

## **APS Workforce - Performance based contracts, fixed-term (3yr x 3yr)/mandatory mobility at end of term**

The APS workforce of the future will need to be fluid. The current workforce is stagnant with some SES and APS staff remaining in the same departments or role for 20 years+. A lot of these positions are not roles requiring specialist skills and could be applied across other departments or agencies. In the digital age staff will need to be more mobile, remain current in new technologies and maintain both corporate and technical skillsets.

SES staff should be employed under fixed term performance based contracts. It is important that the Public Service leaders never settle for mediocrity and are held to highest standards of performance and results.

Terms could be 3 years x 3 years; or 3 years x 2 years; followed by mandatory mobility for non-specialist functions. The notion of ongoing employment as a 'given' should be abolished. The current APS is more of an institution built on tradition, where people just set-up house and attendance is the measure.

The APS employment model needs to be a major focus of future reform if the public service is to evolve and meet the challenges of the future. The old guard are cloning future leaders in their image when there is a need to introduce fresh new ideas, a mindset of continuous improvement and commercial acumen. The sheltered workshop that exists in some pockets of the service needs to be addressed. The APS cannot be considered a job for life if staff are not prepared to continually demonstrate their competitiveness, currency and relevance. The days of 'safe, secure job with excellent entitlements' must be earned and not taken for granted.

## **Attraction and retention of the best and brightest**

Whilst I am not advocating the reintroduction of the public service test, there is merit in introducing some form of minimum standard or aptitude requirement. This would be more directed towards 'direct' entry as opposed to existing on-boarding programs such as: graduate program, cadetships, traineeships, interns etc. There must be a minimum standard to avoid 'dead wood' or attracting personnel that do not fit the culture of a dynamic, flexible and innovative workforce.

There may be opportunity for pre-requisite 'entrance' public service development program that could be undertaken prior to applying for an APS position covering: structure and function of the APS, legislation, terminology, budget and finance, APS communication, security etc. It is amazing that some APS staff have little knowledge of the APS environment, government processes or the environment in which they operate. This approved program designed by the public sector could be offered through government TAFEs or Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) panels providers – and serve as a pre-requisite for employment.

Too much time is spent managing underperformance, jumping through politically correct hoops, only to have the underperforming staff member moved to another area to repeat the cycle. This has created a 'sheltered workshop' of staff who do not have the skills, knowledge or attitude to be a public servant. This must be addressed.

Recruitment processes need to be streamlined. The use of selection criteria needs to be phased out with more emphasis on behavioural-based interviews. Technology should be used more for initial applications i.e. video responses to a range of role-based questions and submit with a resume and covering letter. Whilst there may be some concerns around ageist or other discrimination occurring based on appearance or representational skills, one would hope a professional public servant would

conduct themselves professional and unbiased manner. A simple desktop audit of random selection processes could manage any such concerns.

Merit based selection is an absolute fallacy. No one believes this occurs with constant gripes across departments and agencies about: nepotism, favouritism, cronyism being rife. The conversation needs to shift to 'robust, valid and justifiable' appointments. 'Merit' is tarnished, old and frankly lacks any credibility. Recruitment and selection needs to go beyond 'looking' transparent – and being focussed on delivering the best people, skills and attitude for the role.

There needs to be a balance between recruitment process and what is realistic. Having to go through personality tests, assessment centres, criterion, interviews in one department; and then only having to complete a 1-page pitch in another department will impact on the candidates that apply for the role. There needs to be a universal approach to recruitment.

Also, a candidate's time and effort should be respected and acknowledged. It is not acceptable to not inform of a recruitment outcome, or have a candidate jump through endless process only to find their hours of effort writing applications, attending interviews and performing other competitive activities were wasted.

### **Effective performance management**

The current performance management system across the APS is flawed. In most cases it is a meaningless process that is not valued, taken seriously or linked to any relevant metrics.

There is also no national performance management database so that an APS employee records can be reviewed before any offer of employment is made. This could be as simple as linking the AGS number to a database record.

Performance management needs to be able to be measured against clear deliverables or results. The current system of mid-point unrated performance reviews, followed by end of cycle tick n flick processes with a vague ratings i.e. 'meets requirements' serves no purpose. Every role should have clearly defined, measurable KPIs that have been established from the top down i.e. Department, Group, Division, Branch, Section plans with KPIs of what success will look like.

Everyone has a story of where underperformance has not been managed effectively and where the problem (staffer) is just bounced around to another area because no one wants to manage the problem; deal with HR areas or end up in Fair Work Australia.

It has become all too hard to terminate employment without going through endless red-tape, mediation, re-training, counselling etc. – resulting in a drain on resources, personnel and tax payer's monies.

If performance reports were maintained on a central APS database before an offer of employment was made, it could alleviate some of the problem.

The Home Affairs Department has an Employment Suitability Check which has some very good aspects worth considering.

The APS also needs leaders who are capable of having difficult conversations – most do not and just move the problem around; or ignore the problem or give them a good referee to move them onto another department or agency for the cycle to start over again.

