Working Papers on Public Governance

Civil Service Capacities in the SDG Era

An assessment framework

OECD

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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) pose challenges to public services in all countries regardless of their level of development. Their broad scope and interconnectedness, long-term commitment and contextualisation at both local and regional level require dedicated focus on government capacities to deliver. This paper analyses the major capacity areas that can support a shift from siloed policy making to more integrated approaches. It defines an ideal benchmark for assessing both the individual and organisational capacities needed by a public service to successfully deliver the SDGs. The paper, which was commissioned as part of a project to build civil service skills for SDG implementation in Poland, is drafted by Cristophe Dietrich and Marco Gozio of the ICON Institute.

Background

The integrated, universal and transformational nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) makes them a particularly relevant tool for addressing the issues faced by public services worldwide. The SDGs provide a globally shared blueprint for tackling diverse and interconnected challenges such as responding to the ongoing pandemic, reacting to economic crises, mitigating and adapting to climate change, managing migration flows, and countering hybrid threats.

In this sense, a public service that is capable of achieving the SDGs would also be able to address the root causes of these issues. A typical feature of the 2030 Agenda is the indivisibility of its economic, social, and environmental dimensions. For policy makers, this implies effectively managing cross-sectoral co-operation and adopting a holistic approach to policy design, implementation and evaluation. There is a global need for solid national governance structures and institutional arrangements that can co-ordinate connected, inter-ministerial actions, both at national and at international level.

These structures and mechanisms must be robust enough to ensure policy processes that are both appropriate to context but also based on rigorous empirical methods (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011[1]). Given the influence that politics can have over policy (Verma, 2000[2]), this need is especially important as the 2030 Agenda's targets will inevitably require long-term commitment throughout diverse political

landscapes. The governance structures in place to implement the Agenda will inevitably be only as strong as the consensus it can summon.

These are not the only challenges that governance structures worldwide face in implementing the SDGs: policy cycles need adequate monitoring, evaluation and reporting tools to reflect the work done to help achieve the SDGs, and state budgeting tools need to be able to take in consideration both social and environmental issues.

While numerous countries have, in fact, developed the strategies, plans and institutional mechanisms needed to deliver the SDGs, progress on a number of goals is still slow or uneven, both within and between countries, including in key issues such as poverty, inequality and addressing climate change. Experience in OECD countries (Gerson, 2020[3]) indicates two main areas where government performance could be improved to accelerate progress on SDG implementation:

- **Policy coherence** – the policy processes underlying national efforts towards the Goals do not balance actions across different sectors in a coherent manner that takes into account the interactions of economic, social and environmental goals, as well as their transboundary and long-term effects.

- **Public service capability** – the public sectors responsible for delivering the Goals still need to rise to the challenges posed by modern society. In particular, public services need to strengthen the way they design, implement, and improve policy processes. This includes linking policy making and policy delivery through continuous, evidence-based feedback loops. To this end, it is essential to rethink leadership and employee engagement to support and foster professionalism and to acquire, retain and develop the right skills (Kahneman, 2011[4]).

Five years after the launch of the 2030 Agenda, it is clear that policy-making bodies need to be equipped with the right leadership skills and competences: the success of Agenda 2030 will inevitably rely on organisational and individual capacities to design, implement, monitor and evaluate policies in line with the Agenda's broad vision.

Professional civil services must provide evidence-based and objective advice to policy makers, balancing short-term political needs with longer-term policy solutions. Moreover, the experience with COVID-19 clearly illustrates the importance of a prepared, reactive and resilient government, able to quickly adapt to new inputs and challenges. This, in turn, requires public servants to adopt innovative skills and capacities.

This paper presents an overview of key issues related to assessing the gaps in the skill sets, processes and procedures needed to achieve the SDGs in an integrated and coherent manner, both by adapting new interventions to the SDG targets and indicators and by mapping existing interventions against SDG targets and indicators. By analysing these policy processes, the paper defines a set of common skill gaps that are most likely to limit effectiveness and integration of SDG implementation.

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

In September 2015, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all UN Member States as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They set an unprecedented global set of objectives to be achieved within 15 years; all countries share responsibility for achieving them and must play a role at local, national and international levels. The 17 goals integrate economic, social, and environmental elements, and are indivisible: to be fully achieved, they must be achieved together. The SDGs cover a number of sectors and issues: poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation, infrastructure, inequality, urban development, sustainable consumption and production, climate action, environmental protection, peace and justice, and global partnership.

