Interpersonal sensitivity
- Active listening skills

The above list is illustrative only suggesting areas you may need to consider. However, any requirement you include must be strictly job relevant and clearly identified for effective performance from a proper analysis. It should be described in a way that is understandable to applicants, and the panel must use objective methods for assessment (see also [Guide to Interviewing](#) and [Best Practice Methods of Assessment](#)).

Finally

Again check the length, style of language and format of your Person Specification. Have another look at the example Person Specifications attached .

Attachment 1A

Example: Traditional Job Description before being reviewed (both in format and substance).

**MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
JOB DESCRIPTION**

DATE PREPARED: February 2000

JOB TITLE ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION OFFICER <input type="checkbox"/>	DEPARTMENT: Name of Department	POST REFERENCE: <input type="checkbox"/>
	SECTION: Name of Team <input type="checkbox"/>	GRADE: SC 5 <input type="checkbox"/>
REPORTING TO: Team Leader, Name of Team <input type="checkbox"/>	MAIN CONTACTS Members of the public Residents Other City Council Departments Outside Agencies Elected Members and MPs <input type="checkbox"/>	
RESPONSIBLE FOR: Not Applicable <input type="checkbox"/>		
MAIN PURPOSE OF THE JOB: To provide a comprehensive administrative and clerical service to the Team. To work as part of the Team providing a service to all fulfill the aims of the service. To develop with the Team Leader a full information and monitoring system and thereafter to maintain the system ensuring it is accurate and up to date at all times. <input type="checkbox"/>		

MAIN TASKS:

The postholder will be required:-

- 1.1 To provide an efficient and welcoming reception and telephone service to the public.□
- 1.2 To provide information and advice on the range of services provided from the Team and from other Council Departments.□□
- 1.3 To respond to all enquiries (whether by telephone, in writing or in person) courteously and efficiently.
- 1.4 To ensure the provision of relevant and updated publicity (to include information/advisory leaflets).□
- 1.5 To carry out all duties and administer all procedures in accordance with the Council's Policy and objectives.□
- 1.6 To contribute to and attend training courses as may be required.□
- 1.7 To work as a member of a team and contribute to the achievement of the team performance.□
- 1.8 To participate in new initiatives and future changes in service delivery□
- 1.9 To receive and provide support to other team members.□

2 RECEPTION/TELEPHONE SERVICE□

- 2.1 To act as the principal and initial contact person for enquiries, and to deal with basic enquiries.□
- 2.2 To answer the telephone in a sensitive and helpful manner, ensuring that sufficient information from personal and telephone callers is gathered, to take messages and/or refer them to the appropriate person, signing, dating and timing these messages.□

3 INFORMATION, OFFICE SUPPORT AND TEAM WORK□

- 3.1 To provide under direction and supervision, relevant information to enable Councillors', MPs, etc, enquiries to be dealt with, including setting up the necessary clerical procedures.□
- 3.2 To carry out typing and word processing duties.□
- 3.3 To provide clerical and administrative support to the Team.□
- 3.4 To ensure the teams record keeping system are effective and up to date. In conjunction with the Team Leader, to review and develop administrative systems within the section, making full use of computer software packages. Where appropriate setting up record keeping systems, both manual and computerised which allow the team to review its progress and effectiveness.□
- 3.5 To receive, record and distribute incoming mail, and despatch outgoing mail.□
- 3.6 To undertake photocopying, faxing duties as required.□
- 3.7 To undertake administrative duties, filing and retrieval of correspondence and documents from the filing system as required.□□
- 3.8 To process forms and records including some of a legal nature.□
- 3.9 To assist with arrangements for meetings, including minutes and note taking.
- 3.10 To order and maintain supplies of appropriate stationery and equipment, including compiling and maintaining an inventory of equipment.□

- 3.11 To assist in checking and processing invoices for payment, including liaison with the Administration/Financial Services Department. To maintain a petty cash imprest account, balancing the account on a weekly basis and requesting reimbursement in accordance with the financial regulations of the City Council.□
- 3.12 To assist in preparing and keeping of staff returns, and other relevant information about service provision as required.□
- 3.13 To possess typing skills of a sufficient standard to undertake typing and word processing duties.□
- 3.14 To assist in the preparation reports.□
- 3.15 To courier documents.□
- 3.16 To be actively involved in individual cases and to have a good working knowledge of office business□
- 3.17 To administer the inputting of information onto the database and to pass on appropriate information.□

Attachment 1B

Revised Job Description (standards of performance/ outputs highlighted in bold) and associated person specification. These documents illustrate required formatting

Manchester City Council Job Description

Administrative Information Officer, Scale 5
Name of Department, Section

The postholder reports to the Team Leader, (Name of Team). Apart from team members, the main contacts of the job are: Members of the public, other City Council Departments, outside Agencies, Elected Members and Members of Parliament

Main Purpose of the Job:

To provide a comprehensive administrative and clerical service to the Team.

To work as part of the Team and **contribute to the achievement of its objectives**,

Work with the Team Leader to develop and maintain information and monitoring systems which are **accurate and up to date at all times**.

