



RESEARCH BRIEFING ON STAFF REDEPLOYMENTS AT OFSTED

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November 2022



Foreword

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I welcome this academic contribution that examines the human capital, knowledge and learning practices of individuals during Ofsted redeployments in the pandemic 2020-21. COVID-19 affected so much in our lives. It was a particularly tough time for those in children and young people's services. Many people worked hard to make sure that children and young people learned as much as possible whilst being well looked after, and I am incredibly proud of Ofsted's role in this.

As soon as the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic became clear, we made the decision at Ofsted to do whatever we could to support the wider government and national effort. We had to suspend our routine inspection work in March 2020, and we quickly recognised that with the skilled colleagues this freed up, we could help other public services that were coming under pressure.

We moved fast to deploy hundreds of staff into local authorities, into central and local government, and into vital frontline roles with the police, the NHS, and others. Those that stayed in Ofsted shifted their focus to emergency response or were deployed internally to help policy teams with the exceptional volume of new work, or to assist with novel research projects.

Over 700 colleagues were deployed to other organisations. This is over one third of our employed workforce and demonstrates the commitment we have shown to supporting the nation through this pandemic. We are proud of the difference this made to the national effort, and that Ofsted, a small organisation in terms of the number of employees we have, provided over 25% of all civil servants who were deployed to help other government departments during the initial response to COVID-19.

Through all this, we made sure our critical regulatory work continued, including on-site where necessary. Our staff showed great flexibility and a real dedication to public service. I and all the senior leadership team at Ofsted are proud of every colleague's contribution.

This report looks at how Ofsted reconfigured its human capital to respond to the biggest national disruption of our lifetimes. I believe it demonstrates how we remained true to our aim of being a force for improvement, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

Amanda Spielman

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Executive summary

During the pandemic the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) deployed over 700 staff externally to a range of ministries, civil service departments, local councils, and other institutions such as multi-academy trusts, and on occasion hospitals. This report synthesizes the key findings of research into this experience. In particular, we paid attention to how knowledge and skills (human capital), relationships across various stakeholders (social capital) and enriched processes and systems (organizational capital) were developed. The research was conducted by the authors between August and December 2021. The findings are qualitative in nature and refer to a sample of 64 interviews spanning the different re-deployments and across different departments. The aim of the research was to understand how individuals adapted their know-how once removed from their professional institution and working in unknown settings. Furthermore, the report illustrated how redeployments can be enriching to organizations across different context, during and post-pandemic. Findings and recommendations are now synthesized.

Portfolio managing and project delivery offered during redeployment:

1. Redeployees drew upon five distinct meta-capabilities linked to Ofsted's unique organizational practices. These meta-capabilities comprise key features of portfolio managing. They include: (1.1) High-level capacity to make and strengthen relationships, thereby building and using social capital to develop individual and institutional knowledge; (1.2) Ability to flex their identity and the content of their role to meet context required goals; (1.3) Strategizing, implementing and envisioning an outcome orientation; (1.4) Understanding leadership as collaboration with others; (1.5) Working well in improvised inter-organizational teams and contexts and at speed.

Gained during redeployment:

2. Knowledge and learning (human capital) was gained and subsequently applied in: (2.1) Challenges faced by communities and community leaders during the pandemic; (2.2) Use of technology and digitalization expertise; (2.3) Self-development and self-confidence; (2.4) Resilience and emotions linked to diverse contexts.
3. Redeployees enhanced organizational capital by gaining: (3.1) Knowledge of political and policy decision making processes across the civil service; (3.2) Understanding of wider civil service systems and processes; (3.3) Appreciation and enactment of Ofsted's reputational position.
4. Redeployees strengthened organizational network capital by: (4.1) Strengthening stakeholder relations; (4.2) Improving working practices for collaboration across silos and in multidisciplinary and inter-organizational teams.

Improvements in practice:

5. Post-redeployment employees improved practices at both individual, organizational and institutional levels, concerning: (5.1) Internal and external communications; (5.2) Managing self and others; (5.3) Leadership acumen.

Conclusion and recommendations

- a. The findings of this study were overwhelming positive both in terms of individual and organizational outcomes. **Learning and development:** Redeployments during the pandemic increased the leveraging of current human capital and the development of an array of new skills that enhanced organizational performance. Redeployments should therefore be programmed and systematized, as the Institute for Government (2021) has also noted, into workforce planning.
- b. **Unique meta-capabilities in portfolio managing and project delivery:** Ofsted redeployees showed enhanced project delivery and project management capabilities that enabled innovation during redeployment. This was clearly linked to a cultural embeddedness and capabilities that have been developed across Ofsted. Redeployees deployed a wide range of past professional experience, educationalists expertise, managerial expertise, and project delivery specialisms. These capabilities were honed by Ofsted's work practices of time critical project delivery, leadership/team rotation, inter-organizational teamwork, multi-stakeholder engagement, a client/relationship orientation and a laser focus on negotiating outcomes. These enhanced meta-capabilities should be documented and monitored by human resources departments to further strengthen competency-based approaches to human capital and civil service readiness for policy requirements, future innovation and challenges.
- c. **Purpose driven redeployment:** Redeployments during the pandemic were purpose, not promotion driven. This form of redeployment was especially valuable in enhancing the drivers of collaboration and increasing the likelihood of durable outcomes. Purpose driven redeployments could be the focus of future redeployment programs in the civil service, with employees volunteering to be 'deployment-ready'.
- d. **Matching - high risk or low risk redeployments:** Some redeployments involved adapting to high levels of risk and uncertainty, working under continuous stress and navigating many unknowns in terms of responsibilities, relationships and objectives. In future, redeployments could be categorized according to their level of uncertainty so those with meta-capabilities suited to meeting such challenges can be appropriately assigned, whilst those with single task profile are also well assigned. When optimal matching is not possible in advance, structured support can mitigate the higher risk exposure.
- e. **Redeployees can be location flexible:** Experience of Ofsted's redeployments during the pandemic enhanced employees' online participation skills showing that individuals located away from central civil service offices can meaningfully contribute to national processes via virtual meetings and briefings. These practices should be encouraged and systematized to expand participation and diversity of skills needed to deal with complex problems, such as the pandemic, that will arise in the future.
- f. **Inter-organizational teams:** Prior experience of inter-organizational teamwork expedited redeployee's ability to adapt and innovate in difficult contexts, creating new knowledge and social capital quickly. In developing this capability inter-organizational team working should be facilitated and prioritized over departmental formations as tackling challenges in the public arena are better understood as muddled multidisciplinary complexities than functions or tasks.