Because of their unprecedented scope and nature, the SDGs intrinsically pose challenges to public services in both developing and developed countries. The following characteristics are especially worth mentioning:

Broad scope and interconnectedness – the SDGs cover a wide range of topics that span a number of government sectors. Addressing issues such as hunger, inequality, and gender equality has required a level of transversal effort and horizontal co-ordination that inevitably transcends the traditional limits of sectorial or ministerial mandates. For civil services worldwide, this requires being able to identify interactions and balance the economic, social, and environmental aspects of policies, while considering the implications of domestic actions and policies on other countries (and particularly on developing countries).

Long-term commitment – targeting 15 years in the future, the SDGs look at the long term. In terms of policy making, this means that public services will need both long-term planning competences and the ability to carry forward transformative action across more than a decade, all while balancing short-term priorities and unforeseen events (such as the COVID-19 pandemic). In these conditions, a high-performing public service is able to build on its foresight and resilience to negotiate the trade-offs between emergencies and continuity;

Contextualisation as an opportunity – implementing the SDGs requires contextualisation at both regional and national level. In fact, the 2030 Agenda encourages countries to adapt the SDG targets to local contexts. In implementing SDGs at national level, co-operation with local authorities and stakeholders is crucial. At the same time, the SDGs provide public services with a framework in which they can pilot initiatives, learn from them, and share knowledge across the globe. Many of the issues that the SDGs address are common across countries, and the SDGs themselves encourage knowledge sharing and co-operation. For civil servants, this implies being able to engage a variety of stakeholders, including citizens, while tailoring interventions to local contexts.

1 Individual and organisational capacities for a high-performing civil service

Existing literature

The need for capable governments able to achieve the SDGs is clear and broadly recognised. Yet, there is surprisingly little literature regarding the specific skills that civil servants need to implement the SDGs. There is, however, a large body of literature and initiatives on the general skill sets and organisational capacities needed for a high-quality civil service.

The OECD has identified the skills that civil services need for the future and the strategies they can adopt to invest in them. This includes four connected skill areas (develop policy, work with citizens, collaborate in networks, commission and contract) and three specific skill categories (strategic orientation, innovation capabilities, professional expertise).

Table 1.1. Skills for a high performing civil service

Skill area	Strategic Orientation	Professional Expertise	Innovation capabilities
Develop policy	Foresight, evidence, resilience	Legal, regulatory, economic	New tools for policymaking
Work with citizens	Engaging citizens to improve policy outcomes	Service, outreach, communications	Crowdsourcing, co-creation
Collaborate in networks	Align objectives, resources, actions	Stakeholder relations, partnership development	Social innovation, government as platform
Commission and contract	Using and developing markets to improve policy outcomes	Value for money, business and commercial	Agile development, social finance

Source: (OECD, 2017[5]).

With a specific focus on senior civil servants, drawing on ten case studies from OECD countries (Australia, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, South Korea, and the UK), complementary OECD analysis identifies **four common leadership capabilities** for public sector performance along with the policies, processes and tools necessary to develop them (Gerson, 2020[3]).

- Value-based leadership;
- Open inclusion;
- Organisational stewardship; and
- Networked collaboration.

For example, in the **United Kingdom**, the GovernUP initiative "tackling the skill gap" (GovernUP UK, n.d.[6]), (Horton, 2010[7]) analysed the existing skills gaps in the UK Civil Service identifying the successes

and shortcomings of the current capability plan, and suggested areas for improvement for both the civil servants' behaviour and the civil service's human resources strategies.

In particular, this initiative adopts a framework based on six capabilities: agile integration (being able to connect people, information, and resources), quiet transparency (the ability to consult and hold open dialogues with staff, service users, partners), digital aikido (the ability to use digital media to assess attitudes, build influence and motivate action), horizon scanning (the ability to holistically understand the environment in which services are delivered), rapid prototyping (the ability to experiment and pilot projects), and rebel rousing (the ability to challenge the status quo and seek dissenting voices).

More specifically on implementing the SDGs, **UNDP's Global Centre for Public Service Excellence** (GCPSE) identified in a Draft Note (UNDP, 2016[8]) the challenges faced by public services, distinguishing a set of areas, among them: Data management, Knowledge sharing, Capacity building, Collaboration, but also Thinking and working politically to better nudge political priorities that will help achieve SDGs.

Governance, policy coherence, leadership and capability

Based on the situations described above, it seems that the skill set needed to deliver the SDGs needs to address very specific requirements. The existing analysis on public service quality, SDG implementation and policy coherence allows painting in detail the scenario in which the skill framework unfolds. This paper is based on three specific factors and concepts.

The first, broader factor is the wider concept of **governance within SDG implementation**: it was already mentioned how the SDGs pose unique challenges to governments, including balancing long-term and short-term political pressure, adapting compartmentalised, sectoral public budgets and accountability systems, and managing the way they involve both private sector and civil society in policy delivery. In this sense, one of the main challenges the SDGs pose is to foster a whole-of-government approach that reaches beyond the short-term political cycles. This in turn will require co-ordination mechanisms that can ensure stakeholder participation to a point where a critical level of consensus is reached. The challenge of coherence extends not only horizontally across sectors, but also vertically amongst regional, national, and local policymaking bodies.

