



# TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT SESSION

## 2021 FUTURE LEADERS SUMMIT

### LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS

**Dr Damian West (Guest)**

Deputy Director-General, Workforce Capability and Governance  
ACT Government

**Deanne Allan (Guest)**

Director, Counter Fraud Policy and Evidence  
Attorney-General's Department

**Megan Aponte-Payne (Guest)**

Industry and Expert Insights, Office of Supply Chain Resilience  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

**Brock Phyland (Facilitator)**

Hub Leader, Transform, Engage, Design  
Department of Veterans' Affairs

**Holly Noble (Introduction)**

Director, Business Transformation and Education  
Department of Finance  
IPAA ACT Future Leaders Committee Chair

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Enquiries should be directed to Caroline Walsh on 0413 139 427 or at [caroline.walsh@act.ipaa.org.au](mailto:caroline.walsh@act.ipaa.org.au)

HOLLY NOBLE:

We're now going to move into our final session for the day, our panel discussion on leadership at all levels. I'd like to hand over to my colleague on the Future Leaders Committee, Brock Phyland, from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Who's going to be our facilitator for this panel discussion. At the end of the discussion, Brock is going to hand over to Anthony Pronin from the National Indigenous Australians Agency, and also a Future Leaders Committee member. Who will provide some closing remarks on behalf of the \Committee. Thank you very much for your participation today. Please remember to stay engaged as part of the Alumni Network, and get in contact if you're interested in joining the Future Leaders Committee.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Well, thank you very much, Holly, for the introduction. As Holly said, my name is Brock Phyland. And I'm the co-designed hub leader over the Department of Veteran's Affairs. And I'm also a member of the IPAAC Future Leaders Committee. And it is my pleasure to facilitate the final panel discussion today.

Now, I do encourage all audience members to please ask questions in the chat stream. We'll try and get to as many of those as the timing that we have left for today will allow. If you do love a particular comment or a question, please give it a thumbs up. And that'll help me prioritize, because I know you're all going to bombard me with a lot of different questions. But on the panel today, let me introduce Dr Damian West. Dr Damian West is the Deputy Director General, Whole of Government Workforce Capability and Governance, and Workplace Safety Industrial Relations, CMTE. In his current role as Deputy Director General, he's responsible for leading and driving whole of government strategy to build and enhance the workforce capability of the ACTPS. Positioning the service to effectively maximize new opportunities as they arise, responding to changing priorities and delivering high quality outcomes into the future. I can see Damian's connecting now. So welcome to Damian. We also have Deanne Allan who leads the Evidence and Policy Team in the Commonwealth Fraud Prevention Centre. This team is focused on influencing a shift in how Australian government entities consider and prevent fraud by providing a strong evidence base and narrative. In her spare time, Dee is also the deputy chair of IPAA, ACT's future leaders committee. Great to have Dee again, I'm seeing Dee's also connecting, hopefully that's going to come through.

And our final panel member is Megan Aponte-Payne, who is an international trade specialist who currently works on ensuring Australia has access to critical goods, such as medicines and PPE in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. She's previously worked at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and at Austrade. Megan is a mentor, coach, team leader, and believes strongly in evidence based approaches to organizational leadership. Now, I can't see anyone's faces at the moment.

I'm hoping it's an issue on my end, but I can see that Dee, Megan and Damian have got the connecting boxes there. I'm hoping they're here. Can one of you come off mute and let me know that you are in fact here.

DAMIAN WEST: We are here, Brock and I can see the other two clearly.

BROCK PHYLAND: Okay. Well, you know what, it's my end. I won't be able to see you very well, but I can definitely hear you so fantastic to have you here, Damian. The first question actually goes to the whole panel. And so we'll kick off with you, Damian, because I know I can hear you. Can you briefly share with us your career path to date and what your leadership journey has been?

DAMIAN WEST: Career path to date? Yes. In two minutes or less. So I joined the federal government approximately about 20 years ago. And through that time I've progressed through a range of departments and agencies. I've worked in service delivery. I've spent time in regulators. I've spent time in Prime Minister and Cabinet. I've done secondments to state government to work in Premier and Cabinet down in Victoria and the Public Service, the state version of their Victorian Public Service Commission down there and then other big leadership jobs back in the APS. And then finally into effect the Deputy Secretary role in the ACT.