Main Duties

1. Provide an **efficient, courteous and responsive** reception and telephone service to the public.
2. Provide information, **up-to-date** publicity materials and advice on the range of services provided from the Team and other Council Departments.
3. Carry out typing, word processing and data inputting duties as required.
4. Assist with arrangements for meetings, take minutes and keep notes.
5. Order, maintain and keep inventories of stationery and equipment supplies.
6. Assist in carrying out **efficient** financial administration, following City Council systems and financial regulations (training on in-house systems will be provided)
7. Be **actively** involved in individual cases, keeping self up-to-date and **applying good working knowledge** of office business.

8. **Participate in new initiatives and future changes in service delivery improvements.**
 9. Support the team in promoting equal opportunities in the workplace and delivering services which are accessible and appropriate to the diverse needs of service users.
 10. Carry out photocopying and faxing duties for the team **as and when required**
 11. **Actively pursue own personal development** and **take full advantage of** training provided.
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Where the postholder is disabled, every effort will be made to supply all necessary aids, adaptations or equipment to allow them to carry out all the duties of the job. If, however, a certain task proves to be unachievable, job redesign will be fully considered.

Attachment 1C

Manchester City Council Person Specification

Administrative Information Officer

For this job we are looking for:

Accurate keyboard skills at a minimum 25 words per minute

Excellent personal and office organisation skills

Experience of developing and implementing effective administrative systems in a busy office environment

The written communication skills to produce good quality materials for a variety of purposes (publicity leaflets, short reports, information bulletins, letters and minutes)

Active listening and verbal communication skills for effective interaction with members of the public and staff at all levels

Basic numeracy and ability to calculate percentages

Willing to abide by the City Council's no smoking policy

Personal Style and Behaviour

Tact and diplomacy in all interpersonal relationships with the public and colleagues at work.

Self-motivation and personal drive to complete tasks to required timescales and quality standards

The flexibility to adapt to changing workload demands and new organisational challenges

Personal commitment to ensure services are equally accessible and appropriate to the diverse needs of service users

Personal commitment to continuous self development

Personal commitment to continuous service improvement

Attachment 2A

Manchester City Council Job Description

Head of XX Services

Purpose

To lead and manage the City Council's XX services to achieve statutory requirements, the Council's corporate aims and objectives, strategic plans and organisational values.

Main duties and responsibilities

1. To lead with vision and strong management direction in the continuous improvement of cost-effective services, aligned to service user needs.
2. Promote the Council's vision, values, policies, aims and objectives, through personal example and positive direction to ensure they translate into practical and effective action.
3. Develop service plans and priorities, ensuring they are realised through clear direction, optimism and purpose, marshalling allocated resources to this end.
4. Assist the Chief Officer in the budget setting process, and manage and monitor the Division's budgets in accordance with policies and service priorities
5. Contribute to a strong, co-ordinated Departmental Management Team, helping develop a culture of collaborative working across functions, departments and inter-organisational boundaries in the service of Manchester people
6. Develop an effective Divisional management team, focused on achieving organisational priorities and service plans.
7. Regularly monitor and review services and continuously develop strategies to promote quality improvements
8. Ensure all complaints are investigated and resolved promptly, and any lessons learnt are acted on.
9. Through personal example, open commitment and clear action, ensure diversity is positively valued, resulting in equal access and treatment in employment, service delivery and external communications.
10. Agree and monitor performance objectives with directly managed staff that deliver the Council's vision, values, priorities, aims and objectives.

11. Ensure proactive implementation of the City Council HR policies and procedures and the continuous development and motivation of staff for delivery of services of the highest possible quality.
 12. Actively engage in area based and thematic initiatives which contribute positively to the Community Strategy, delivery of the Public Service Agreement and the Local Strategic Partnership
 13. Establish appropriate systems for identifying service user needs and consult stakeholders regarding service development and direction
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Where the postholder is disabled, every effort will be made to supply all necessary aids, adaptations or equipment to allow them to carry out all the duties of the job. If, however, a certain task proves to be unachievable, job redesign will be fully considered.

Attachment 2B

Manchester City Council Person Specification

Head of XX Services

Extensive track record of successful direct management in a relevant area of service

Demonstrable evidence of effective staff motivation and development, including establishment of a positive performance culture delivering continuous service improvement

Knowledge and significant understanding of the legislative framework and key issues relevant to the portfolio of service responsibility

Clear understanding of the agenda for modernising local government

Demonstrable ability to lead from the front and motivate others to high performance, especially in periods of turbulent and transformational change

Highly developed project management skills, having led or worked in multi-functional teams to create service improvements

Evidence of successful resource and financial management, including resolution of conflicting priorities, formulating budgets, rigorous monitoring and control procedures

Evidence of continued professional, managerial and personal development

A record of success in championing organisational and cultural change, effectively working with staff, trade unions and stakeholders

A broad understanding of the value and use of new technologies in improving services and modernising working process

A record of success in creating equality in service delivery and employment

Personal Style and Behaviour

An influential and persuasive communicator able to define and articulate a strong sense of purpose, engendering commitment across groups to shared objectives

Quality orientation and commitment to continuous improvement

An enthusiastic and effective ambassador for the organisation, its stakeholders and partners

Personal and professional demeanour, credibility and presence in groups

An inclusive team worker who fosters partnerships, works collaboratively across boundaries and achieves results through others

Achievement drive, tenacity, able to maintain focus, objectivity and sound judgement under complex conditions

Interpersonal sensitivity and concern for relationships

Strong external awareness, thinking beyond own area of professional expertise

Challenges the status quo and breaks down barriers to change whilst maintaining essential control mechanisms