Snapshots

"...for me the thought that I was doing something to help the country in whatever way, no matter how small, if we could process an extra 5,000 tests a day and people weren't having to drive for two or three hours to get a PCR test, because that's what it was in the beginning, that in some small way I was helping the country, that for me that was all I needed, that was a reward in itself."

"...we then worked on it and said "right, this is how we can put a governance structure in place". Obviously, people love that sort of thing, if you're saying, yes, I can do that for you. So, you know, I think anybody who didn't get their hands dirty wasn't very popular but we were quite popular because we got our hands dirty."

"it was almost like the wild west as in it was very fast and loose. Things were made up almost on the day to try to react to what the situation was developing throughout the country"

"Sometimes we can get into a sort of gilded cage in Ofsted and think about 'well we know what's right' and I think that – reminding yourself of your own humanity and humility is not a bad thing."

"But I'm also really, really proud of what we achieved. You know, I mean, when you look at the infrastructure that endures because of what we did, and we weren't very efficient in those early days. You know, I think you could have driven a coach and horses through the structures and processes that we had. But we were set an unrealistic target, and we met it. And then we met the next one. And we met the next one [...], a system was developed that meant that this infrastructure protected our nation. I don't think that's over playing it."

"You know I'm a civil servant, if we needed to be gone somewhere because we're in the middle of a crisis, that's what's expected. You know, you can't turn around and say no, I'm not going to do it. And plus, I'm proud of it, I'm proud. I went to the DWP and helped during the pandemic!"

"I felt I was doing the right thing for the country. That sounds weird doesn't it. So, it just felt, you know, I was asked would I – I did have a choice, I didn't have to do it, but I said yes of course I would. There was no way I would have turned it down. My reflection is that we probably could have – we could have been more organized in terms of what it is we could offer to these different places. But I think nobody really knew what they wanted until we got there."

FINDINGS

1: Meta-capabilities offered

Portfolio managing involves leading and coordinating a range of programs and projects. Redeployees deployed portfolio managerial skills via five key meta-capabilities:

1.4 Developing and maintaining social capital: Describing redeployments as the ‘wild west’, redeployees often had to harness and navigate relationships, coordinating with others at speed and in unknown contexts: ‘I was one of a team of 55, but only two of the 55 were civil servants’ [2]. We found that the safety of familiar social relationships and navigating ‘who to talk to’ in unknown contexts were crucial to a successful redeployment. A key characteristic was an understanding of how social capital creates knowledge:

‘...what’s interesting for us is how people adapted very quickly to working with all these different types of people, which is unusual, you know, how many situations would you go into, and you would be working with the military, you’d be working with other civil servants, and with these consultants as well. Different types of people so it’s really interesting how people adapted to that and built a working model or social capital from that.’

‘I really came up against some real, I suppose, it was barriers, some real barriers about people not wanting to give me information. Very much smoke and mirrors type of thing, oh, you’re not going to be here for very long. And it was getting [everyone] to come onside, which I found very, very difficult, again, it was those negotiation skills. ... [As] a HMI we do have to deal with [those] who don’t like what we’re doing, [...] who put barriers to everything we’re doing [...]. So, it was using those skills, using those management skills to get where I needed to be and to do it quickly, and that was probably the biggest issue.’

‘I also think I brought something to bringing people together and getting things to fit. And I think my problem-solving skills came to a fore. I think in terms of knowledge...’

‘you don’t mind change and you don’t mind jumping into the unknown. And the way I view it is, we’re all in this together and actually none of us know it, so actually it’s about building your networks, it’s about building knowledge etc., and that’s what I like. [...] this is my personal view, relationships really help that work ethic in relation to taking things forward, setting deadlines etc., actually giving people tasks, and that’s what we did from the beginning.’

'I guess it's finding those key people who are really helpful often, so it's finding the people who will take the time to explain, who know about the structure of the business and how it works, some of the more technical things as well sometimes, I think that's the key thing.'

'having that knowledge that all local authorities are different and finding my way through, and that's something I do. So, if I have a complaint about a school that's something I have to do, that's part of my role, is finding those right people to speak with. And often they're not the first person who picks up the phone, they are some way down that – or some way through that tree of people. Finding those people and being able to have those conversations is key.'

'the thing I had to do was park, any preconceived ideas I had about that local authority, even though I had that intelligence and I'd made evaluations previously about what was happening within special educational needs, for example, or within transport or those types of things, I had to sort of park that and say, right, let's go at this from a different angle. It's a pandemic, you know, it's a different relationship. And this is about working with them, regardless of any perceived strengths or weaknesses, to find a way to navigate through that for schools and children. So that's been my tack, really.'