So a wide range of opportunities. And I think my motto through my career has really been, not so much planned, but very much take opportunities as they come. They will come your way. If you do a good job, people will recognise that and things will be put in front of you and you have to be courageous and say yes, more than you say no, would be my advice. And the rest of it largely takes care of itself. Thanks Brock I'll hand over to Megan.

MEGAN APONTYE-PAYNE: Of course. So similarly to what Damian was saying in that your career is often not predictable. I came to Canberra in 2014, wanting to be a diplomat. I joined the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinets' Graduate Program. And before then I came from Adelaide and I'd worked as an industrial organiser, and I'd done languages and international studies at university, but I kind of fell into trade. So I worked on the G20 Summit when Australia hosted it in 2014. And then again on the ASEAN Summit that we hosted in 2018 and are now doing post-graduate studies in economics. So similarly to Damian, just said yes, when opportunities presented themselves. And I think it's paid off. In terms of my interest in leadership, I've always been one of those people really interested in the glue that keeps organisations together.

And so I've always been involved in a lot of extracurricular activities within the workplace where I've worked, because I think that those activities are really useful for understanding what motivates people, helping them to feel valued, helping to encourage them to bring their whole selves to the job as

well. And so, I would encourage you to get involved. I've done things like social club, consultative committee, a graduate bargaining representative on EBA negotiations, the cold group. And it's actually a lot of those experiences where I think I've had my leadership experience before I moved into leadership roles.

BROCK PHYLAND: Fantastic. And it's great to have you here, Megan. I can hear you. I can see you. It sounds like you've had a wealth of experience already and coming from what Damian said, just saying yes to things like this panel as well today. Now Dee I can see you, hopefully we're going to be able to hear you. Can you tell us a little bit about your career path to date, your leadership journey?

DEANNE ALLAN: Can you hear me?

BROCK PHYLAND: Sure can.

DEANNE ALLAN: Yay. Hello everybody. So I started in cotton biotechnology. I've got a background in science. So I joined after uni went to the CSIRO and I stuck it out for about a year, but it wasn't quite what I wanted in a role. And I applied for a position at the Australian National Audit Office because performance audit sounded like a giant lab report, but about government and I wasn't wrong, auditing basically follows the scientific method. And there's a lot of ex scientists at ANAO.

I was there for seven and a half years as a performance auditor. During which time I went from APS4 to EL1. And about two years ago, I moved to the Attorney-General's Department and joined the wonderful Commonwealth Fraud Prevention Centre. I've been in the director position there since March this year and just loving life. I would say that my career so far has had some high highs and some low lows, but all of them made me who I am today. I would say, you might look at me now and see a fairly confident soul, but it has taken a bit of work to get to that point. And all I can say is that it was definitely worth it. My mantra in going into things is be scared and do it anyway.

BROCK PHYLAND: I absolutely love that Dee in terms of a philosophy I think, I don't get nervous before a presentation, I get excited, or at least that's what I tell myself. And then things all seem to turn out a little bit better. All right. Fantastic. We've got the panel here. Everyone's working, it's all working. It's all going to be fantastic. Now, first question to Damian and I do want to reiterate to our audience members, hopefully you can see and hear everyone as well. Please start posting some questions in the chat stream, but the first question I've got for you, Damian, is how do you empower future leaders in your organization?

DAMIAN WEST:

Yeah, thanks Brock. And a really good question. And I think this is probably a couple elements to that. So one is about understanding themselves and understanding what someone's seeking to do with their career and where they are at that point in time. So often I hear from a lot of graduates and people who have just joined the service, be it the Federal Government or State Government. And they've got a vision of their career trajectory and whatnot. And usually in their first few years and months, they experience different things. And that starts to shape which way they want to go. And the sort of things that they like doing, and you learn the sorts of things you dislike doing. And I think that's their benefit of particularly early on in career being really quite mobile and agile, because the further you go up in your career and once you get to director and SES level and Deputy Secretary level, you don't have as much flexibility as you have early on.