Transparency, integrity and accountability[1] do not only promote good governance *per se*, but are essential for the quality of policy cycles in delivering the SDGs.

To support this front, some governance tools constitute available and viable solutions: public finance systems that integrate and dialogue with the SDGs would promote both policy integration and accountability; monitoring and evaluation systems that provide evidence and faster feedback loops can support governments to address a number of issues such as policy value for money, transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and sustainability.

The other factors and chief enablers of this scenario are summarised by two OECD Council Recommendations adopted in 2019: the Recommendation on **Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD)**[2], and the Recommendation on **Public Service Leadership and Capability (PSLC)**[3].

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[1] There exists a risk of competing prioritisation between accountability and transversality. Traditionally, accountability tends to be organised vertically rather than horizontally. In turn, this poses another challenge for public services: finding a balance between accountability and horizontal trust across its sectors.

[2] See OECD Recommendation of the Council on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, OECD/LEGAL/0381

[3] See OECD, Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability, OECD/LEGAL/0445

The concept of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development provides an approach to integrate the dimensions of sustainable development throughout domestic and international policymaking. Specifically, the PCSD Recommendation's three pillars and eight principles propose the enabling factors necessary for a government to successfully deliver on the SDGS, combining:

1. A strategic vision for achieving the 2030 Agenda in an integrated manner:

- *Build a strong, inclusive political commitment* to enhance whole-of-government approaches, including by applying poverty, gender equality and human rights perspectives to policymaking; and by building leadership capacity to formulate, implement, and monitor policies;
- *Define, implement and communicate a long-term vision* to support policy coherence, including by adopting the right strategic tools to identify, prevent and potentially mitigate adverse policy impacts on all dimensions of sustainable development;
- *Improve policy integration* to better incorporate sustainable development into policy and finance, including by adopting policy planning mechanisms and tools (including budget and public procurement processes), incorporating the PCSD lens into national development plans, integrating geographical and sectorial policies, and taking a whole-of government approach to diversify resources beyond official development assistance.

2. Effective and inclusive institutional mechanisms to address policy interactions:

- *Set up whole-of-government co-ordination mechanisms* including high level co-ordination mechanisms, clear mandates and resources, formal governance arrangements, and the right administrative capacities to support them;
- *Engage sub-national levels of government*, promote PCSD at different levels and foster vertical synergies;
- *Engage a wide range of stakeholders in all phases of the policy cycle*, raise awareness and especially reach out to marginalised and vulnerable groups.

3. A set of tools to anticipate, assess and address policy and financing impacts:

- *Introduce regular and timely assessment* of the different kinds of policy and financing impacts, including strategic, regulatory, environmental, gender equality, social and transboundary impacts;
- *Strengthen monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems* that embody policy coherence, allow to measure progress on the SDGs and facilitate the systematic adaptation of policy work in response.

The Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability, in turn, identifies what makes a public service fit for purpose and responsive today. In doing so, it recommends the adoption of 14 principles, organised under three main themes:

4. Values-driven culture and leadership:

- *The values are well-defined, shared and communicated*, allowing for public servants to discuss and apply them in practice;
- *Leadership capabilities are both strengthened and recognized,* with clear expectations upon senior-level public servants, transparent and meritocratic procedures in place, and impartial, evidence-based policy advice is valued;
- *Public service is inclusive and safe*, promoting organisational and managerial processes supportive of diversity/inclusion;

- *Proactive and innovative practices allow to take a long-term perspective in the implementation of policies and services,* ensuring an appropriate balance of employment continuity and mobility, an adequate investment in foresight and analytical skills, and engaging communities outside the public service.

5. Skilled and effective public servants:

- Systematically identify the skills and competences it needs and align its people management processes with them;
- Attract and retain the employees with the right skills, through a mix of motivational methods;
- Establish transparent. open and meritocratic recruitment processes that are able to fill out vacancies with the best skills in an impartial and inclusive way;
- Develop a learning culture that encourages employment development and engagement;
- Assess, reward and recognise performance, talent and initiative, both at individual and organisational level.

6. Responsive and adaptive public employment systems:

- Clear institutional responsibilities for people management, including merit-based criteria;
- A long-term strategy to people management, informed by evidence-based assessment of skills needs and availability;
- Innovative conditions for workforce mobility and adaptability to match skills and demand;
- Transparent employment terms and conditions;
- Employee engagement in shaping public service delivery.