Absenteeism is also an issue for the current public service. The rise of more and more flexible work practices in a politically correct environment has led to a less stable workforce, inefficiencies and unproductive behaviour. Independent and departmental contractors could assist to alleviate this issue as there is a clear motivator to attend work and deliver on the agreed outcomes.

Independent contractors do not attract the overheads of ongoing staff and only get paid when they 'work' and 'deliver' on contract requirements. The APS save on insurances, workers compensation, payroll tax, sick leave, long service leave, public holiday pay, leave liabilities. A lot of independent contractors are former public servants and understand the APS landscape.

Bullying is unlawful and there should be zero tolerance for such behaviour. The rising statistics about bullying are alarming. In one department, 24% of staff experienced or witnessed workplace bullying in the previous 12mths. When a quarter of the workforce has experienced or witnessed bullying, it points to a toxic environment – which would reflect in efficiency, effectiveness and productivity outcomes.

### **Capability development**

The endless traditional leadership development programs and love-ins should be abolished. There is little evidence that two and three day residential leadership programs have any impact on performance or behaviour 'in the long-term'. In fact, the growing bungles in decision-making, project delays and failures across the APS in recent years would anecdotally allude to a deterioration in effective public service leadership. Furthermore, all departments have their own methodology and approach to leadership development – and not all staff undertake the training, making it less effective.

There also needs to be an onus on staff to maintain their own skills and not expect the department or agency to provide all development. It is unsustainable to provide employment for staff if they do not maintain their own skills, knowledge and competitiveness. People need to take personal accountability for their own development. The APS of the future cannot sustain an under skilled workforce or personnel who are not self-starters.

The State of the Service report illustrates a tendency for departments and agencies to promote from within. Whilst this might maintain corporate knowledge, it may not deliver the best results in leadership when there is no injection of new ideas, talent and expertise.

Also, having SES attend Executive Master Programs via organisations such as ANZSOG and then not applying any of the learnings; choosing to stick with old habits, is a waste of time and money and nothing more than a smoke-screen.

The future APS will need greater emphasis on: user-centred design, consultancy skills, business acumen, behavioural economics (insights), user experience (UX), exceptional communication and representational skills and diverse digital agility.

### **Remuneration and incentives**

To be sustainable in the future there needs to be greater alignment between private and public sector remuneration, superannuation, work level standards and incentives.

Superannuation should be the same rate for the public sector as it is for private sector. Personal leave should also be in line with private sector. There is absolutely no valid argument or reason for the public sector entitlements to be over and above private sector.

The entitlement mentality of annual pay rises that are not based on efficiency, productivity or a significant change in job role requirements should be abolished. Annual pay increases should be based on inflation, cost of living, GDP; unless the job role substantially changes; or productivity or efficiency targets are met. “The age of entitlement is gone”, coined by our politicians needs to be modelled by the APS. Some roles are remunerated well beyond the skills and knowledge of the occupant. The disparity in role levels and responsibilities and remuneration between departments/agencies in the ‘One APS’ is inexplicable.

There is no justification for 6%+ variances in superannuation between public and private sectors. Private sector organisations, Not for Profits, Charities etc. contribute just as much to the Australian economy so there should be parity in employment conditions, superannuation and remuneration across all sectors.

There are endless examples where the qualifications, certifications, skills and knowledge of current public service staff (at all levels) do not match the remuneration they are receiving – for the outputs being delivered.

The public service has a track record of promoting people above their level of incompetence and this leads to failure to implement effective public policy, incur budget blow-outs, lost time, and rework.

### **Blended workforce - Consultants, Contractors (Independent), Contracts (departmental i.e. non-ongoing)**

There needs to be acceptance of a blended workforce. The APS cannot be expected to have all the skillsets, all the time. There are good business reasons to engage independent or departmental contractors for short stints.

There is a need to have a blended workforce that considers: consultants, contractors, both independent and departmental i.e. non-ongoing.

Whilst there seems to be a palpable friction at engaging independent contractors to do APS work, the reality is that contractors are engaged based on ‘delivery’ and not attendance. With over 30 years’ experience in the public service (state and federal), I can attest that the public service can operate at a pedestrian pace and the blend of the workforce can benefit in many ways i.e. drive change, collaboration, capability development, fresh ideas, quality outcomes, healthy competitiveness and better results.

### **Privatisation and outsourcing**

There is definitely room for privatisation of services to achieve better outcomes. Payment services and call centre operations are just two examples that can be operated in a more efficient and effective manner if outsourced, resulting in quality outcomes for the consumer. To suggest only public servants can deliver quality public policy outcomes is farcical. The future of the public service is not to provide jobs for people who would otherwise be displaced. It is to deliver quality outcomes for all Australian’s in a professional and cost-effective manner. A job for life will be based on the continued performance and competitiveness of the staff member – it is not a given.

Outsourcing of tasks and embracing technology, online services and apps needs to become more mainstream and acceptable. In a recent example a government department used Fiverr to prepare a range of marketing materials. The cost, time and resource saving of this activity was thousands of dollars. The department also used the service to create a webpage design and template. This also yielded efficiencies and cost-savings without compromising security or confidentiality.

