



contentgroup

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

Work with Purpose

EPISODE #56

PLANNING FOR UNCERTAINTY

A Work with Purpose episode that was originally recorded as a webinar between contentgroup and Proximity.

# TRANSCRIPT

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David Pembroke:

Hello everyone and welcome once again to Work with Purpose, a podcast about the Australian Public Service. My name's David Pembroke. Thanks for joining me.

David Pembroke:

I begin today's podcast by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Ngunnawal people and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging and recognise the ongoing contribution they make to the life of this city and region. Today, a podcast with a difference. Our guests, two former secretaries from the Australian Public Service, Kerri Hartland and Glenys Beauchamp.

David Pembroke:

This podcast was recorded as a webinar for both Proximity and contentgroup, but the content was so good, we decided to turn it into a Work with Purpose episode. And the topic was, how do you build and sustain a high performing public sector organisation post COVID? It's a great conversation. I hope you enjoy it.

David Pembroke:

Well, the pandemic has forced a new way of working for individuals, for teams, for organisations, and it's also forced change in the way we collaborate with clients and with stakeholders. It has challenged traditional structures and exposed glaring governance weaknesses at an international, national and local level. COVID-19 has also accelerated the uptake of digital technology and brought about a greater awareness of wellbeing and productivity, particularly in times of crisis. So what are the lessons that we've learned from the past couple of years and what do we need to do to ensure that we can create and sustain high performing organisation? What are the building blocks for improving performance and productivity and how do we manage and sustain not just our own performance, but the performance of the people who we lead?

David Pembroke:

To discuss these questions and more, I'm joined by two former Australian federal public service departmental secretaries who are now part of the team at Proximity. Kerri Hartland is the principal advisor at Proximity and the chair of their advisory board. And Glenys Beauchamp is the principal advisor of Proximity's health and industry practices. Welcome to you both.

David Pembroke:

Glenys, I might start with you. What are the biggest and most critical challenges that organisations must address as a result of the changes brought about by the pandemic?

Glenys Beauchamp:

I think the pandemic's exposed some of the changes that need to be made particularly in larger organisations in the public service in particular. And one of the most paramount issues to address is that planning for uncertainty. I think organisations have been good at planning for change. I think it now is planning for uncertainty and that requires a lot of communication, a lot of effort by leaders and a journey to take organisations on. I think what we've seen during the pandemic is the rate of change, the speed of decision making. And coming from a line agency in the commonwealth previously, one of the things that I've really seen

is problem solving can't be done in silos. And I think working across agencies and organisations and across teams is going to require ongoing discipline by leaders and organisations.

Glenys Beauchamp:

I think it's interesting, many agencies and public services have had the mantra in the past about one APS, or one health and the like. I don't think we can operate like that anymore. I don't think citizens, clients, constituents, industry really care about the organisational structures within government. They really want to know those outcomes are being delivered and that we as public servants are working together to deliver those outcomes in consultation with those that are most affected. I think that, that is going to be a big change. I think there's also, obviously, you mentioned digital and the way we work. And so there's change in how we work and we'll get onto that a bit later, but more remote working. What does that mean for cultures of organisations and particularly in leaders, in bringing cultures together based on values?

Glenys Beauchamp:

We've heard the further you are from the centre, the harder it is to manage and lead organisations and that cannot be done through prescriptive processes. It is absolutely based on values. And how do you entrench those values in people that you probably don't have daily contact with and are not likely to have contact with in the future? So there's using digital and engaging and I should say engaging, not just consulting, but engaging staff is going to be a particular challenge as well.

Glenys Beauchamp:

I think one of the other things and you mentioned focusing on people and productivity and what we've seen through the pandemic is, what makes people tick? What do you have to do to bring out the best you possibly can in their performance? And I've been delighted to find out more about people that work in my teams than probably I ever did before. You've seen people come in as robots and they're a unit there to produce particular outcomes rather than looking at the person as a whole and focusing on not just cost efficiencies and productivity, but health and wellbeing to improve productivity for the future. So I think there, a couple of the challenges. I guess, the other big organisational challenge is I think the move from efficiency cost drivers to resilience and sustainability for organisations and people. I think that's what we've got to focus on.

