

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

INTEGRITY SERIES

EPISODE #1 | UNDERSTANDING INTEGRITY

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RINA BRUINSMA: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the first session in our new Integrity podcast series, Understanding integrity. This is a four-part series, and it's brought to you by our partnership between the Institute of Public Administration Australia and the Australian Public Service Commission. My name is Rina Bruinsma, I'm the First Assistant Commissioner at the APSC, and thank you for joining me. I'd like to begin today's podcast by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are broadcasting from, the Ngunnawal people, and to pay my respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging and acknowledge the ongoing contribution that they make to the life of this beautiful country and region.

Today's topic is Understanding Integrity. And joining me is Peter Woolcott, the Australian Public Service Commissioner. As Commissioner, Peter has a specific role to play in leading integrity for the APS. And I know it's a topic that's of great importance to him. I'd also like to welcome Andrew Colvin. Andrew is a partner at Deloitte Australia, also formerly the National Bushfire Recovery coordinator and Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police. It's great to have you with us, Andrew. And last, but by no means least, Jaala Hinchcliffe, Integrity Commissioner, and head of the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity. Welcome, Jaala.

JAALA HINCHCLIFFE: Thank you.

RINA BRUINSMA: Andrew and Jaala are also members of our APS Academy faculty for the craft of integrity. We're going to start by hearing from the Australian Public Service Commissioner and Peter is going to highlight for us why integrity is important in the Australian Public Service? What having a pro-integrity culture actually means? And how he leads integrity in the APS? We're then going to open it up with a conversation with our panelists about the importance of integrity in the work of the APS and the craft of integrity. So welcome Peter, Andrew, and Jaala. I'm really looking forward to hearing about your thoughts and experiences. I might let Peter start first, I'm wondering, Peter, could you explain for us, what a pro-integrity culture looks like? Why is it important?

PETER WOOLCOTT: Okay. Look, thank you, Rina, and great to be here with Jaala and Andrew. So I think we actually need to start with emphasising that the Australian Public Service really has a privileged role in supporting the work of government and in delivering outcomes for all Australians. So ensuring a high level of trust, particularly with the Australian community is utterly critical in ensuring we continue to deliver quality outcomes and the integrity of APS employees, and

agencies and their capacity to deliver. I think it is central to building a high-performing and trusted public service. So integrity in the APS is the pursuit of high standards of professionalism, both in what we do, but I think it's critically important to also emphasise it's about how we do it as well. And the starting point for pro-integrity is through understanding what our integrity obligations are, but that is only the starting point.

Our own individual integrity sort of guides our professionalism. However, a pro-integrity culture provides assurances that all APS employees, and I mean all, that's irrespective of level and their agencies are accountable for their decisions and that consistently in the public interest. So that is sort of the embedding of integrity into an agency's culture, where it becomes a core consideration of all that it does. And in a practical sense, this includes everything from the sort of conduct of individual employees to how an agency approaches and how it works. So what are the building blocks for a pro-integrity culture? I think they can be framed in three silos. First, there's awareness of the obligations for working professionally. Second, there's the capability of APS employees to identify and work through ethical challenges and ensuring they can have or can develop the skills to address these integrity concerns.

And remember, integrity is a learnable skill. And I think it's very important to understand the higher you go up the leadership ladder, the more complex it can become. And this is where the role of the Academy becomes so important. And it's so good that people like Jaala and Andrew as part of the faculty of the Academy and helps us work through these issues. And then thirdly, there is accountability; that is, being accountable for decisions and actions at every level and has the systems for addressing concerns about employee's integrity or conduct appropriately and consistently. So I think a pro-integrity culture is really critically important in terms of strengthening integrity culture, which delivers many benefits to APS agencies and citizens. And if you think about them, what are the benefits for a pro-integrity culture? It's better decision-making, it's enhancing public trust in the APS, which is of critical importance, and it's also protecting against misconduct.

So, culture integrity requires a strong, ethical values-driven mindset at every level, but it's also exemplified by leaders as well as systems and frameworks that enable and encourage individuals to do the right thing.

RINA BRUINSMA: Thanks, Peter, I really liked that you highlighted that it's something that is important for all of us. It's not somebody else's job to maintain integrity, but it's a role that we all have to play. I think that's really important for our listeners to hear. Andrew, you've worked in some roles that demand utmost integrity, what does pro-integrity mean for you?