The public service flexible work practices i.e. teleworking, work from home, flex, part-time, casual, compressed hours etc. has led to inefficiencies and an inability to predict deliverables due to an ever changing predictor of available effort. Whilst flexibility is very good for staff, morale and work-life balance it proves difficult to manage such a transient workforce and plan projects.

It is likely the future public service workforce will become more reliant upon contracting services as it is more stable, predictable and there are less overheads i.e. leave, workers compensation, superannuation, long service, business insurances, payroll tax etc. There is a worldwide shift to an outsourced and contractor workforce.

### **Work, health and safety**

The current Comcare premiums across many departments and agencies I have worked are crippling and on the rise. The effort and infrastructure required for managing Return to Work programs has created a new industry within the APS, requiring substantial investment and infrastructure to maintain.

To manage the future sustainability of the APS a risk-based approach needs to be considered. This could include:

- Mandatory government medical assessments based on a risk approach i.e. previous medical history (including mental illness), accidents, incidence, job role, industry etc.
- Requirements for personal insurance to be taken out by the employee
- Increased outsourcing of services; or
- Engaging of independent contractors who are self-insured

### **Rationalisation of Departments and Agencies**

Departments and Agencies need to be consolidated into more 'functional' portfolios i.e. all science agencies merged into one portfolio; Veteran Affairs under Defence; Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) a Division under Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C). It is time to totally overhaul the structure and functions of the APS. This would reduce the cost of endless duplication of infrastructure.

Machinery of Government changes that seem to follow federal elections; or ministerial reshuffles need to cease. The government needs to show restraint and not continually place additional burdens and costs on the APS and taxpayers by changes of names or merging and separating of portfolios without any logical reason.

The duplication and red-tape needs to be addressed. The complex nature of doing business with government is ridiculous. It is almost impossible to talk with a person face-to-face; or email directly etc. and systems are not mature enough or intuitive enough to meet community expectations. There needs to be a shift in culture and public servants need to be accessible and come out from behind the bollards, emails and voicemail – and engage with the people they are serving.

Australia needs to improve its digital transition as a major priority. We are way behind the rest of the developed world.

## **Technology**

There needs to be a standardisation of government ICT platforms. Allowing Departments and Agencies to make strategic procurement decisions in isolation is not sustainable or cost effective. It certainly is not efficient to have countless vendors, all implementing high cost solutions that either do not meet requirements, or have unsustainable customisations.

More business needs to be moved to the Cloud and a whole of government roadmap for ICT infrastructure and digital needs to be established. The Digital Transformation Agency (DTA) has emerged as an island, as opposed to the central driving force leading the digital revolution.

It is time to consider non-traditional solutions – other than Microsoft. State government departments in NSW are using G-suite (Google Apps etc.), Open Office etc. to reduce operating costs and transition to an online, secure, cost effective business model with ROIs of 304% over 3 years.

Now is the time to move away from dedicated workstations and antiquated hardwired solutions. The APS workforce of the future needs to become less reliant upon physical infrastructure and equipment and transition to an online digital workforce. The APS needs to embrace and promote the various digital disruptors i.e. Ai, wearables, APIs, Apps, Gameology etc

The APS needs to make it easier for people to do business online in a safe and secure environment.

## **Policy reforms**

To allow consumers to self-service and access automated services online we need to reform government policy i.e. simply the tax and welfare systems. If our policies are like a Yellow Pages directory, and cannot be explained to an 8 year old – they are far too complex.

## **Culture**

The APS is a large, diverse and complex organisation. There needs to be a strong push to improve the culture of the APS.

Absenteeism and bullying are two areas which need to be addressed as it impacts on the entire workforce, costs and wellbeing of our staff. Staff surveys tell a sorry tale of absenteeism and level of bullying across the public sector.

Personal presentation is another area requiring attention. There is endless research about workplace attire, uniforms and professional image that aligns with business confidence and outcomes. The level of personal grooming has dropped over many years. There is a lack in professional image and pride which detracts from the overall perception of our stakeholders. Jeans and a t-shirt is not an acceptable work attire.

Work attire is not just for the employee, it is for our customers, stakeholders and clients.

It is hard sometimes to know if someone is on a day off, or actually coming to work, such is the drop in standard of personal grooming, presentation and appearance of staff. Casual Friday or mufti day now seems to be everyday.

Whilst I do not suggest a formal dress regulation – minimal standards of dress to ensure professionalism and WHS must be considered along with etiquette training for staff. You cannot expect to be considered worthy of the very generous remuneration, work conditions and entitlements if you look like a homeless person.

Punctuality has become harder to manage due to core hours and flexible start times all under the auspices of a flexible workplace. Workplace policies do not support managers and allow for exploitation.

Productivity needs to be measured. A recent time and motion study of productivity reported that less than three hours a day was productive and focussed on business deliverables. All of us are busy doing busy work, but maybe not the work that contributes to workplace outcomes. The flexibility and 'reasonable use' policies have blurred the lines of what is work related – and this does not take into consideration the multiple trips to the coffee shops, socialisation, birthday morning teas, hour-long meetings without agendas and purpose and the list goes on.

Thank you for considering my insights.