David Pembroke:

That's not a short list.

Glenys Beauchamp:

Actually, one of the other things though that the pandemic show and particularly when the pandemic started in the health portfolio is how soon that every portfolio was involved, every industry stakeholder was involved, every community was involved, but just the connectedness of all of our work. And so that's why it's probably not a short list, but that's probably the underlying theme coming out of the pandemic for all of us.

Kerri Hartland:

And it has exposed, isn't it? Some of those capabilities that we've sort of lost I think over time in the public sector. It is just an overtime thing where there's been sort of deep specialisation in areas. I know that Glenys, you were working really specifically around some of the value chain and issues. And we found that the public service had to go out to consultants and to industry and were finding that there was much more depth of knowledge and things that normally the public sector would have known more about. So I think that's exposed some of those issues, which then is an opportunity for the future, right?

Glenys Beauchamp:

It is and a willingness of industry players to work together to solve problems. I think when I was there post retirement, looking at the supply of PPE and finding out that most gowns and masks were from Wuhan, it's the absolute willingness of local companies and local organisations to work together to produce masks and gowns and the like and I think that was a terrific thing to happen, that you can make things happen.

David Pembroke:

But when there's not a crisis, how do you make it happen? How do you sustain it?

Glenys Beauchamp:

Yes.

David Pembroke:

How do you do that?

Glenys Beauchamp:

How do you sustain that?

David Pembroke:

Yeah.

Glenys Beauchamp:

I think it's around behaviours and expectations. And I think that's why you need to reset in the sense organisations, whilst organisations. And I think, David, you spoke about the foundations. I've got a very simple framing of those foundations around people, processes, systems, resources, governance and values. And if you get those lined up and those right, then I think you're in a good place to manage whatever's thrown at you. I think there'll be different emphasis around collaboration, so I think the collaboration work. And engaging rather than consulting is going to be a big change for organisations. Less hierarchy, more focused on project work and drawing in skills rather than people in particular roles. I think there's absolutely going to be a skills-based approach rather than a roles-based approach as well. So there are just a couple of examples.

David Pembroke:

So Kerri, from your point of view, do you agree with Glenys that there will be a greater openness, a greater ability to engage to bring in some of the thinking, the experience, the access to global knowledge perhaps that's not available immediately inside the public service?

Kerri Hartland:

Yeah. I mean, I certainly think there's the opportunity. It's up to leaders then to take that opportunity and run with it. So I think there's the ability now to rethink, to be able to reset and reform. So there's lots of lessons to be learned. I think you're right, David, that sustaining that is going to be the really tricky part of it. But in the end, that's going to be up to leaders and to be able to drive that down through organisations. So many times, I'm sure, Glenys, you found the same thing, that you can't just do it from the top, you actually have to have that values piece and an understanding right throughout the organisation. Otherwise, you find that what you think is happening at the top of the organisation is not happening sort of lower down. So I think that's a lot around your communication strategies, which are really fundamental and giving people context of what they're there to achieve and really focusing sort of on the outcomes.

Kerri Hartland:

So I think coming off the back of and it's hard to say whether you're coming off the back of the pandemic, right? So it's ongoing, and I think that's the other thing people need to be aware. There's likely to be other strains, right? And there's likely to be that resilience factor that's needed for ever more. So Glenys' point about continuing to plan for change and for upheaval, that uncertainty is going to be really important. I think part of the, particularly for leaders, sort of part of their capabilities that they're going to need, their skillset.

Kerri Hartland:

So I think though, one of the things that has happened during this pandemic, everyone had to focus obviously on getting stuff through and doing the things that have to be done. That's probably to the detriment of reform across the public sector. And we know, certainly Glenys and I from different pieces of work that we've been doing, that leaders across the public sector have said, we are two, three years behind in terms of where we wanted to be, in terms of reforming systems, in terms of building capability. So I think now's the time. And there will be, at the commonwealth level, we'll have a caretaker period where people will need time to get some rest, but they will also need time to sort of rethink about what those reform agendas are and how you're going to actually put new things on the table and do that reform in your own organisations to have greater performance.