'They came to me to do it was because of that background knowledge and also the contacts I have within the sector as well, with the unions, with the head teacher unions, with various other people that I could draw upon. And also, that I could reach back into Ofsted as an organization, you know, at the ground level and get information about what's going on the ground very much quicker than anyone.'

1.2 Adapting identities and roles: Many interviewees described complex role negotiations to help smooth their integration with others in a new team, reduce political tension, and establish a new role as a legitimate problem solver or adviser. This was vital, especially in local authority settings where inspectors might have been perceived as a 'fox in a hen house', to ensure those receiving redeployees didn't feel monitored by Ofsted. 'They were clear about what we were willing to do, and they were clear about what we wouldn't do, and what wasn't part of our role, as part of the redeployment. So sometimes it's a wee bit messy, but we got there in the end.'

Others integrated their skills to establish new roles:

'I'm not a scientist but spending time, I did a day's job shadowing so that I would be able to take on that knowledge, not in that, oh, I'm a scientist, but by knowing the process of what was happening, by knowing when things were more likely to leak, when things would become contaminated, building those relationships with the lab managers, with the scientists there and then by being on site.'

Sometimes it involved relinquishing an identity: 'But I was working for [the Council] first and foremost. It wasn't about me or Ofsted'. And assuming another:

'So, the way I worked with a local authority was more in a consultative role creating particular plans, policies, procedures, that then they could reflect on and amend. [...] trying to establish yourself within a pre-established team. When you've been asked to lead on some quite complex issues, it's almost in a consultancy role isn't it. You're coming in, and you've got to deliver. And then you know, you're going to leave. And whatever you leave behind has to be powerful enough to work, and to be bought into and understood and accepted.'

Often it involved being 'whatever is needed':

'I can't remember what the job title was because it made no difference. [They said to me] "actually we know you've got a lot more to give than that, so you know, we're going to get you to attend some high-level meetings and basically if you say 'I think I can add value there', then go there and attend those meetings as well"'.

'I stepped out of the design part of that and allowed other people to continue our design. But what I did was, I stepped into and brought some capacity into the HR element. [..] And so by moving away from the designs element of that and supporting with just interviewing, getting some infrastructure in place, getting some agreements around some agency staff, allowed us to move forward at much more rapid pace.'

'I described it like the wild west, but it really was, like no-one really knew. There were bodies coming in, but no one really knew what anyone was doing or what our task was. So that was the most difficult bit almost seeking work out, how can I actually be helpful rather than a hindrance.'

'It was very much in at the deep end, learning as I go. And although I had done some diary management work before, I'd never done it as a full role, so it was definitely a bit of a steep learning curve.'

'So that required a completely different skill set because suddenly, I went from being the person challenging to the being the person who worked within the local authority and being led by the very person that I'd been holding to account.'

1.3 Applying an outcome orientation to strategies and processes: The pandemic presented complex social, operational and scientific challenges, as visible in daily press reports and televised ministerial briefing, across

multiple government departments. We found through the interviews that there was clear engagement and willingness to contribute to society. Redeployees used an outcome orientation to make sense of this complexity and to identify goals:

'I've always had an impact. You know, on the outcomes both in personal and development and academically of kids. But it was, I felt there was a real need in the country, well you know, what are we going to do about exams? What are we going to do about qualifications?'

'it was certainly a review that allowed us to have in one place, information about all of the work streams. All of the work [everyone had] done, and to triangulate that with outcomes where possible. [...saying] "that is what happened. Actually, this bit here wasn't as good as we wanted. To say this bit didn't work and this is how they improved it". Which gave us a blueprint then to move on and create the next set of work programmes in the system.'

'So I had to book a venue at fairly short notice and there was no process in place, so you just had to ask around and ring around and kind of put things in place and work, you know, find work arounds. And then, once you've done that, then you'd write it down and think, "Well there we are, I've got a process, I'll share that with the team," so it was those kind of things, yeah.'

'I just had to keep banging at doors really. Which I think is quite helpful because part of what we do as inspectors is we don't let go, we're ferrets, so we just carry on, and carry on until we get where we want. I think that's the skill that – I won't be pushed back.'

'Built outcomes into negotiating roles: 'I just had to be open and honest with them, this is about me supporting you in any way that I can. And then making sure that the project was, as I say, meaningful to them, was of use to them, and met – so setting very clear parameters makes it sound a bit too business, but very clear ideals about what they want to come out of this and what was realistic, what was a realistic outcome to come from this.'

'So, my job there was to sort of set the agendas, and keep things moving, and try and pull together all of those different stakeholders to get a coherent plan together really, of how we could achieve almost a restart in education and, see it as an opportunity for resetting the clock.'

'We were two million places short [on buses and trains for kids to get to back to school], we got the gap down to 10,000 places across the country [...]. There was one funny thing where we even had people who were travelling into the [...] office reporting back to us what bus queues were looking like across London in the mornings that week. And so, one of the things we did just to gee them up [those in charge

of transport] was to say, 'we know on the Lewisham line, No. 51 bus, there were 30 kids waiting for it and they had to wait for half an hour, and they were, like, 'how the hell did you know that.'

'So, every day there was a sort of a flow of meetings, if you like, and it really was sitting in all of those to see how decisions were being made from an operational and leadership point of view.'