ANDREW COLVIN: Yeah. Thanks, Rina. And firstly, thanks to IPAA and APSC for the invitation to come along and share some of my thoughts and it is fantastic to be a part of the faculty with the Academy. What does it mean to me? I mean, I really pick up on something Peter just said before, which I think is so important. It's the 'how' is as often is always actually as important as the 'what' and for having come through a career in policing and then the Bushfire Recovery Agency and now stepping out into the private sector, the thread that runs through everything that we do is integrity and it might look different in different circumstances and the context of how that integrity plays out might be different, but integrity is at every step of the way. And I think that occasionally we can lose focus on the how because we're so focused on the what at the end of the day. And so I'm really backing what Peter said there about that; transparency, consistency, behavior all levels, all of this is about integrity and it's not just about institutional integrity. I mean, my strong focus in this area is it's around personal integrity. If you get your personal integrity right, you get your personal behaviors right, then the institutional integrity will flow or follow from that. So, focus on what you do and what you can control. And I think that will bring about strong culture and help your organisation.

RINA BRUINSMA: Thanks, Andrew. I guess many of us are attracted to work in the public service because we do want to actually serve the public. So integrity is something that is part of why we do what we do. Jaala, I'm really interested in your role as Integrity Commissioner. For you, why is integrity important?

JAALA HINCHCLIFFE: Thanks, Rina. And again, thank you for this opportunity to speak to people and this great initiative, what an exciting month September is as Integrity Month for the Australian Public Service. Integrity, I think is so important to all of the work that we do as public servants. It actually is the core of who we are. If we go back to our APS value of ethical, it talks about the fact that APS demonstrates leadership, is trustworthy, and acts with integrity in all that it does. So it's vital to who we are as public servants. We act with integrity in everything that we do. And one of the issues that I've been thinking about recently has been the issue about what do we do as public servants when we see that we've made a

mistake? This is what I think is one of the common integrity issues that we come across.

In my role, I see a whole lot of integrity issues that are really very, very serious issues that go to corruption. And often we can think if that's really what we mean when we're talking about integrity, but actually integrity is an issue for all of us. And if we only think about integrity in terms of some sort of criminality or in terms of corruption, then we're really missing the point. Integrity is how we act in our day-to-day work. And I think the biggest issue that we face as public servants is 'what do I do when I realise I've done something wrong'? 'What do I do when I realise I've made a mistake' and a pro-integrity culture is a culture that allows someone to be able to speak up and say, "Actually, I've made a mistake and here's how I'm going to fix it."

RINA BRUINSMA: Thanks, Jaala. And I guess that goes to the trust that Peter was talking about that we need to project externally. We also need to trust one another internally. And so being able to come to your supervisor and say, "I've made a mistake," builds that trust. Peter, coming back to you. I was really interested in your role in leading integrity for the APS. So what exactly does that mean? What does that look like for you?

PETER WOOLCOTT: Yeah. Thanks, Rina. I mean, as the Australian Public Service Commissioner, I'm responsible for promoting the APS values, the APS employment principles, and the code of conduct. And they're all set out in the Public Service Act of 1999. So I, along with other agency heads have a role as stewards of our agency's culture and across the APS more broadly. And so in this regard, I actually promote and raise awareness of integrity culture, and also have the responsibility of code of conduct enquiries in the unlikely event that an agency head himself or herself as has been accused of a breach of the code. But it's an agency head themselves who have the responsibility for managing these issues in their own particular agencies.

So I have a sort of overall oversight on the culture across the APS, including through the State of the Service Report. And in that regard, for example, when David Thodey and the Thodey Review the Australian Public Service talks about the need to keep working on institutional integrity, on the importance of managing integrity in the wider public service. A lot of those aspects will come to me to think through in terms of how do we do that and what is the best way of doing that.

So I'm also responsible for ensuring the standards and guidance material and making sure they're accessible for all APS employees and agency heads. And of course, enable the practical application of the values and employment principles and code of conduct. As I mentioned earlier, it's a learnable skill, integrity. And so in setting up the Australian Public Service Academy which we've done, it's all about building capacity and to introduce mandatory training at the foundational level. And we're working with that at the moment.

So the thing that Jaala and Andrew are going to work with the APSC and the Academy, is about how do we teach the more difficult elements or the more challenging elements of integrity in terms of practitioners and experts in this area. So that's more complex and more nuanced. And also very mindful of what I call institutional integrity, which is the integrity of the whole system. It's about our capacity to deliver because most Australians actually judge and trust the public service through their interaction with the public service, the fact that we say and deliver what we say we're going to do. And I think that is critical.