David Pembroke:

Glenys, it was the first point that you raised and Kerri's gone to it again, this notion of planning for uncertainty. How do you do that when you're working in the federal public service, particularly at senior levels, it is just so busy. There is so much to do. How do you carve out the time and the mindset and the space to be able to help your organisation to manage and be better prepared for that uncertainty that you talk about?

Glenys Beauchamp:

It's great question. And I think Kerri and I have been exposed to some commentary around what some big multinationals are doing, and they've got dedicated teams that report to the chief executive that do have scenario planning units. But I don't think the Public Service holds all the answers. And I think that's what the pandemic's shown.

Glenys Beauchamp:

So if we are open to working with industry and stakeholders in problem solving and taking them on the journey, then I think we're halfway there where I think in the past, we've been very good at developing policy papers and cabinet submissions and the like. I think we've actually got to get out there and go through some of those scenarios. And we have had, when I was in health, we did have WHO scenarios around pandemics, influenza outbreaks and the like, but it's very much focused on health and what health was going to do, whereas I think now we've got to look at across government, across industry and say, what if? And Kerri mentioned supply chains and the like, so supply chains were being managed just in time. Now, supply chains are being managed just in case.

Glenys Beauchamp:

And so I think the private sector is starting to do that. It's interesting, I think in the public sector, if we managed in the past for contingency, it was always seen as fat, bloated, but I think now we do have to plan for that contingency and surge capacity and needing new skills in very different ways. So I think we should be doing more scenario planning. And particularly with governments and with stakeholders. That's hard to do because as you say, takes you off some of the transactional day to day things you're doing and focusing absolutely on the future, but problem solving and critical thinking and Kerri mentioned some of the



capabilities that have started to diminish in the public sector over time, not just through the pandemic, is that critical thinking, policy analysis, problem solving with others, even defining what the problem is, is part of the challenge. So I think there's people that want to make things happen and I think we've got to just use that momentum if we can, to change the way that business is done in government.

Kerri Hartland:

I think there's an opportunity there. And I was involved in a discussion the other day with a large department that was looking at how they ... With the recognition that there's so much small business in this country, 90 plus percent of our businesses are a small businesses. How do you better, I guess, corral the sort of the ability of small businesses in terms of crisis, for example and that you had that ongoing relationship with them to be able to use them in a crisis, but also in terms of supply chain work, knowing what they can provide? And I think that's a hard one when you're dealing with lots of sole traders, for example and micro-businesses. But I'm really encouraged that those discussions are now starting to happen. So I think it does give us that opportunity to forge different stakeholder relationships. And because we're actually now been doing a lot of work remotely, there's some other mechanisms that we can use to do that, but communication's the key.

Glenys Beauchamp:

The other big thing that's brought to the floor is, how you manage risk and what your risk appetite is? And I think many of us have been in organisations, I hope Kerri agrees, where you've gone through a tick and flick process in terms of some ISO template to manage risk. And yet now, it's real. And so I think risk management, risk appetite and what we do about it, what are our risk mitigation strategies are real for people now at all levels. And so I think that's the other part of how to do and plan for uncertainty.

David Pembroke:

And certainly one of the key mitigation tactics, practices, processes that you can deploy to manage risk is effective communication. And Kerri just mentioned it and you mentioned it in an earlier answer. Do you believe that the pandemic has heightened the need for more effective communication? Do you have to communicate more now than you used to before? Previously, you did mention about your people and your productivity and dispersed workforces, which would tend to suggest that you do think that, but do you have to do more now than you used to have to do?

Glenys Beauchamp:

Well, from my point of view, I think you probably do. I think one of the big challenges to create a positive culture in an organisation is to instil that sense of belonging for every staff member. And how do you do that? The best way is to communicate and engage with them so they don't feel so isolated. I think now that remote working is here to stay, and it doesn't matter where from, I think most people talk about from home, but we're probably talking about from around the world, around Australia, how do you keep them engaged? I think digital technology, and the way we do business is a great way to do that as well. But I think for leaders, understanding what makes people tick and how best to engage, you really do need to focus on the person.