Needs drivers - quality management approaches and transversal dimensions

Delivering the SDGs implies a rethinking of traditional policy making methods. This being said, some of the existing quality management approaches provide a starting point to set the basis for a skills assessment of civil service administration capabilities.

In its formulation the traditional policy cycle foresees a continuous, iterative improvement loop of both policy processes and contents (Capano and Pritoni, 2020[9]). In this sense, it parallels other quality management and continuous improvement frameworks that are useful to test improvement and manage change (Lasswell, 1956[10]).

Obviously, in the context of the SDGs, policymaking requires continuous stakeholder consultation and political negotiation that fall outside the limits of the traditional policy cycle approach.

In the context of the SDGs, this implies approaching topics from multiple angles and putting in place some of the processes in the policy cycle at the same time. The SDGs also imply that several policy cycles are at play in parallel and policy coherence for sustainable development must be a central concern for policy makers.

Without shying away from the dense complexity of policy making, this paper adopts a continuously adapting policy cycle approach as an illustrative grid on which the skill framework for SDG implementation is contextualised.

In particular, following the OECD Recommendation on PCSD, it is possible to distinguish four functional dimensions:

- **Turning vision into plans (Strategic Vision)**: identify and analyse the problem or opportunity, develop hypotheses about what the issues may be, predict the consequences of the decisions made on the specific issues and develop an implementation plan;
- **Delivering high quality policy (Implementation and governance mechanisms)**: carry out the potential solution, ideally on a small scale first, and measure the results;
- **Measuring progress and continuously adapting to change**: continuously collect timely and quality data, study the data collected and result obtained and deploy governance mechanisms that allow for preparedness and quick adaptation;
- **Reacting to change**: carefully assessing policy delivery and the context in which it unfolds, then adapting processes accordingly.

Complementing these functional dimensions, the framework suggests four additional, transversal dimensions related to the specific nature of SDG implementation:

- **Transversality and long-term perspective**: strengthen the ability to identify, analyse and exploit the linkages between policies across different sectors, in a long-term perspective that allows for both resilience and sustainability;
- **Involving stakeholders and promoting dialogue**: proactively seek contributions and feedback from citizens, private sector, civil society and competence providers;
- **Holistic, value-based leadership**: promote inclusive, transparent management processes that can increase efficiency and accountability of public service;
- **A culture of evidence**: formulate and adapt policies on the basis of factual information and knowledge, as opposed to ideology or inertia. This implies the ability to read, interpret, and effectively use data.

Obviously, reducing the capacity set needed to deliver the SDGs to just eight dimensions is inevitably reductive. Additional capacities include technical and sectoral expertise; statistical expertise; the capacity to adapt and align both public budgets and procurement systems; the capacity to use regulation to deliver coherent policy outcomes; communication and negotiation skills; digital literacy; and human resource management processes that allow to value and develop individuals' skills.

Figure 1.1. Functional and transversal skill dimensions
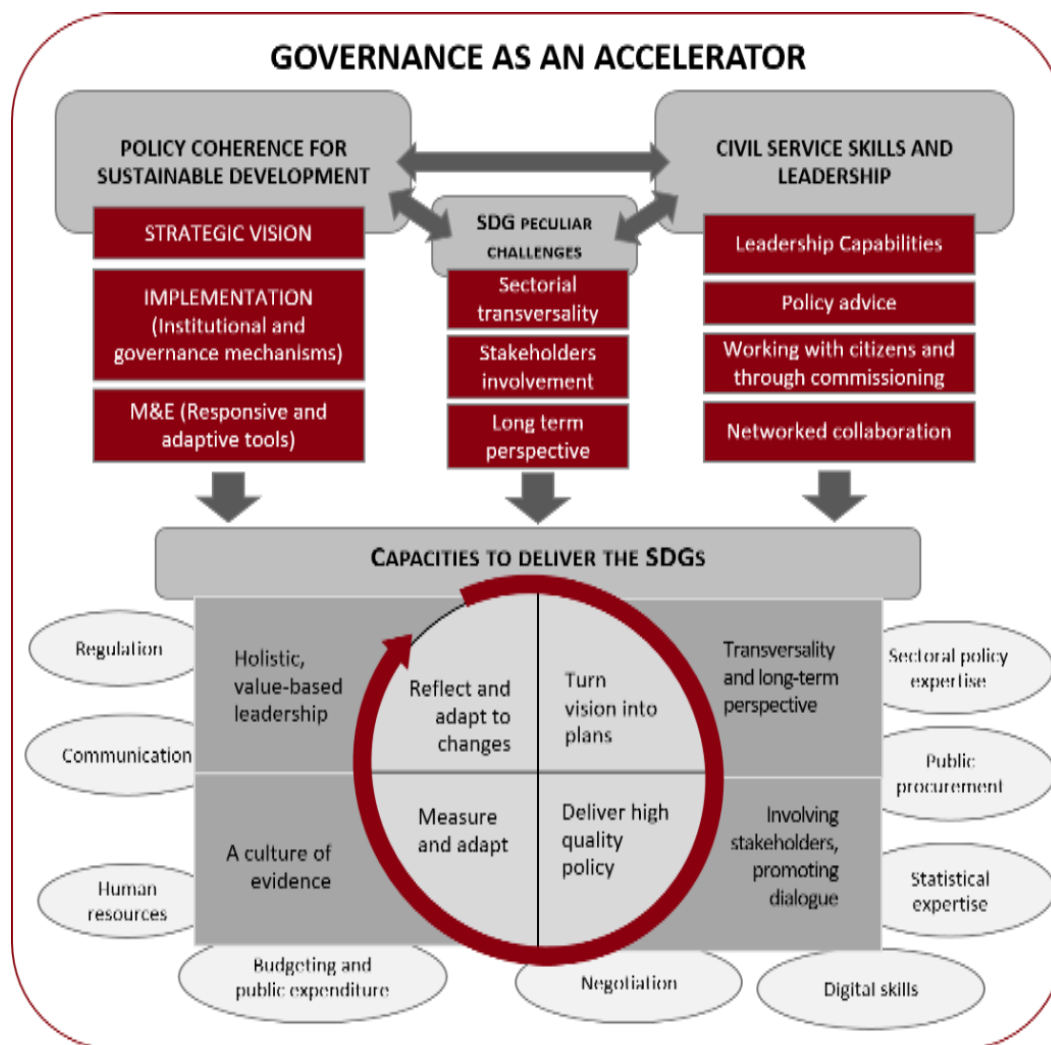
Source: Authors' elaboration.