1.4 Leading as collaboration: Establishing leadership integrity during redeployments was achieved by pitching and positioning leadership as helpful collaboration. This was often done in collaboration with consultants but also required careful positioning to maintain collaboration. The awareness of multiple skills (human capital) and the value of relationships (social capital) was clearly important in successful redeployments. This approach helped in avoidance of political and power contests amongst senior figures and establishing effective inter-organizational and multi-disciplinary teamwork:

'I think what was helpful for senior leaders ... was that we were able to think about how can we help you to make the improvements that you guys have identified that you need to do?'. [...] So, I knew for example, that some of the senior leaders didn't think very well of some of the other not so quite senior people in the organization and had agendas about getting rid of them. I just thought I'm not getting into this. I was asked to meet with some people that they had concerns about, and, I said "well I'm only doing that through a coaching lens".

'I tried to be as close to the labs as I could, [...] by being as close as I could, people could either ring me and I could be there straight away, or they would come and get me and say [...] whatever [...] just occurred, come and have a look. Which meant that I was developing those skills and then I was able to talk with some conviction in those focus groups and in those debrief meetings.'

'My role was ' I guess a guardian of what had gone before, and what I tried to do [...] was helped people who were developing the bigger system and the more sustained system to understand what had already been developed, so we weren't dismantling one set of infrastructure to replace it with another [as things changed]. But we were trying to evolve what existed into something that was more enduring and sustainable.'

'I'm a leader first. [...] I am able to provide an assurance when people are making difficult decisions. I'm able to counsel and develop people in the role, but I firmly believe that the best leadership is - leadership properly needs time and space. And so delegations are really important, and it isn't about being lazy and isn't about not being seen to roll up your sleeves when that is necessary. But I think it's about being able

to stand back and reflect back to people who were doing a really important job, what they're doing, how it's going well.'

'So, whilst I'm a senior HMI when I'm out on an inspection the lead inspector is in charge of that whole event. So, we're quite used to going you're in charge this week, I'm in charge next week. And I don't think I'd appreciated until I went over to the department that that's quite a skill in itself because quite a lot of leaders can't hand the baton over. I'm able to accept that. Maybe 10 years ago I wouldn't have been able to.'

'the local authority had said that, you know, we've got this group of people and we need somebody to sort of bring them together, who can hold that group and has got that sort of ability in terms of credibility within the sector to be able to, to pull together the different threads, without taking it over, but facilitate the discussions and prioritize an action plan from those'.[56] , this was about children and young people. And this was about Ofsted fulfilling its mission as being a force for improvement, and of targeting resources where they're most needed. And that isn't about a personal thing. That's about credibility as a leader within an organization and showing the flexibility and the skill set that's required to get that right.'

1.5 Working well in improvised inter-organizational teams and contexts and at speed: Many redeployees thrived under the challenges presented by redeployments, including the unstructured, changing and high-tempo nature of the work. Interviewees referred to their Ofsted routines as good training and a solid foundation for the redeployments given the time critical, high-pressured, and unpredictable nature of inspections.

'It's just a case of we needed to thrash this out quickly. You know, changes that would normally take, you know, a year to be developed and then two years of piloting after consultations and the like, were having to be in like a week, you know, a week or two's notice'.

'I can't praise my colleagues highly enough, they adapted and developed what they were doing very, very quickly, created a capacity to do that, worked on rotas just to be able to provide the cover we needed to cover the weekends, and we were able to hopefully prevent what was an emerging crisis become a catastrophe.'

'...but it was quite chaotic. It was very, very busy and it was structures within structures and systems within systems, and trying to join it all together was like trying to play Tetris with jelly, to be honest, it was incredibly challenging at times. In my role, I work at pace. The work we do is contentious. We, you know, we don't make lots of friends. We have to balance lots of different concerns and views and opinions across the public spectrum. Key people tried to weaponize us, they'll weaponize the media, and they'll try and

involve us in stuff that way. So, I'm used to working under pressure, you know, I do work under enormous pressure...'

'I think being a manager and where I work currently there are a lot of surprises that happen, you have to be ready for that new day and being used to reacting very quickly and coming up with a plan, you know, transferrable skills. Also, I think the people skills, as well, one of the important things in my role is being able to communicate externally, internally, people at different levels etc., So, I could be talking to someone very senior or someone in the medical profession, you know, it's about that adaptability of self to be able to get what is needed.'

2: Learning gained

Redeployees acquired contemporaneous knowledge and learning relevant to their roles in Ofsted, as well as their role in the civil service more broadly enabling innovation and resilience:

2.1 Knowledge of communities and context: Significant knowledge was gained in the difficulties faced by the public, communities (schools, colleges, councils, and social services, etc.) during the pandemic. We found that an engagement with the causes and policies helped enrich practice upon a return to Ofsted. This knowledge was subsequently channelled to raise and develop timely and innovative policy on concerns such as absentee children, child protection, safeguarding, flexible exam procedures, as well as local pandemic crisis response arrangements.

'...it allowed us to get a closer understanding of what was going on. And indirectly we've given, from our perspective in our study, because of that particular work, that peripheral information that comes through that you learn about local authorities has allowed us to target some additional support, post that particular redeployment.'

'I learnt so much myself [...] because you know I've been inspecting for a long time, and it's a long time since I've had those pressures of managing, and the world has moved on. If you think about safeguarding, and knife crime, and all those things, they were around a bit when I was in practice, but not to the same extent that they are now. [...] and changes in welfare – social policy [...] and all of those things have really changed and impacted on the services in terms of budgets that can be provided. So, [...] it's really helped my own inspection practice moving forward. Not that we wouldn't always focus on what's right, but having much more current understanding of some of those real pressures in real time for people to be able to deliver that work.'