Glenys Beauchamp:

And from an organisational sense is, what's the impact of remote working and engaging individual on teams and team productivity? In the past, we used to have arguments about who was going part-time, who was full-time, who was going to cover this, particularly when there were crises happening. I think now there needs to be much more discipline and a deliberative process around how teams engage and teams work and the best ideas come out of engaging around the table, tossing around ideas and having brainstorming sessions. You can still do that with technology, but we shouldn't lose sight of the team productivity as well.

David Pembroke:

And Kerri for you, the communications?

Kerri Hartland:

Yeah. So I would argue that it should have always been there. It should have always been done well and you can never communicate enough. I use that context word. I think that's really important as well. So if you've got people sort of working in a vacuum that they don't know what it is that they're trying to produce, but you open up a bit more, you give them a context of why it's important and what they're doing and why it's important that you also talk to that department over there and those people over there, that you'll get a better product. I think the pandemic has just sort of has heightened that, but it should have always been sort of up front and centre.

Kerri Hartland:

I do agree. The remote side of it again, I've just been around a number of the cities where I've been talking to stakeholders with a particular issue that I've been dealing with and they were just so pleased to be able to have face to face meetings. And so I got record turn ups, turnouts of people. So that was fantastic, but they had also commented that they'd never had that sort of interaction with the public sector before and it shouldn't have been up to me to be having that for the sort of first time. So that didn't matter whether there was a pandemic or not. The fact that they were really eager to have it was a build up from the pandemic, but they'd ever felt that they'd had interaction in the way that they should have with the public sector.

Kerri Hartland:

So I think there is a golden opportunity to use a different media in different ways now, whether it's ... I'm always with the view that you can't forge a deep relationship through remotely, that you to do a lot more of that sort of face to face, but then once you've actually developed that, then it's a lot easier just to pick up the phone or have a teams meeting or whatever. So I think I would be worried that we sacrifice all face to face stakeholder engagement. And there is a risk of that I think, where governments might go, "Okay, you've done without your travel budgets. You don't need that." Whereas, I think that those, you know, all forms of communication are going to be important again. But I do think it gives us a number of other avenues in which ... It's opened up opportunities for better communication.

Glenys Beauchamp:

I was just going to say, I think leaders probably have been more visible now. Kerri is absolutely right. Communications in large departments, there's always been a trickle down misinformation, interpretation of what leaders have said, but now I think there's an opportunity for leaders to talk direct to all employees, which is ...

David Pembroke:

Regularly.

Glenys Beauchamp:

Regularly. And I think Kerri's right, yeah, always it was, "Oh, you're not telling us this. You're not telling us that." There was a thirst for communication almost on a daily basis. I'm sure it would've been for some during the pandemic. I mean, I think we had a number, because of federation, a number of mixed messages going out there to the citizens and the like and who's the authoritative source of information? And that's where I think leaders can be much more visible. But I agree, I mean, I like working around the table and seeing people face to face.

Kerri Hartland:

And I have heard some teams that have said that they've had more interaction with their supervisors and managers than they'd ever had before. I think that was being drilled into everyone, well, you have to keep people informed. So that's a good thing, but it's also become quite tiring for people. I think we do have to recognise that people are really quite tired over the past couple of years. And yeah, we just have to factor those mental health issues into our workers, leaders as well.

David Pembroke:

So Glenys, what's your view when you hear that story, the anecdote that Kerri just told us about the public response, the craving for engagement with government and government went and did it and not only were they pleased through the pandemic that they needed that information, but it was a feeling that they'd never had before or that they've never felt like they'd been spoken to before? Is it a cultural thing? Is it a mindset thing? Does the Public Service think that they're doing it and they're actually not doing it? What's the problem and how can we solve it as we strive to improve that or achieve high performance in the public sector?

Glenys Beauchamp:

In terms of communication with citizens?

David Pembroke:

Well, yeah, with citizens. Yeah, exactly.