And so in a way, I see there are three levels of integrity: there's compliance - knowing what the wrong thing is to do; there's values on understanding - what is the right thing to do; and then there's institutional integrity - which is about that managing the stewardship of the whole system. And this will look different at different stages of a public servants' career. And as people progress through the ranks, they'll have greater personal responsibility for driving integrity culture at an institutional level. And so, as I say, everyone has a role, but that role becomes more challenging as you rise up the system.

RINA BRUINSMA: Thanks. Andrew and Jaala, any thoughts that you'd like to add to Peter's observations about his particular role?

JAALA HINCHCLIFFE: I will add one thing to that, which is that in the APS we are, I think we are in such an incredibly important position, but also a really lucky position because we are a service that is based on values and the APS values provide us with a really useful tool to understand the work that we do. And Peter is working as the steward of a lot of that in his role as Commissioner. And that's something that we should, as public servants, take hold of and be excited about and be enthused about the fact that we are part of a service that is a values-based service. And part of our value is that we have integrity, what a privilege to work in a service like that.

ANDREW COLVIN: Well said, Jaala, and what a privilege it is. And I think the question of that, how important is leadership? There is nothing that is more important than leadership in terms of setting that behavior, setting the standards, not just talking about integrity and the importance of it, but actually demonstrating in your actual words, your deeds, your behaviors, the importance of integrity. Now, someone like Peter as the APS Commissioner, has a lot of formal leadership in this role, but everyone in the APS has leadership responsibilities as well in their own context, in their own team, in the people that they work with each and every day. So we all have that opportunity to show leadership in our own way, to make sure that we are inculcating that good integrity culture into every environment that we have around us.

And as Peter has said, it will be different as you move through the APS career and you have different responsibilities and you might have more senior responsibilities, but it falls into all aspects of our roles. Leadership is so important if you look around you and you see people acting in a way that's contrary to your values or your ethics, then you start to question how important is integrity in this organisation? How important are values in the organisation or team that I'm working in? So leadership is the number one thing that I think creates an integrity culture - a positive integrity culture.

RINA BRUINSMA: Thanks, Andrew. I think what you touched on, I'd like to explore a bit further with all of you and that's the practicality. So how can I guess employees demonstrate integrity? What does it look like in practice? And Peter, perhaps you could reflect on, as you said, it comes from the Commission or through the whole service, regardless of level. What are your views about what integrity actually looks like on the ground?

PETER WOOLCOTT: Yeah. Thanks, Rina. Both Jaala and Andrew talked about leadership and the critical importance of leadership. And I think that's absolutely right, but even as an individual, by showing personal integrity, you're showing leadership to your colleagues around you. And I think that's also something we've, all three of us dwelt on to the importance of integrity at the individual level. And I think that's absolutely right as individual APS employee, we can all play a role in strengthening the integrity culture of where we work. And I understand that sometimes you're going to face situations that involve competing priorities, organisational and time pressures, managing expectations of stakeholders and other challenges. And this can pose challenges in working out the right actions to take. And I think the APS integrity framework really does support employees

who identify and manage these risks and to make the right decision and to work with integrity.

And this of course is all about helping maintain public trust in APS agencies and their employees. And if you look at what the APS integrity framework is, as I've mentioned, it's the values, it's the employment principles, and it's a code of conduct. And they really do establish, I think, a very high standard of professions and obligations on APS employees that you need to comply with. So it's important that you understand this framework, but it's much more than just a set of rules. It sort of underpins the philosophy that shapes our culture and our operating ethos, and also reflects very much public expectations for the conduct of public service. And it's about essentially good governance. So as public servants, we're so bound by the code of conduct, but the key integrity drivers are things really like the transparency, its honesty, its good process, and it's evidence-based decision-making. So it comes back to that sense of institutional integrity.

And that is all tied up for leadership at the senior level, but also at the personal level and as part of your agency. So just to tie all that up again, let me come back to what I call the sort of the bedrocks of all this, which is building an awareness across all levels of integrity culture, it's enhancing the capability, which I've talked about, and it's also about ensuring accountability. So there again, those three bedrocks, but they do come back to some pretty fundamental individual characteristics, which need to be nurtured. And I've got to say that I think we do a good job in the public service around integrity. You do read about issues, but they're not systematic.