‘And I had to be adaptive in terms of – I knew nothing about universal credit [...] So, learning about that gave me an empathy I think for the families that I work with in schools. Because it’s not an easy process. But also, working with adults, and certainly working with adults who are unfamiliar with technology, and themselves were vulnerable [...] So, all of that I think was really valuable.’

‘Most HMI, most inspectors are going to have gone through school fairly seamlessly. It’s going to have been a fairly standard route through school probably, not always, but probably. Whereas many of the young people that we speak with, their experience of school is utterly different. And so, it’s shining a light on that.’

‘But coming back into Ofsted, that’s given me a deeper sense of the types of questions that I might ask of local authorities. It’s given me a deeper understanding, as I said before, about the context that people are working within. [...] So, for me, it’s provided a wide amount, or a wide range of regional intelligence that we wouldn’t necessarily have had. First-hand information, you know, that contemporaneous evidence of what happened rather than second hand...this is an amalgam of findings that Ofsted has compiled through some other means.’

‘So, you know, one of our current projects [...] is redeveloping the area of special educational needs and disabilities framework of inspection. [...], actually, knowing that experience opened it right up. So we’ve, kind of, looked in a more holistic way at that and I’ve looked in a more holistic way to make sure we’re getting to the heart of what the issues are for these young people’.

2.2 Technology and digitalization skills: Many redeployees carried out redeployment roles remotely. The findings also indicate that the team support (knowing others in the same context) facilitated the adoption of new technology skills. Adopting new practices in unknown contexts required that they learn technology run by other institutions of the civil services, gaining a wide knowledge in digital tools for collaborating across different systems with differing levels of security: ‘I think certainly I’d not done any online training at all and now that is a frequent part of my role’. And, ‘There’s also been personal learning, as I said, in the sense of how you can manage and support a complex situation within a local authority remotely. And actually, you can achieve a lot without actually being there.’

2.3 Self-development and self-confidence: Many redeployees boosted understanding of their capabilities and effectiveness in their roles. This had the benefit of raising their agency:

'It also meant that it was broadening my experience of alternative provision (AP), and my experience of how alternative provisions differ across the country, and how alternative provisions differ one AP to another. And so, that has then fed into my practice [...] subsequently.'

' – that made me stand quite tall really. Because actually, I did have ideas and they were listened to and – not all of them, but some of them were upheld [...] that made me feel good that I'd made a difference, I'd made a positive difference to lots of people and actually that's what I'm in it for anyway.'

'So I think my attitude, rather my knowledge developed actually. I mean, I don't think you can come away from that without some additional knowledge, but I think I became braver. I think I became better able to trust my instincts in situations. And I don't think I lacked either of those beforehand, but you really were on the front foot. I think there was something about how being driven by a moral imperative, and recognizing above all, systems, structures and ways of working, actually, sometimes you just got to get the job done.'

'And I think in relation to confidence, as well, I've always been reasonably confident but working in another government department has broadened my horizons massively and I can speak about that openly and give people reflections when my workers have sometimes very tunnel vision about the work they do in relation to the big picture. [...] . It's given me the confidence to think, do you know what, I can do this [...] I've pushed myself around a bit more in Ofsted, as in, getting involved in other remits, other pieces of work. Pushing myself probably a bit more into the unknown, if something comes up, I'm quite happy to put my hand up and take an opportunity, take a risk really into the unknown. [...] My personal biggest takeaways are that I could do it, I survived, I was able to help, I was a help rather than a hindrance which is one of the biggest things.'

'I'd probably go with confidence, you know. Like you were saying before, like confidence to go into a new department and use those same skills but in different ways. And you know just problem solving, building relationships very quickly, I think those were the things that I kind of, yeah, felt I walked away with, yeah. And you know, just perhaps reaffirming that the skills that I did have in Ofsted were transferrable.'

2.4 Tools and techniques for resilience and managing emotions: Like everyone, individuals were redeployed at work while at the same time having to cope with the challenge of COVID deaths or other causes of death and illness in their individual families. Redeployees described meeting these challenges as a new experience in terms of learning the extent and limits of their resilience. Many also set up peer networks during redeployments to check in with each other and provide each other moral support:

'[My buddy] he kept in touch every week... and he was really good [...] because you know things were changing at Ofsted, you know things were moving forward [...] so he kept me in the loop with all those things, which was really important.'

'So I took an informal role in supporting people who were at other levels below myself in relation to checking in emotionally, actually helping with some of their work and how it kind of linked in with some of the stuff I was doing. So, it could be quite lonely but I think, actually, the comradery really helped with it, you know, you're all in it together, this was a very unique situation [...]. I know people who I, kind of, looked after ... when I say looked after kind of like pastoral care is checking in, are you OK, are you surviving today, what are you doing.'

'I suppose I have become more resilient and able to set my own routines a bit more. Not that I didn't have routines when I was a senior leader in a school, but I suppose they were external routines, as opposed to setting my own ones. Yeah, and I think I suppose that's working. Using the internet more remotely? Yeah. Which I think we could always do, but we never tended to.'

3: Organizational capital gained

3. 1 Policy and decision-making know-how about the civil service

Redeployees were directly involved in giving and taking briefings from ministers and senior civil servants, improving redeployees understanding of and ability to contribute to policy and decision making. This involvement had a further positive impact on their roles when they returned to Ofsted: We found that engagement with different processes and systems were appreciated and that Ofsted employees flourished in contributing to other systems and 'importing learning' to make improvements:

I learned a lot about the political workings of a local authority that I didn't know. I had an understanding. But you know, the nuances of all of the different things that go on behind the scenes that you're not normally privy to those things, about how things are ratified, and taken through Cabinet and all those types of things. I sort of developed a deeper understanding.'