Glenys Beauchamp:

I think it is a big issue for the Public Service generally and sometimes that comes from the authorising environment. So sometimes Ministers in government will see it's their responsibility to convey messages to the public. I just want you to implement and make sure nothing goes wrong, public servants and I'll talk to the constituents. Whereas, I think now I think government obviously, has been using chief health officers and medical people, army people. We've heard from emergency department specialists that are getting out there, talking to the public.

Glenys Beauchamp:

So I think now the authorising environment and the acceptance of public servants and public servants with trust, talking more directly to constituents and citizens, I think it's a good thing. Not to raise profile of public servants, but to make sure that there's an authority of source of information and information you can trust. And we've all seen the misinformation coming around from very high levels too, within our elected politicians about vaccines and the like. So where do people go to get information? And I think public servants should be trusted to provide that impartial authoritative source of information that people are craving for.

David Pembroke:

Kerri, that's an interesting point that Glenys raises, isn't it? Around in the age of misinformation and disinformation, the Public Service really does have to be the source of truth has to be able to represent the facts, the evidence. How can they better do that? How can they achieve that? How can the public sector play a better role in being able to communicate that credibility?

Kerri Hartland:

I think it can be done on a micro level and sort of macro level. So I think at the micro level, it is about understanding, getting back to sort of the knowing where your risk appetite is and actually working that out



with your elected official. So working that out with ministers about where your parameters are. It's really important. So that then you can actually instil that in your staff as well, because I think there is, where I see where there are organisations that are very risk averse, they're increasingly then turning to people like us to go, "Okay, well, we need a review done and we want something done out there." Because they're a little bit worried about how far to go. And so we can go in there and we can have a very upfront discussion and then it's not going to come back on them.

Kerri Hartland:

So I think it can be done at that micro level, through more discussions. I'd have to say, I think a lot more listening with stakeholders. I don't think there's nearly enough of that, that happens. There is a lot of preaching that can be done about what can't be done as distinct from just listening to hear what the issues are from a whole variety of stakeholders. I think at the broader level, I mean, I think it does depend a bit on the government's appetite to allow the experts to sort of speak as well. And then I think it's about the line that is there.

Kerri Hartland:

So again, I think it comes back to those discussions with government around the role that the public servant is playing in terms of providing information and the factual piece versus the politics and being clear about not stepping over that line. I think those conversations really important. We're coming up to that election, as we've spoken about, being able to do that almost on day one with new ministers is important for leaders to be able to have those discussions about the roles that public servants are playing, their expectations in terms of that communication.

David Pembroke:

Has COVID changed the expectations, do you believe, between ministerial officers and the senior levels of the Public Service?

Kerri Hartland:

I think in line with actually what Glenys has said, I think it's opened up those opportunities some more. So I think there is a bit more willingness from ministers to see where there's expertise that can be leant on and in the end, I think that's really helpful for ministers. So ministers don't have to rely on everything in their heads about every bit of information and that they can turn to the experts to be able to provide that context and that information. I think that's open and opportunity. I think though there's also a risk and there's always that risk, because if a minister doesn't like what the expert has said, then that might crawl up for the next time. But I think there are conversations that have to happened between...

David Pembroke:

In your view, Glenys, do you think there's been a shift?

Glenys Beauchamp:

I think there has and I think it's not just the pandemic. It's probably the floods and bush fires that started at the start of 2020. And what were people craving is someone out there from government. They didn't care whether it was an elected politician or someone from the Public Service. Look at us, look what's happening on the ground. And we should be doing that anyway, in terms of our normal business, whether it's aged care, health, how someone goes through the cancer journey and the like is we to understand what clients and customers and citizens are going through so we can better tailor our advice and certainly our services to meet their needs.

Glenys Beauchamp:

So I think it's been a whole number of things. It has exposed, I think a need for public servants to engage. And Kerri spoke about micro level. I think engaging and involving industry and citizens in co-design, which sounds like a buzzword, but problem solving again, should be a normal part of the way we operate. And that will instil trust, I think in the future, rather than ... Particularly here in Canberra at the federal level. We're seen as sitting in isolation in terms of what's actually happening on the ground.