2 An assessment framework for capacities required to implement the SDGs

This paper lays the bases for conducting a gap analysis of the public service skills needed to deliver the SDGs. The gap analysis is a relatively standard process based on an identification of the desired state followed by a differential analysis of the observed state, grounded in the evidence directly collected from public servants. In doing so, the paper first identifies a set of skills needed to deliver the SDGs on the basis of the state of art and analytical concepts identified. Secondly, it isolates the most probable existing gaps in civil service competences. Third, it proposes an analytical framework to assess them.

The ideal situation

Many of the particularities of SDG implementation within the public service portrayed above point to the necessity of both organisational processes and individual capacities that are synergistic and mutually supportive. For this reason, the ideal situation proposed below identifies both individual skills and organisational processes, based on the dimensions identified above (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Individual skills and organisational processes in an ideal situation

Capacity dimension(s)	Skills and capacities in place in an ideal situation	Individual skills	Organisational processes
Long-term and transversal planning	Long-term vision – ability to anticipate the future and balance short-term priorities with long-term sustainability objectives (5-10 years)	Ability to balance short-term priorities with long-term policies, ensuring continuity and sustainability beyond electoral cycles	Built-in mechanisms that ensure continuity and sustainability beyond electoral cycles
	Risk assessment – including the ability to formulate risk and opportunities matrixes and post-mortem analysis	Ability to manage risks and opportunities, systematically envisioning, anticipating and preparing for different scenarios that might arise	Internal risk management procedures
	Transversality – this includes the ability to formulate policies and programmes that incorporate diverse sectoral perspectives across the SDGs	Systems-thinking and ability to identify and address policy interactions, considering economic, social, and environmental issues	Policymaking processes that facilitate the linkages between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions, and between ministries and other public institutions
	Prioritisation/ Defining policy objectives – based on SDG targets, policy interactions, data and evidence	Ability to see the big picture, understand and align policy objectives with SDGs	Policymaking processes that facilitate prioritisation and alignment of objectives with SDGs