'There were things I learnt working with the Department for Health and Social Care, you know that have been invaluable [...] in some ways Ofsted is quite insular because we're an inspectorate and that's our job, we're a non-ministerial government department [...] and as we started to get more people on board [...] we really then had a wealth of knowledge to share.'

'They would take it forward and need to get back to us, ping pong, ping pong, back and forth. Then finally we'd come to a decision but then it would just disappear into the ministry [...] And it was like well, the Minister wants, needs to sign this off, and we can't get it on his desk type stuff...'

'...I understand more about the politics that work in what I call the proper civil service because, you know, as a pedagogist moving to Ofsted, I'm a civil servant, but I haven't come through the traditional civil service routes. So, there's certainly been a knowledge about how the wider civil service works, and the interface between the politics and departments that work a slightly different way to what it works in Ofsted.'

'But it was that unknown and the fact we were quite close to more government. For us, we worked for a government department, this was our eyes opened to this is the Department of Health, we were very lucky to have that experience.'

'Being able to put it in the context of education, where is [government] looking at to promote things, where is it trying to dial things down, that kind of stuff was really helpful in then forming our [bids]. So that kind of thing and understanding how those structures work was really important. [...] the exposure to people who are running the country [...] to work with people like that see how they operated without getting it filtered by either the media or other people.'

3.2 Knowledge of civil service systems and processes

Redeployees were involved in establishing and using processes and systems in the wider civil service, giving them valuable insight into the merits of the workings of other departments, as well as those in Ofsted:

'But I was very reflective, actually, on how lucky I am to work in an organization like I do, with some of the structures, actually you know where the outsides are, where the boundaries are, how far to go. When working there, there were no walls, it was very different.'

'So, for us as Ofsted, in terms of Ofsted moving forward, when we have sort of cross regional meetings it just is a bit more purposeful. I think before it wasn't purposeful because we didn't really understand what the others [in Ofsted] do. But now actually we have a better depth and breadth of what the other departments do.'

'I think for Ofsted one of the things we have actually talked about in our team, one of the critical outcomes is actually just working with other – closer with other departments and we are hoping to do that because

although we are obviously funded by DFE to do inspections, one of the things that we got from it is actually some more understanding of how they work, especially within their sort of small teams.'

3.3 Reputation and legitimacy

Redeployees gained deeper understanding of the importance of maintaining Ofsted's reputation and legitimacy.

'I think on a strategic level it was probably quite a good PR thing for Ofsted that we leant our people out. I think more people saw our professional, our capabilities and that we are quite, what's the word, able, we're quite able people. We're doers. We don't mind rolling our sleeves up and getting things done. And I think probably some of that is – although I'm senior [...] I will often go out and join an inspection and be an inspector within that team'.

'One of them [in the civil service said] "you know the complexities, you don't just throw mud, you know..., you criticize if criticism is necessary, but you're always understanding the fact that it's not black and white often, it's much greyer".'

I think for me... there was organizational risk that needed managing. Because if I didn't deliver reputationally for Ofsted, that would have been a significant problem within a local authority that we challenge and hold to account for the standards of education and care. [...] it's been really useful grounding, in the sense it's adding credibility into our work as inspectors. Because we haven't just sat back and watched what school leaders perceive us to be, which is sitting back watching what's going on, and then not actually known, the challenges that they've been facing.'

4: Network capital gained

4.1 Stakeholder relations

Redeployees were particularly skilled at extended enduring stakeholder relations both internally and externally. We found that this skill and orientation was related to the roles that they held in Ofsted. They also became more aware of the importance of building network capital, currently and in the future:

'...we were all in it together. And so, I have made contact with someone who was a business support officer in London or someone who works in Bristol and, actually, it's really helped me when I've come back in relation to my connections within my own organization.'

'I think one thing that did happen was before the secondment, you know, for a senior civil servant, I have very little to do with other departments. Following that secondment, I've been very happy to have those engagements with the Cabinet Office and with the Department for Education. I know that it was a secondment that gave me a confidence to do that.'

'... it's sort of built relationships in a way. And I think, I mean, it was so, it was risky, but it did build credibility between the perceptions of what Ofsted does and can do, in terms of being the person, people that come in and make judgments and then walk away, to actually we're all in this together type thing [...]...what it did do within the sector, is it's built more of a trust between school leaders in that authority and Ofsted.'

4.2 Multidisciplinary and inter-organizational teamwork

Redeployees worked in complex multidisciplinary teams, alongside other civil service employees, consultants, members of the military, hospital workers, council leaders, social care providers, college, and school heads and more, highlighting understanding of the attitudes and qualities of collaborative teamwork:

'What we found, and we found this when we went back to do visits is that the pandemic has really lent itself to thinking about how do we do this more creatively? How do we work more collaboratively? How can we support each other without being in siloes or getting into blaming each other? Because at the bottom of all of this are vulnerable children.'

'Mistakes were made, there always will be when you're working at the pace that people were working at. But you know, you share the blame and you share the credit.'

'So I ended up liaising with the army and working with people who had been brought in, from anyone who was on the Highways Agency last week directing traffic on the motorway, to someone who was working in anti-terror. It was an eclectic group that we'd come together and it felt like the A Team, the show, everyone came together and you had to, kind of, go in a garage and come out with a product at the end which was fit.'