David Pembroke:

Interesting. An earlier answer that you gave was really around that problem solving and saying that it was necessary even inside the bigger departments for everyone to work together. You know, one defence, one health, one APS. But even to take that further, to solve the problems by bringing everybody else together.

Glenys Beauchamp:

Yeah.

David Pembroke:

How does that become different in this post pandemic world? If there has been that flick where there has been that movement towards that collaboration and cooperation, but again, how do we make that continue rather than just, we'll just go back to the way that we've always done it before and we'll just get back into our lanes and we'll stay in our lanes because that's where traditionally we've always existed.

Glenys Beauchamp:

I think there's a big risk of doing that. I think there's raised expectations from the people that we serve now in terms of not only just using digital in the way we do business, but quality of services, the quality of advice, getting involved in problem solving. So the pressures are coming from outside, they're coming from our own staff in terms of how we do business. So changing some of the business models within organisations is going to be pretty critical. I don't think there is going back.

Glenys Beauchamp:

The cost of government through digitization and the like are coming down, but there's raised expectations, heightened awareness of what governments can do that is going to increase pressure on services and the quality of services in the future. So I think we absolutely have to engage others in that problem solving. I know I'm probably sounding cliched by now, but I certainly learned the lesson through the health industry coordination group in terms of procuring PPE in March 2020, March, April, May. And it was a completely new business model, so much so that we had to get ACCC approval for industry to work together, competitors to work together. So they're changing their business models and we have to be in sync as well.

David Pembroke:

Kerri, to deliver on that promise, to deliver on that future goes to your point around capability and being able to do it. It's not as if you can just one day turn up at work and go, all of a sudden I've got all of these new, great skills. So it's a different way of thinking, it's a different mindset. How do high performing organisations go about building that within their organisations?

Kerri Hartland:

Yeah. Well, I think it's again, I know it sounds a bit cliché, but the key to high performance in organisations is your people. So got to have the right people, right skills and right place, right time. That's easy to say and

harder to do. I hear a terminology around the Public Service at the moment about the hunger games type approach to recruit, to finding staff as people are really looking for those key staff members and upping the ante in terms of sort of, in some cases, it will be over promoting people because you need them there. And so there's this bidding war that's happening. And so I think that's a bit of a risk as we know that the supply is not meeting the the demand.

Kerri Hartland:

So I think that organisations more than ever are going to need to go back to sort of what are the capabilities that they need. I'd love to be able to point to an organisation that does this well across the public sector. I think we all always have grappled with looking at what our future needs were in organisations and then doing the development of people in the way that we need to. I just think it's going to be a crucial aspect. I know there's a lot of work that has been going through the Public Service Commission in terms of the academies and in terms of looking at the structures, what's the word I'm looking for? The pay structures.

Glenys Beauchamp:

The hierarchy, levels.

Kerri Hartland:

Yeah, levels. I don't know where that's heading, but I think that, that's going to be really crucial. So I think looking at this in a sort of different way and really looking at what the needs are of organisations going forward and that collaboration, communication, I think that, that resilience piece is probably something we're going to see as a key sort of criteria more than ever before. And that ability to be strategically sort of looking ahead. So I think the key is finding the right people, getting the right people.

Kerri Hartland:

There's going to be that shortage, I think for some time to come. So I think that's going to mean that, that the graduate pool's going to be really, really critical and training up your graduate pool. I think this is the worst time possible to reduce that. And sometimes there's a tendency when budgets are tight to do that. I think that would be a real mistake. And then at the other end, I think it's really looking at that leadership capability in the organisations. So how do you get those leaders and how do you train those leaders that can step up in this continuous sort of process of change and uncertainty?

David Pembroke:

And Glenys, your advice in terms of ... It's the dreaded word, isn't it? Skills. Every organisation, public sector, private sector, every time you open up the financial review, there's another story about we don't have enough people and how do we solve the skills? Should we...