Capacity dimension(s)	Skills and capacities in place in an ideal situation	Individual skills	Organisational processes
	Develop an action plan to foster sustainable development – including indicators with baseline situation, milestones and targets	Ability to develop action plan complete of indicators	Planning processes that require sound formulation of action plans
	Formulating assumptions – involving the ability to identify the hypothesis for a theory of change	Ability to formulate assumptions for a theory of change	Policy guidelines that require identification of underlying assumptions
Long-term and transversal planning; Budgeting and public procurement	Costing interventions along an action plan, relate existing intervention to SDGs (SDG budgeting), including positive/negative expected/unexpected impacts, managing trade-offs across issues, and capitalising on synergies	Ability to consider economic, social and environmental policy issues when evaluating costs and benefits of a policy	Public accountancy systems capable of interacting with SDG targets across a number of issues
Budgeting and public procurement	Defining typology of interventions - including the ability to define precise terms of reference and requirements for procurement or acquisition of services and goods	Ability to formulate needs for suppliers and markets	Sound ToR formulation procedures Robust procurement systems
	Translating assumptions into gains and losses at macro level – including across policy areas	Ability to budget for diverse impacts, including social, environmental, and economic issues	Planning processes that require budgeting of assumption at macro level
Budgeting and public procurement; Deliver high quality policy	Design the right delivery model, e.g. direct delivery, commissioning and contracting, partnerships, digital channels, etc.	Ability to contract required services and goods – including formulating expected results, monitoring of progress, and mitigation of deviations.	Sound, adaptive commissioning and procuring processes
Deliver high quality policy	Being comfortable with localised adaptations (no one size fits all solutions)	Ability to coordinate policy delivery at local level	Policy delivery processes that allow and value localised solutions (no one size fits all solutions
	Mobilise resources – including financial, and staff, including at local point of delivery	Ability to design funding tools and accountability frameworks for delivery partnerships	Effective funding tools aligned to the appropriate level of government, with suitable oversight and accountability framework
Evidence culture	Evidence-based policies – this involves the ability to consider evidence in formulation and delivery of policies, as opposed to ideology or inertia.	Ability to understand data interpretation and use it to inform decisions	Guidelines and policymaking mechanisms requiring evidence-based needs analysis
	Culture of learning from data and evidence - including widespread and systematic collection, analysis and usage of data for policy/delivery improvements	Expertise in collecting, analysing, disseminating and presenting evidence	Collaborations with universities and centres of expertis
Statistical expertise	Capacity to identify data needs, collect quality and timely data, analyse it, and use it to inform policies	Ability to collect, manage, analyse and interpret data	National statistical processes aligned to SDGs targets
Involving stakeholders and promoting dialogue; Communication	Raise awareness and communication – and especially reaching out to marginalised and vulnerable group	Ability to communicate policies and policymaking work to external publics	Policy arrangements and guidelines that facilitate communication of policy work to targeted audiences
Involving stakeholders and promoting dialogue; Digital skills	Digital public services directly delivering and engaging with citizens and stakeholders	Ability to connect to stakeholders through adequate digital media (e.g. social network)	Digital service provision systems that allow to better deliver public service
Digital skills	Digital skills that facilitate cooperation and innovation across all functions	Digital literacy and mastery of information technologies	ICT systems that facilitate collaboration and dissemination of information
Measure and adapt	React to collected evidence – including the ability to adjust plans based on gaps between milestones and situation (including	Ability to value criticism and to react to new inputs	Governance processes that require reflection and adaptation based on available evidence

Capacity dimension(s)	Skills and capacities in place in an ideal situation	Individual skills	Organisational processes
	renegotiating terms of service contracts) and formulate management response plans following evaluations		
	Integrate a sustainability dimension into existing impact assessments, e.g. regulatory impact assessments (RIAs)	Ability to assess the impacts of legislation on sustainable development	RIA is fully integrated with other regulatory management tools and integral to the regulatory policy cycle
	Plan for systematic evaluations – to actively support all policy cycle phases	Ability to plan and carry out evaluation plans	Evaluation processes supporting all policy phases
	Adopt responsive monitoring systems – to measure and document progress against indicators and budgets	Ability to plan, measure, and interpret monitored progress	Sound accountancy and monitoring systems that allow to monitor and interact with the SDGs
Reflect and adapt to changes	Holistic assessment of policies and processes – across the SDG dimensions	Ability to evaluate the sustainability of policies and processes	Evaluation mechanisms that require reflection on the sustainability of policies and processes
Holistic, value-based leadership; Human resources	Organisational stewardship – Public service managers that are able to build needed skills and healthy organisations based on common public service values and trust.	Ability to recognize and develop talents; impart values-based decision making, build a culture of trust.	Access to fit for purpose HR tools to attract, recruit, and develop needed skills. Performance incentives and values frameworks.
	Openness and inclusion – leaders are able to proactively acknowledge and value other employee's point of view and foster a culture of openness and inclusion allowing for innovation and organizational development	Ability to promote open, inclusive working environments that value all contributions	Diversity and inclusion processes and safe places for experimentation and collaboration in the public service
Human resources	Recognize added value of the SDG and incorporate it into HR processes	N/A	Management frameworks that incorporate soft (SDG) skills such as cross-sectoral and vertical collaboration into performance assessments

Data collection and assessment framework

The ideal method to carry out the capacity gap analysis is through a gap analysis measuring the distance between a benchmark and an observed situation. The assessment of the situation could be done through interviews or surveys that allows collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. Ideally, a survey would target civil servants at various level of seniority and focus on their practices and processes.

The data collected will then allow to infer how far the actual situation is from the desired situation, and in which areas the gap is wider.