You actually much more mobile in the beginning of your career. And I encourage people to take those opportunities and move people and to jump around and to listen and learn and participate and be very courageous early on and hold that courage through your career because I think it's really important that the further you go through, things don't necessarily get easier, they probably get harder, but you have to lean into problems. You have to acknowledge, get it wrong. Nobody is perfect. Everyone has made mistakes. You learn from them, you dust yourself off and go forward. So for me, I encourage people and future leaders to really, to experiment, to get out of their comfort zone, to offer themselves up and to do things. But I also finish with and to have balance.

So it's really important I think that you retain the things that really energize you outside of the workplace. So it could be social endeavors, sporting endeavors, other extra curriculum type work, and they are absolutely central to who you are. And it's that balance and holding onto that balance, actually make you a leader and help you through your journey. And I think, you need to do a lot of that and that gives you a real sense of strength. And so, I think when I was coming up through the different hierarchy, I was doing my PhD. I kept playing football and I worked really hard in my job. And that sort of gave me different parts of my life that you could draw on.

As Dee mentioned, when you're having a down day at work, you could have a good day at uni or a good day on the sporting field. And that rounds you out. It also connects you to lots of different people and those connections are fantastic as you go through your career because people will pop up in your life, both socially and professionally at different times, and having more connections and a greater array of people in your professional circle is really, really powerful over time. Thanks Brock.

BROCK PHYLAND:

I love it. And I'm hearing a lot about being mobile, being agile, experimenting, saying yes to different things. And I think that's kind of resonating through in the chat stream too. People are saying things like, be nervous, do it anyway, are the life goals, but getting comfortable, being uncomfortable. I love that, but then also you've taken it around to but it still is all around balance. And we've heard a little bit around those rejuvenating activities like self-care and making sure that we're an entire person. Our career is one part of that whole of our wellbeing. Thank you to Damian. I've got a question now for Dee. Dee what does leadership at all levels look like to you?

DEANNE ALLAN:

Just checking my sound is still okay. Fabulous. So look leadership at all levels, it is a line that has been used a lot, and I personally found it a little hard to get a great answer to it. And mine, isn't a perfect answer, but this is my take regardless. You may have heard this quote, "The standard you walk past is the standard you accept." And while I think that that approach has merit, I'd love to add a new perspective using a new one liner and excuse the appalling grammar, the behavior you display is the culture you okay. And yes, I deliberately made that rhyme. This approach ensures that we take personal responsibility for not just calling up bad behavior or poor behavior in others, but also displaying integrity yourself. It also acknowledges the influence that your behavior has on others, especially those that are still developing in the workplace.

And this links so closely to what Paula and Lizzie were discussing earlier in this session. And I was nodding vehemently as they were presenting. I will always be a work in progress. I am shaped by what I've seen and heard and read. And if you accept this assertion, try applying it to the rest of the population and recognize that everyone else might also be on a path of continuous development. And I think this is particularly the case in a workplace. We're all taking cues from others to develop professionally and it's possible for the majority of your career no matter what level you're at, there might be someone taking cues from you, even if you don't realize it. And this could include how you're treating others, how you're making decisions, how you're communicating decisions and how you approach your work, even how you take a lunch break or not.

So take the responsibility to act the way you'd like others to act. And I think anyone can do this no matter what your rank. I also think it's about being vulnerable and open to sharing. If you want your team to share with you, share with them. So I had noted that there was a team member working for another director who was taking unplanned leave on a roughly monthly schedule. And she always looked like she was coming back earlier than she was ready to. And she was clearly not open to giving any details, but I could make an educated guess to what was going on. And the next time I caught up, I let her know that I wasn't feeling great. I was going to take the afternoon off because I was feeling crampy and nauseated and any woman, and hopefully most men know exactly what that is code for and nothing else happened in that conversation.

But a few weeks later, she called me up to talk about her endometriosis diagnosis and how she'd struggled for years, feeling unable to talk about it with her male director, and she'd even put off surgery because she didn't want to provide the details to ask for the time off. So I provided support and I worked up the conversation with her, and I shared a bit about my journey, to normalize how talking about how we feel about women in a workplace. And it's just a small example, but hopefully it shows that you can put in leadership at all levels into any approach by just having conversations and being open to what you're talking about.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Thank you so much for sharing a pretty powerful individual story there already D and I guess showing that anyone can display leadership and by being open, vulnerable, and authentic, as we've heard today, that can really lead to deeper connections and generally a better outcome for everyone, which is really fantastic. Thank you D. Megan, I can see you're not only answering questions here. You're answering questions in the chat stream. You're doing it all. Question for you, Megan, is what supports or structures are in place for you to feel empowered to lead?