Glenys Beauchamp:

And that's why there's been a lot of outsourcing too. So there's been a whammy of a cap on staff on public servants, but also an increased demand in terms of skills and capability. I think Kerri's right, we do have to invest in capability. And what we've done in the past is invested in thinking about a particular role and invested skills and capability around a particular role. Whereas I think now, it's more that critical thinking, showing the initiative, being innovative. I mean, how do you judge that? Entrepreneurship is probably not a skill we would've been looking for many years ago in the public service, but I think entrepreneurship, taking the initiative, problem solving and obviously, the normal leadership skills, because that's how you influence and mobilise others to perform well too.

Glenys Beauchamp:

I think there's a great opportunity to break down the hierarchy. I think being leaders in organisations, information is sanitised by the time you get it as a leader. You do want to engage like ministers want to engage with people who know about the subject matter. So I think we'll see more of a mix of specialist expertise and knowledge as well as the generalists. Whereas, I think we were probably leaning towards, quite a few years ago, having many more generalists in the public sector. Whereas, I think there's going to be a real mix now.

David Pembroke:

But it's not something that you can turn around overnight, is it?

Glenys Beauchamp:

No, but you can work with research institutions. 40 universities, we've got, what are we doing in terms of secondments and partnerships with universities? We've got a great source of expertise there as well.

Kerri Hartland:

But I think you're right. I mean, there's not a short term fix to the capability uplift that's needed. I think it does take a lot of strategic planning. It has to be sort of front and centre across the public sector and look at it as a whole of what's needed. That collaborative piece I'd add to sort of your piece, that relationship building is just critical. And without that relationship building piece, you're not going to get that collaboration and sustain the aspects you were talking about earlier, David, about, how do you maintain that sort of task force feel in terms of what you're doing to the every day in the public sector.

David Pembroke:

Now, I do want to go back to probably the, if it's not the most important thing, it's pretty close to it, and that's people. You both expressed in earlier answers, just the importance of getting the people right. But managing people in these continuing challenges. Because before we turn the lights and cameras on here today, we're all the discussing COVID cases that we all knew about, that were back. What's your advice again, in these future high performing organisations, these dispersed, distributed workforces around the place? What do people need to do to get that bit right, to make sure that they can keep people connected, they can keep them motivated, they can keep them productive and they can keep them safe?

Kerri Hartland:

Well, put people front and centre. I think we have learned a lot through the pandemic about issues around mental health, that people can't be on all the time. And I think that humanity that's been brought through sort of remote working has actually been really helpful in that, the fact that you see people's kids and you see the cat climbing on the table and you know in some ways it's more intrusive and you've got to be a little careful of that because people are protective of their private life for good reason. But it has brought that sort of sense of, oh, actually they're real people and they've got other things going on in their life. And I think that's a really good thing and opportunity for leaders to sort of build on that.

Kerri Hartland:

But I do think it's a tough number of years for people and I do a lot of mentoring and coaching with people and they're really tired because they're actually leaders that are trying to sustain that high performance of individuals. So I think we have to learn about being a bit kind to each other and understanding that it has been a tough time, and seeing the signs from people that are actually not sort of coping and using the services sort of around us, which I know it all sounds a bit soft. But if you want high performance, then you actually have to take care of your people.

Glenys Beauchamp:

Yeah. And I think there's a bit of self responsibility too here.

Kerri Hartland:

Yeah, true.

Glenys Beauchamp:

Like WHS. I mean, everyone should be looking after their own physical and mental health and wellbeing. And I think there's been a misalignment of expectations in the past around performance and we haven't focused on, well, okay, what's going to make you be the best you possibly can? And I think the alignment now and I think there's more onus on leaders and supervisors to be very clear about those expectations and agree what can and can't be done with individuals and teams.

Glenys Beauchamp:

It's not being soft or sacrificing productivity because we all want high performance, we all want productivity, and how are we going to do that together? But I think that focus on physical as well as mental wellbeing is particularly important. I look at people who do suffer from anxiety and the like and people are going through stressful situation. So stress sometimes is a normal part of life. It's how we manage it. And are we as managers giving the strategies and tools for people to work through those crises as well? And I think that's where I think leaders have got to be very conscious of what productivity means and what duty of care we have to make that happen.