'I was working with school leaders and sector leaders that potentially I could inspect. And so, I worked with head teachers of the six secondary schools, the CEOs, from an ILAX perspective, we worked with children's services, we worked with the opportunity areas, we got representatives from there, we had DFE representatives on that group.... So, there was a lot of, of trying to get to grips quickly with the relationships and the political workings of that group. So, it was quite high risk really, to try and galvanize that group of people'. [...] Because there's the danger isn't there that somebody is coming in to tell us how to do this. And that wasn't the brief. It was about pulling together a diverse range of people who perhaps

hadn't always traditionally worked together in this way because they'd been part of different organizations that didn't mean they had to work in this way, and, it was about trying to find a way forward.'

'...to work with brand new people, you know, in a very quick, form a team and then get more people given to you to form a team with them, which is what happened over the time. I started out with three people I was working with and ended up with about 25 [...] being forced to get to know people very quickly, identify their strengths and weaknesses and know what kind of work you're going to get those people to do and what you're not going to get them to do, considering it was a short period and you didn't really have time to develop them, if you know what I mean[...] it was like, we just need to crack on.'

5.Improvements in practice

Improvements in practice occurred because redeployees: (a) Developed better ways of making meaningful communication; (b) Increased empathy for managing others, including juniors; (c) Adapted their appreciation of leadership acumen.

5.1 Communication

Greater proximity to stakeholders improved the meaningfulness of post pandemic communications:

'There's been an increasing flow of communications, so school leaders for example, they feel they can go to the local authority and can come to me, and then we'll get more of a response. There's more of a dialogue, and there's more of a collaboration, and a less of a sense of that fear about what Ofsted does that they just come in, make judgments, and walk away.'

Many redeployees had to negotiate roles and responsibilities highlighting the importance of negotiation skills in setting meaningful expectations:

'I think if it were to happen again, I would be a little clearer about -these are some of the things I can do for you, which of those would be useful, or which combination of those would be useful for me to use to do something that you need. So, I think I'd be a little more direct because initially, as I said, difficult isn't the right word but the initial difficulty around setting those expectations did mean that there was a little bit of time that was possibly wasted when we could have been doing something more productive.'

5.2 Managing self and others, empathy

Redeployees adapted how they managed themselves post pandemic:

‘...for me organizational skills, trying to keep yourself on a level playing field for myself, for my own mental health, as to actually knowing when to stop as well. One of the biggest things where I work currently is telling people to know when to stop, when is enough enough and when can you move on.’

‘[Now] I’ve been in a lot higher pressure situations and I can recognize where it’s getting to, and so I can maybe seek that help earlier, which I think is a benefit for me and my team and for the person who manages me as well.’

Redeployees also adapted how they managed others:

‘We have new employees, so I’ve taken on two new HMIs from September, it’s just understanding that feeling really of newness, you know, and feeling de-skilled. [...] You know, and so you can use that experience really to understand or empathize how people are feeling. And just to put, you know, so we used to have monthly meetings with new HMI, so I tend to meet them now at least once a week, just to have a quick chat with them, so that’s something I’ve changed.’

‘And it’s also enabled me to put some additional training and support in with our workforce in the sense of the impact of the pandemic, the impact of what leaders and other stakeholders have been through, and sort of pulling that information together so that we can move forward and support the recovery through the work that we carry out now moving forward.’

5.3 Leadership acumen

Importantly, the way in which Leadership was view shifted substantially. Post-pandemic redeployees changed their understanding of leadership effectiveness, in terms of negotiating skills:

‘I’m being more cautious. When people are meeting with me in my Ofsted role, and they’re saying that they will be supportive, I think naively when I first started, I thought that meant that they would be at worst neutral in public and hopefully positive about it. But they’re not, you know, literally they can be very positive behind the scenes and extremely negative in public [...] so it’s being a lot more cautious really and not assuming that people are always going to be true to their word.’

In terms of being reflective:

‘It was more about being self-reflective and self-aware to make sure that if there were any pinch points in there, that there was somebody within the organization that I could go to and say, well, what do you

think about this? Or, you know, is there anything...? Am I crossing a boundary here? You know, those types of things. And that's why it's important that there's also people in the background.'

In terms of leveraging credibility:

'I used to do local authority briefings once every two weeks for different local authorities, and I can start you know, just by saying that, you know, with credibility that I understand what they've had to go through, I understand the challenges that these leaders have faced [...] So it's given me a little bit more of a, a platform, if you like, to engage people in what we do as an organization, and to show us in a different way.'

In terms of strategic leadership:

'...it is about doing that thinking and listening, and understanding, and seeing the bigger picture. Again, that sort of – it crystalized for me, or reminded me, a bit more around not seeing the whole picture. Looking at the whole picture. Thinking about the different layers where are those? So, who's doing the influencing? Where are the pressures? Who are the people who understand within that, as a system as well, a leadership system? [...] as somebody who can lead and does lead, and has those skills, I think it's helped me be empathetic as well about how bloody difficult it is. These people again at every layer were really trying hard but the leadership wasn't clear. There was a lack of clarity, there was a lack of vision and there was a culture of blame [...] I could see that getting played out. You can't fix that overnight.'

Background and methodology

Covid 19 raised many concerns central to managing human capital in organizations. While many private organizations furloughed employees, some public sector organizations in the UK were involved in large-scale re-deployments. Human capital was redeployed from designated roles and responsibilities to new positions needed to strengthen the public sector response and delivery in the context of Covid 19 pandemic.