MEGAN APONTYE-PAYNE:

Yeah, thanks for that Brock. And yeah, you can't take the multitasker out of me. I wanted to talk a bit about mentoring and coaching, which is a support structure I think that we can all draw on and I wanted to start with an anecdote. So when I was a graduate about halfway through the grad program, our HR manager came to us and said that she was creating a mentoring program for us. And that we'd all have director level, which is pretty impressive when you're an APS3 director level mentors, but there was a flaw on the plan. And I found out when I met with my designated mentor for the first time that the mentors had been selected on the most recent [inaudible] two editions to the department and they'd been voluntold. And my mentor basically said that to me, said that she was doing it, because she had to and said, "okay, so in six months time, we'll just tick a box.

"I'll just let HR know that we've done this." And that was the end of the mentoring session. And look, she was actually quite a nice person. And I think in another environment we might have got along, but it was a really unorganic way of finding a mentor. And we've been talking about making connections. Those connections have to be real. And so I would encourage all of you out there to think about the connections and those support networks you've actually already got. You're probably in some almost mentoring relationships without even realizing. It could be, if you are a grad or you have been a grad, you've got peers to work with, or perhaps you've identified someone who's on the same career trajectory to you, but is a few years ahead of you, for example, and you don't have to ever say to them, "could you be my mentor?"

Because if they're already providing you advice or you're having a catch up every couple of months, they've actually already accepted that role or they've perhaps seen something in you that reminds them of how you were. So they've already almost agreed to it. So it can be really organic. But I would say draw on those networks where you can, but I would also encourage you to pull the resources.

So where I am at PM&C the department pays for three professional coaching sessions each financial year. But if your department doesn't do that, remember you've always got the Employee Assistance Program. So yes, the EAP has got counselors, if you're going through a crisis or you've got bullying at work, but you can also just ask for someone who's a career counselor or a coach as well. And they're free. And I would really encourage you because often mentors can hold a bit of a mirror up to you. And one of the really important things about leadership is being really self-aware and being self-aware is often about understanding how others are perceiving you, because that's really the only way you can understand how you're coming across.

BROCK PHYLAND:

I love it. Thank you so much, Megan. And it's actually a really great reminder to seek out the resources that are out there. I think we're quite lucky in the public service that there's a multitude of different strings to pull. If we see something that we think could be good for our self improvement, but also just the importance of being self-aware of your relationships as well and how you're perceived is such an important part of it as well. A question to Damian. Damian, can you tell us about a time where your resilience and your leadership was really tested and how you managed that situation?

DAMIAN WEST:

Yeah. Thanks Brock. I'll just check, you can still hear me if you can nod. Yep.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Still hear you.



DAMIAN WEST:

Good, good, good. Just building quickly off both D's and Megan's point. I think, coaching and mentoring are great activities to engage with, but absolutely in effect, you're getting feedback all the time from your colleagues and peers. So when you're doing work every day, people actually are giving you feedback whether or not you know it, whether or not they know it or not, or you know it or not. So it doesn't have to be organized. It can be quite organic. And the other thing is just informally, absolutely talk to anybody and be clear about the sorts of things you want and see what perspective they give to you. And I've noticed in the chat box, there's questions around how to seek that out and how to position yourself for move.

So I think by being interested in what's around you and alert to what's around you, you almost go with your gut instincts and if you think, oh, wow, it'd be really interesting to go to work in PM&C for a period, because you'll get a different perspective of the world or into a policy role or into a delivery role or a regulatory role or work on fraud and other types of work in the center. There's those things that appeal to you, I would run with and seek it out and talk to people who are in those spaces. And lots of people transition through those agencies as well. So the more you are clear and the more you articulate, the better as well, but look in regards to the question, look I think there are different challenges at different times in your career.