Kerri Hartland:

I think that word expectation is a really, really important piece. I know a few times in different organisations that a cohort of people who have been aspiring to next levels have thought that the organisation wanted one thing from them and you sit down and you work through and say, "Actually, no, this is what we need." It goes back to the skills piece you were asking about, "Here is the expectation we have of people at the EL2 level. This is what we expect you to do." And anytime I've done that, people have been surprised about what they thought that I wanted from them and what my expectation of them was. So I think aligning that is really important. And that goes through in terms of how they're working, goes through in terms of that relationship building, goes through to their expectations of not being at their desk or virtual desks 24/7.

Glenys Beauchamp:

Or even behavioural expectations, what behaviours you expect? What are the values? What's the culture you want to instil? And I think every employee needs to understand that.

Kerri Hartland:

Yeah.

David Pembroke:

Okay. A final question then. We've been talking about high performance organisations dealing with these dramatic, substantial changes that have taken place and are continuing. But if I was to offer you the optimism scale 1 to 10, in terms of where we sit at the moment, where would you land in terms of this bright future that you've described and how ready the APS and organisations inside the APS are ready to move to that nirvana, the enlightened future that you've described?

Kerri Hartland:

I mean, if that's sort of looking across as an amorphous sort of block here, and I think that it's, you know, it-

David Pembroke:

And it's not easy. Like all of this stuff, together, it's massively...

Kerri Hartland:

So I think there's an opportunity there and to be able to take all of the things that we've learned over the last couple of years. And so I'd be really positive about what that opportunity is there and sort of put it further at that, probably at sort of seven-ish though.

Kerri Hartland:

There you go. So we've learned a whole lot of things and we've got that opportunity. We've got a springboard because of a whole lot of things that we've learned and lessons learned. Whether people will actually take that and run with it, I think is a different story.

Glenys Beauchamp:

I think the mindsets there. Absolutely, you'd probably put it on the very positive side, but are all the tools and the processes and what I said about the fundamentals of managing organisations there and that's what's going to constrain the pace of change within organisations. So they may not have all the systems in place, they may not have all their performance agreements in place, they may not have redesigned their business models. So that's where I think I've come back to a seven in terms of implementing the mindset that I think is there from the leaders.

Kerri Hartland:

I think that capability issue is the big one.

Glenys Beauchamp:

Yeah.

Kerri Hartland:

That if that isn't sort of addressed and there's a reliance on sort of a non-existent sort of workers there, then I think that's a problem. So that's probably the thing that I would worry about most for the sector.

David Pembroke:

All right. We could go on. I have quite a few more questions that I could ask to Kerri Hartland and to Glenys Beauchamp, but I will stop it there. Thank you so much for coming along today to listen to us and thanks to Glenys and thanks to Kerri. I hope you've enjoyed today's discussion and we'll see you again sometime in the future.

David Pembroke:

So there you have it, my conversation with Kerri Hartland and Glenys Beauchamp and a big thanks to Proximity and the team at contentgroup for putting that webinar, which was now a podcast, together. A big thanks as always to our friends at IPAA and the Australian Public Service Commission for their ongoing support for Work with Purpose. It really does help us to raise the profile and improve the awareness and understanding of the important work of the people of the Australian Public Service.



David Pembroke:

A big thanks to the team at contentgroup for putting it all together. And they have been busy. They have also now launched another podcast to go along with GovComms and Work with Purpose. There is now the Gradcast, the third of the GovComms podcast network podcasts. And the Gradcast is, as it sounds, it is by Australian Public Service graduates for APS public service graduates. So by APS grads for APS grads. It's a fantastic, innovative, new program, which really helps to bring the perspective of grads to life and the topics and information that they are interested in. So if you know anyone who's a grad, please encourage them to their favourite podcast app, where they can download the episode. And please, if you do see the social media promotion, pass it on.

David Pembroke:

Thanks again to each and every one of you, our loyal audience. We'll be back at the same time in two weeks with another episode of Work with Purpose. But for the moment, it's bye for now.

Voiceover:

Work with Purpose is a production of contentgroup in partnership with the Institute of Public Administration Australia and with the support of the Australian Public Service Commission.