This project explored questions at the heart of human capital development, which are central to organizational performance in the civil service. It is well-known that human capital becomes ingrained in organizational processes and is therefore either organization or sector specific. The particular shifts that need to take place in the context of redeployment challenge human capital specificity. Yet, they shine a light on how human capital can be flexibly deployed in the face of great challenges.

Such redeployment raises the questions of “how well did we do and what can we learn from this unique experience”? For the academic community, the Covid-19 experience in the public sector offers an unprecedented opportunity to understand in empirical detail the strategies of professional workers in adjusting to significant shifts in capability demand and in making adjustments in new contexts.

By investigating the matrix of knowledge (‘know-how’) and capability adjustments at the heart of human capital reconfiguration in complex crisis situations, the aims of this study were twofold. First, to develop insight into how organizations can plan and prepared for human capital reconfiguration as part of their resilience planning and future crisis preparedness. Second, to shed light on the relationship between human capital reconfiguration and innovation.

Methods

Interviews were conducted online and were recorded. Both researchers participated in the majority of interviews enabling triangulation of findings. Key questions asked during interviews were: (1). What are your past and current key firm-specific and sector-specific knowledge areas? (2). How did you adapt to redeployments? (3) What was most challenging about the redeployment? (4). What influence did such adaptations have on your practice during and post-redeployment? Two hundred and twenty interviewee invitations were sent, giving a 28% response rate. The shortest interview duration was 22 minutes and longest was 79. Interviewees reflected the full range of redeployments and the full range of staff diversity at Ofsted (see Table 1). Interviews were analysed dialectically for what was offered and what was gained.

Location	DWP	DHSC	Local authority	DfE Ofqual	MAT	Other	Total
Interviewees							
Business support	7	5	1	0	0	1	14
Regulatory inspectors	2	1	5	0	0	0	8
S/HMI	7	14	9	8	1	3	42
Totals	16	20	15	8	1	4	64
	N.B. No technical skills or context match 36 interviews (in unknown networks and relationships)		N.B. Matching technical skills and education/social care context 28 interviews (with known stakeholders)				

Table 1: Interview data at a glance

Limitations and acknowledgements

The researchers would like to thank all those who generously gave up their time to contribute to this study, and to thank Ofsted leaders for permission to carry out this research. This study focused on individuals redeployed by Ofsted to other institutions. It is important to recognize the role of employees who were not redeployed and maintained work processes at the home institution, often providing valuable support for those out on pandemic projects. Large numbers of Ofsted employees were also deployed internally and were not included in the sampling of this study. Further information on Ofsted redeployments is attached in appendix.

The aim of this research was not to assess the effectiveness or impact of Ofsted’s redeployment program during the pandemic. While the researchers recognized there were some redeployments that worked better than others, and clearly some redeployment opportunities did not offer the same level of challenge and interest, our focus was on understanding knowledge and human capital implications, not operational ones. We hope at least some of the issues raised by those research participants whose redeployment experience was not as positive as it could have been, are addressed by the report’s recommendations.

Interviewee quotes cited in this report are illustrative and limited in number due to the nature of this report. No funding was obtained for this study. The study was initiated on account of the researchers’ academic interest in human capital reconfiguration during workforce adjustments to the pandemic.

Summer term 2020, Deployments

'We recognised very early in the pandemic that some of our routine work would stop and that we would have the capacity and skills to support the national response. We gathered information about our staff's skills, locations and availability and set up a deployment panel to match staff to roles. The panel considered opportunities and requests to use our resource, flagging potential conflicts of interest and putting in place mitigations whenever a deployment necessitated it. Deployment agreements were also put in place between Ofsted, the host organisation and individuals themselves to ensure that all were clear on responsibilities and standards. We also secured a change to our ambit (the description of what we can spend our funding on) to enable us to temporarily deploy our staff and contracted inspectors.

During 2020–21, we deployed over 700 staff in total, around a third of our workforce.

Some of our staff were deployed to other government departments, including: the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP); the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC); the DfE; and the Cabinet Office. These staff worked in Universal Credit case management and training, test and trace, communications, and planning for the return to schools and childcare providers.

Other staff were deployed to over 100 local authorities, as well as to multi-academy trusts, children's homes and the NHS. The types of work that staff undertook included: on-site support in children's homes; tracking of vulnerable children and young people; working on multi-agency safeguarding hubs and developing safeguarding processes; establishing a national helpline to provide parents and carers with advice and support on home learning; and working across the London local authorities to recruit staff rapidly and safely into care settings.

From September 2020, we supported the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) in several executive and non-executive roles. In total, we deployed 20 staff, and no charge was made for the majority of these roles. These arrangements were agreed to provide Ofqual with the extra capacity, short-term support and oversight needed to help manage the additional pressures the organisation faced following the 2020 exam season. HMCI was asked to chair a Recovery Committee. This was set up to oversee much of Ofqual's work between August and December, ensuring that the organisation learned from the summer exam season, tackled the remaining issues from the 2020 awarding process and worked to ensure that arrangements for 2021 could again command public confidence. HMCI was supported in this role by our Director of Corporate Strategy and a small number of other Ofsted colleagues, working for Ofqual two days a week. The Deputy Head of External Relations was also deployed by Ofqual to cover its interim Director of Communications role. In addition, Carole Stott and Baroness Laura Wyld, both Ofsted Board members, served on the Ofqual Recovery Committee, acting in their personal capacity.'

Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1001292/Ofsted_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2020-21.pdf