And I remember, when I was an EL1 or the first time I was a director, what was the big shifts and the big pivot points. And, I was a director really young, and that was a really difficult thing for much more mature people or older people that I was working, who I was suddenly their team leader or their supervisor, and creating and establishing yourself in that space is really important. When you get to senior levels and certainly in the deputy secretary and even the band 1 level, often I've come into roles where I've been asked to lead a big change or a big shift, or there's been a performance issue, or the directorate or the divisional group is underperforming. So the importance there is around really setting your standards and your expectations and the expectations of others.

And the two things to that is in my mind has always been be very, very clear. So I'm very, very clear with the people that work with me and around me and support me what I expect and the standards I expect. And I'm very clear when they're not met. And I don't do that in a nasty way. I do that in just a sense of this is what I was expecting. And if it didn't come, what we can do to ensure that doesn't happen again, or if there are challenges that I'm aware of those. So I think communication is really really central to managing that. And when you are being resisted or where people are outright trying to undermine an agenda or a deliverable and let's face it, some environments are very difficult and policy and change are very difficult.

And that could be in sort of any context that we're working in. The clear thing is to certainly try to understand where other parties are coming from, but be really clear and always very honest with both yourself and your stakeholders about what you're trying to achieve. And I think that always sets you up, positions you really well. I think if you try, if you are anything but that, that that will eventually undermine your credibility and people won't know what you stand for. So I have all always through my career, been very clear to people about how I work and how I operate and what my expectations are, but also been really clear about what we're trying to achieve. And people will choose to work with you or come with you on that journey, or they won't.

And that's okay. But I think if you're working with people and you're positive and respectful, then that will play out really well. But there will be times in your career, particularly as you're transitioning through levels where those roles and relationships change. When you go from being a peer and colleague to a leader or a supervisor, that's a big shift and how you manage that's really important because you sometimes go from being a friend to being someone's supervisor. And that the first time you do that, it's a difficult thing because suddenly you have a different relationship, whether or not they, and you like that, or acknowledge that, but it is true.

And similarly, when you go up the next level, you might have a different set of relationship with a broader stakeholders. So for me, it was always about articulating that, setting the boundaries, being clear about expectations, really clear about expectations, and then following that up. So if something's not the way you want it, being clear, because like with anything in life, unless you communicate and over communicate, people won't know that something's not to the standard you want, or hasn't met your expectation. Thanks, Brock.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Brilliant. Such a fantastic answer there, Damian, and I'm hearing the strong message of communication is key in terms of setting those standards, being really clear and I guess setting the tone on what your expectations and the goals are, regardless of what that relationship is. And it's probably an issue that a lot of the cohort that are listening in, will be challenged by as we are on our own leadership journeys with all our peers as well in terms of working to, working for working with them as well. I'm going to go one more question to both D and Megan, and then we're going to look through the chat room, maybe try and grab one more as well. Can we just speak a little bit briefly D and Megan on where you've seen an egalitarian ideas' culture done really well in the workplace. We'll go D first, looks like she's off mute.

DEANNE ALLAN:

Thanks Brock. Sorry Megan. I beat you to it. Look, I think that it's about not just saying it, but also providing the mechanism for it to actually happen and holding people accountable to follow through on it. I think people need to feel safe before they can start providing ideas and flourishing in the workplace. I've been in teams that felt unsafe and where I felt that I didn't matter. And I assure you, there is no better way to destroy team morale. One of the things I love about working at Attorney-General's Department and especially in my division is that there's a huge emphasis on leadership responsibility for setting a great culture and people are held accountable to it. And a lot of it has to do with sharing where you can, I've heard the new open door policy in this remote environment is a shared calendar and outlook, and that is not hard to action.

And it just lets people know what you're doing when you're doing it, when you might be free for them to talk to. And it just really helps in this remote environment. I'll wrap up with another rhyme just because I really love them I'd love to throw work to live or live to work out the window. I think it's a bit judgmental. Look, I'm still work shopping the alternative, but how about something like, should we work to survive or work to thrive? And for me, obviously it's work to thrive. And certainly it gives me a bit more of a purpose for what I want in a workplace, but also how I want to be as a leader. I want my team to thrive in the workplace. And so that sets goals for me.

BROCK PHYLAND:

I love that D over to you, Megan.