In doing so, it would be important to distinguish between actual practice and perceived practice, and to leave room for the participation of target audiences. In this sense, respondents would have to be prompted to comment and provide suggestions on how to improve both their own individual skills and organisational processes. Recommendations from participation are important input to measure the existing capacities along the PDCA model.

Country examples on various aspects of the framework

As mentioned above, the particular challenges of SDG implementation are similar across public services around the world. This section notes a number of national capacity building initiatives in OECD and partner countries alike that can inform various aspects of the framework.

In **Germany**, the SDG training initiative of the German Development Institute (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, DIE) was developed in 2018 as part of its Managing Global Governance programme. (GDI, 2018[11])Together with schools of public administration from Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa and a number of UN institutions, it devised an action plan for strengthening the public sector in implementing the 2030 Agenda. The initiative focuses on breaking down silo mentalities, involvement of stakeholders and communication. To do so, it promotes continuous professional development for executive leaders (in a "training of trainers" modality) and on systematic international experience exchanges among public administration schools and other actors from academia, research community, civil society and private sector (Reiber and Reiners, 2018[12]).

In another German initiative **– "Daring to transform" Capacity building workshop series on transformation literacy for civil servants and policy makers** – the German Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt, UBA) published in 2018 a report on "Transformative Environmental Policy", proposing different policy approaches for public servants and policy makers. To promote the application of these approaches, UBA funded the development of a workshop series. In four two-day trainings over the course of five months in 2020 the participants learned skills to deal with sustainability transformations within different societal sectors (mobility, energy, food etc.). These skills included system thinking, experimental policy design, cross-departmental and -societal collaboration and understanding patterns of organisational and societal transformations. After a successful evaluation it is planned to make this workshop series permanent and to reach out to departments beyond the Ministry for the Environment for further application of the format.

Romania's Department for Sustainable Development (DSD) – the coordinating body for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Romania's Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 – is the beneficiary of a project financed from the European Social Fund, "Sustainable Romania - Development of the strategic and institutional framework for the implementation of SNDDR 2030" (Mihai, Florin and Jimborean, 2013[13]). In the context of this project, Romania introduced in 2018 the profession of sustainable development expert in the national Classification of Occupations. According to the classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), this occupation is part of the Policy administration professionals' group (ISCO-08 code 2422). Specifically, Romania developed the "sustainable development expert" national occupational standard. This standard defines the competences which apply to job roles or occupations in the form of knowledge and the evidence required to confirm this competence. This new occupational standard will require time, money and excellent collaboration between the public system and authorised providers of training courses and qualifications. The first step (autumn 2021) is the training of 150 sustainable development experts, employed in the central public administration, within the project financed from the European Social Fund. Then, the public authorities at all levels will offer their employees the possibility to enrol for trainings focused on sustainable development, financed from their own budget or from European funds.

In 2019, in collaboration with UNDP and ECLAC, the Government of **Aruba** elaborated a Roadmap for SDG implementation identifying the policy accelerators to target in order to accelerate progress towards their achievement. In doing so, they pointed out a lack of internal (interdepartmental co-operation) and external partnerships (coalition of partners), as well as a lack of skills from public servants, especially on systematically collecting, interpreting and using evidence to base policymaking. A capacity gap analysis of both public service organisations and individuals confirmed a fragmented governance landscape, highlighting as main capacity gaps the insufficient communication and connection across government

departments; and low data literacy, reflecting the low adoption of data collection mechanisms and in even lower usage of available data. Capacity building efforts led by the ICON Institute are currently ongoing.

National Schools of Public Administration can play an important role in capacity building for the SDGs. For example, in **Greece**, the Institute of Training of the National School of Public Administration and Local Government developed a specific training initiative to raise awareness among and build capacity of a range of stakeholders to contribute to 2030 Agenda implementation. The Institute provides a recurring three-day seminar on the SDGs for representatives of ministries, local and regional administrations, universities, research centres and independent authorities (Shannon Kindornay and Zeki Kocaata, 2019[14]).

Furthermore, in its 6th annual meeting of 2018, the **OECD Network of Schools of Government** (NSG) brought together 40 representatives of schools of government, academic institutions and national civil service bodies from 2017 OECD member and non-member countries under the theme "*Building capabilities and engaging employees to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*" (OECD, 2019[15]). The meeting provided an opportunity for its members to share and discuss opportunities on how to build civil servants capacities, innovating and developing more encompassing policymaking processes, including evidence-informed policymaking. The network also constitutes an asset to its members for sharing practices and experiences and facilitating the creation of intersectoral networks so much needed to deliver the SDGs.