I think there's a very strong standard of integrity in the public service and lots of checks and balances. And obviously, Andrew was very much part of that checks and balance, and Jaala is very much part of that checks and balance. And I'm involved with in an organised group called the Integrity Agencies Group, which brings together a whole range of agency heads who are deeply enmeshed in the integrity issues. And we toss a lot of ideas and thoughts around in that about how to keep vigilant. It's a process where you just need to keep moving, keep developing people in terms of how we handle integrity. And I've got to say I'm very proud of the way the APS actually manages these issues at the moment, but there's constant work.

RINA BRUINSMA: Thanks, Peter. Looking at the time we're coming to the time to wrap the conversation up, but I just thought I would hand back to Jaala and Andrew for some final thoughts and comments. So Jaala, would you like to go first and I guess, continue that theme about what practically does integrity look like and what you'd like to leave with listeners today?

JAALA HINCHCLIFFE: So I like to go back to what the definition of integrity is. The Macquarie dictionary talks about integrity as being honesty. So if we think about it in that way, then really integrity is about doing the right thing and how we can demonstrate integrity in our jobs every day is to do the right thing. And that can be really straightforward and simple, particularly at lower levels in the APS where it's about applying rules and understanding how they work, and that can become greyer as we move through our career, and we have to make some really difficult decisions. And one of the things that Andrew and I have been talking about in terms of the APS Academy is about the APS Academy being a space for people, not only to learn the rules, but also to have a space, to be able to work through a safe space, to talk about how you make those decisions, those really hard decisions in the grey areas and how you show your integrity in those decision-making processes

RINA BRUINSMA: Thanks. And over to you, Andrew.

ANDREW COLVIN: Yeah. Thanks, Rina. I guess when I reflect on integrity and I think about when I've seen mistakes made or problems developed, I always bring it back to small moments matter, small things matter, and most big integrity breaches can be traced back to small integrity breaches, or small moments where complacency set in and complacency is probably one of the biggest enemies of integrity. We would just get comfortable. We settle for the status quo. It's always been done that way. So I'll just do that as well. It's simpler for me just to do it that way. And that's understandable in time pressured environments and the APS works in a time-pressured environment where we have to deliver, but delivery doesn't come and shouldn't come at the cost of integrity. So I encourage people just to think about those small moments, the small things that you see, that you wonder, whether that conflicts with your own values set, whether you think it fits with the values of the organisation you're a part of, or the broader public service commission, but not everything has to be a combative approach.

There's plenty of people out there within the APS that you can talk through this. There's official organisations. There'll be people within your own department and your own agency that you can talk to, or along the way through your APS

career, you will collect people that you trust. They may not be in your team or in your agency. There'll be people that you've come across in your professional life. And these are the people you're going to talk to, to go and test your thinking of what happened to challenge the system, to ask questions, to be curious, it requires you to be courageous at times, but again, you don't get a second chance to preserve your integrity. So it's important to get it right.

I think the Integrity Month for APS is a wonderful thing. I'm excited to be a part of it with the APSC and with Jaala and the team, and the opportunity we have now to help lift the trade craft of the APS across a whole range of capabilities, but with integrity as a core of that, and seeing integrity as not a thing that you have to do, or that you might do at the end, or I've got to tick those boxes, but see it as a core capability. And I think you get a deal with most of the problems that will come along in any professional career in the right way.

RINA BRUINSMA: Thanks. How lucky we are to have three really experienced senior leaders across the APS and even our private sector now, sharing thoughts on integrity. And I really wanted to thank all of you for your time today. I guess for me personally, if I could summarise some of the things that I've heard and I'll take away with me, it's up to public servants and public service leaders to build awareness at all levels of what it means to work with integrity. And it's not one person's job. It's everyone's job. We've all got skin in the game. And I really appreciated, Peter, you were talking about, that we can learn and grow in this space, and it's important that we embrace lifelong learning. We can hone our skills, we can become knowledgeable. And when those moments arise that you were speaking of Andrew, we can draw on what we've learned to apply in those instances when we're working at pace.

The other thing I think I've heard is that we need to ensure the accountability for decisions and actions at every level. And we need to make sure that there are systems in place to address concerns. So it's important to have an environment of trust where you can put up your hand and say, "I need to talk to someone about this," or, "I have to raise some concerns about somebody's integrity or conduct" in an appropriate and consistent way.

So look, I really benefited from having a chat with you today. Thank you so much for your time. I think the examples that you've provided are really relatable to all of us, and I know that listeners will take away what they've heard, and we'll be able to think about this in their work going forward in the coming weeks. I would also like to thank you for everyone who's joined to listen.

Thanks for taking time out. I hope you got a lot out of today's session. Thank you again to all our panelists and goodbye for now.