MEGAN APONTYE-PAYNE:

Thanks I wish I was writing these down. I hope someone is, if you are put them in the chat box please. Building on what D said, I wanted to also share one example and it's about Martin Parkinson. So some of you might remember Martin. He was the head of Prime Minister and Cabinet a couple of years ago, which made him also the head of the Public Service. So essentially the highest ranking Public Service official that we have. And one of the ways that he developed this sense of egalitarian ideas' culture, which for me, is about sharing ideas at all level, ideas for change, innovation, et cetera, was around cult groups. So culturally and linguistically diverse groups. So it was fairly clear within our department. And I think it's a fairly common occurrence across the APS that we are not as culturally and linguistically diverse as the wider Australian community is and where we do have the numbers, they tend to be at the lower ranks.

There's quite a stark gap I think among SES in particular with people from a cult background and Martin recognized this, and I think did something really smart to empower the cult people within PM&C. So he ran a round table and pulled together 25 cult people within the department and went around and spoke to each one. And each person talked about their experience and barriers that they had experienced, often though around recruitment and promotion and interviewing because often some other cultures don't talk about what the individual did. They talk about the team, for example, and got each person to come up with ideas on how we could help to solve the issue. And every person in the room had a say. He then did what only he could do at the top of an organization, which was provide the imprimatur for change.

Firstly, by providing his approval, that there was a problem at end of solutions. He then created a dedicated HR area and an ill to who reported directly to him on it. He identified a cold leader within the organization to work with the cold staff members who could also see that SES as someone to aspire to be like and proof that you can do it. And he created this cultural ground swell. And part of that was connecting this group of 25 people in the room had shared an experience where they'd all been vulnerable with each other and to the top leadership within the organization and all felt listened to, respected and valued. And so the solutions that then were provided, they owned them and they felt empowered to actually do something about them. And it was a really positive example of someone from above almost bestowing the power and the legitimacy on people at the lower levels of the organization to make a change. And I think more examples of that would only lead to positive outcomes within the public service.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Brilliant, such a fantastic example of leadership from the very top there. Megan. I think we may be out of time here in a second. So I do want to just give a big loud round of applause and thank you to Damian, to D and to Megan for all of your insights and your experiences and sharing with the audience today. I wish we had all afternoon to discuss leadership at all levels. I'm sure we will. We'll get a coffee and we'll do it soon. For now though a big thank you for me and putting up with our technical issues that we've had in this last little piece. I'm now going to pass over to Anthony Pronin, a fellow IPAA ACT future leaders' committee member. Who's going to be giving our closing remarks. So over to Anthony. Thank you very much.

ANTHONY PRONIN:

Thanks Brock. Can you hear me? Okay, great. Thanks Brock for surveying that discussion. I think it's a great example of every day being an opportunity to lead conversations, model culture, be courageous and get involved in those diversity conversations too. I'd like to thank all the speakers today and Holly for facilitating. I think there was some great take aways and topics you can carry with you and hope you take the time to reflect on the sessions. A few of my immediate reactions is from the wellbeing one, it's really important to give yourself permission to take care of yourself, model a balanced life and support your peers. And also there's some really interesting thoughts about tuning into your own reactions and having to think about that. There's also some great ideas from the networking session, such as keeping your networks alive, being creative in terms of how you do it using digital platforms, cohorts, warm introductions, and things like that. And the digital platforms are great to break time zones or borders and reach across geographically.

So take the time to think about catching up with your networks and building that trust. And it really helps to creating a one APS approach to delivering the important services that our community relies on.

So with that being said, I encourage everyone to continue with the curiosity that brought you here today. Curiosity is a skill and something that will benefit you in the long run. So continue to learn and ask questions as much as you can. And before you leave today, you'll see a QR code on a holding slide. And if you scan this, it'll take you through to a survey. So let us know what you thought of the session and we'll use it to improve future IPAA sessions in the future. I'd also like to thank the IPAA sponsors for their ongoing support and with today's event, KPMG, Hays, Telstra, MinterEllison, Commonwealth Bank of Australia and Microsoft. I really enjoyed today and hope you did too. And we hope to see you in the next IPAA event. So thanks everybody. Bye.