Conclusion

While all the skills presented in the framework are important and complementary, some core skills appear to be particularly relevant:

- Operating transversally in convergence with the nature of SDG and with the need for coherence across policy areas;
- Engagement with citizens and civil society, allowing and fostering continuous feedback and constructive criticism;
- Integration of evaluation principles in policy design and implementation, and systematic use of sustainability impact assessments; and
- Statistical literacy in using empirical evidence for policy formulation (beyond context description)

Operating transversally in convergence with the nature of SDG and with the need for coherence across policy areas

The skills related to the transversality of the SDG and coherence require a sound knowledge of the policy cycle, the ability to identify and analyse policy interactions, and the skills to incorporate elements of policy evaluation at the design phase.

Using the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance and coherence are especially helpful as relevance aims at ensuring the interventions and policies are answering actual needs and are aligned with policies, strategies and, in the case of the SDGs, to SDG targets. The criteria of coherence aims at ensuring that, in the planning phase, the policy is aligned with objectives of other policies in other sectors and that they are not targeting competing or conflicting objectives. A recurring example in policy planning is the potential conflict between economic development and environment, health and decent labour.

This would require analytical skills (being able to see a bigger picture and think multidimensionally) as well as collaboration, engagement and networking skills. This will involve advanced analysis skills to map policy outcomes against the whole set of SDG targets, carrying out stakeholder mapping and set up effective co-ordination mechanisms.

Engagement with citizens and civil society

The provision of top-down information and distant communication with citizens are not enough anymore to ensure the legitimacy and credibility of the government interventions.

Presently, communication is still largely centred on the interventions of one ministry or one institution as governments are organised thematically. However, with regards to the SDG targets and the 2030 Agenda, ministries need to take into account interventions of the whole government and even civil society and be able to absorb and disseminate information to and from a multiplicity or sources.

However, realising SDG 17 itself requires catalysing the engagement of stakeholders to integrate their contribution to the SDGs within policy delivery. Within this perspective, this implies operationalising the "leave none behind" principle and engaging both individuals and communities, with a particular focus on marginalised voices and groups.

Operationally, this implies deploying the skills to set up regular consultations with citizens and civil society, including by proactively raising awareness; leveraging on citizen generated data; creating communication platforms and integrating administrative process with social media, all while protecting individuals' privacy and personal data.

At the same time, the ability to listen needs to be coupled to the ability to quickly adapt to inputs, reacting and building consensus to support policy delivery

All this requires civil servants and institutions to have highly effective and efficient information systems and communication skills in order to be able to manage accurate and credible information whenever necessary and on a large scope of topics.

Integration of evaluation principles in policy design and implementation

Expanding on the previous point, the integration of evaluation principles aiming at constantly reflecting on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and coherence of the policies helps policymakers to adapt and adjust interventions to the evolving context and to the results of the monitoring of the intervention.

Continuous learning as policies are delivered also requires regular data collections, reporting and critical thinking about intervention, with senior management willing and able to integrate the lessons learned in the implementation of policy. In turn, this allows for re-scoping, adjustment of targets and reprioritisation of interventions.

It also involved that, in the implementation of the policy, the public services are able to manage providers of services and goods effectively and efficiently are able involve the private sector and the civil society in aligning with government priorities and policies.

Digital literacy and data science in using empirical evidence for policy formulation (beyond context description)

Digital, data and statistical literacy have been a subject of discussion for a long time, even before the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals.

Statistical systems in developed countries, and especially in Europe are now largely integrated and standardised. However, in the modern information society, the number of data sources, providers and users has increased exponentially. Producers of official statistics are not the only ones to produce data that could be used for monitoring SDG targets anymore.

Ministries and public services themselves produce data from administrative sources that are now incorporated in the sources for official statistics. However, definitions and methods sometimes differ and the quality of administrative data for statistical purposes can be variable depending on how and for what purpose the systems were built.

Finally, the private sector and citizens themselves have now become producers of information through various channels, and these data are usually referred to as "Big Data". The new data ecosystems are challenging to grasp and the emergence of the so-called "fake news" flood citizens with often contradicting information of similar topics, harming the legitimacy of information provided by official sources. Civil servants and institutions are now challenged to produce fast, highly accurate information as well as plausible and robust narratives associated with this information. New skills are therefore required in storytelling, data visualisation, data science and statistics.

As mentioned above, data protection and privacy will also be crucial, implying both awareness and specific capacities by public servants.

The way forward

This paper proposed a capacity framework specifically designed for public services intent to deliver on the SDGs. Based on the state of the art, it aimed to identify major needs areas and to build a benchmark against which to start assessing current capacity levels. In doing so, it aims at filling a gap in the existing literature around public service skills for the SDGs.

However, in order for the proposed framework to be fully relevant, it needs to be used and tested against the reality of public services. Only then could it be possible to analyse and intervene on capacity gaps and enable public services to deliver on the SDGs.

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