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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP | SESSION TWO

Liz Cosson AM CSC, Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs
Dr Michele Bruniges AM, Secretary of the Department of Education and Training
Kerri Hartland, Secretary of the Department of Jobs and Small Business

DFAT DIPLOMATIC ACADEMY
BARTON, CANBERRA

Hala Batainah:

Last time we met, for those who might have been here last time, when we had the first Woman in Leadership event, we had one powerful woman about to lose her job and this week, we had another female leader lose hers. Now, both in a very public manner. Now, I realise the circumstances are different and not so new. We have had many senior female leaders lose their jobs, including one amazing Prime Minister. And men, of course, lose their jobs as well. It's not particular to females.

And we know that as more women come into leadership positions, we will have more women moving on in their roles and so forth. So, let's not make a big deal out of it. But I think we do need to make a big deal out of it. Not because of the circumstances that precipitated the outcomes in the case of [inaudible] and Ms Guthrie but in the manner in which it was done.

Now, some might say, the cynics in us, "Well, if women want to be in leadership roles, then women need to know how to play the game and women need to know how to just deal with it." But I say, "No. Leading the same old way is no longer working and I suspect many papers have been written about the fact whether it ever really worked." But no matter.

I think it is the time of change and both men and women need to recognise that new leadership characteristics are needed. But then that brings up some really interesting questions. Do women lead differently? Do women bring a different set of contemporary leadership skills that are much more needed in these transformational times?

In the 21st century, is there an opportunity for both women and men to lead differently? To learn from each other and perhaps bring a contemporary homo sapiens perspective to leadership. Now, I won't answer these questions because we have an amazing panel of leaders to share with us their experience and their perspective. I, for one, am looking forward to the conversation. Thank you everyone. I'd like to hand over to Daniel.

Daniel Sloper:

Thank you very much. I'd like to thank Hala for a very warm welcome and her comments and also, to Microsoft Australia, for IPAA. Before we proceed, like Hala, I'd like to acknowledge today the traditional owners of the land in which we're meeting, the [inaudible] people and pay my respect also to elders, past and present, and recognise Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander colleagues who are present today.

It's very exciting for me to be here, I'm speaking on behalf of the Secretary of our Department, Frances Adamson, as she wasn't able to join us today but as Chief People Officer, I also have a role in supporting our women leadership initiatives and I've seen some change throughout our department. But it's a change for all and the opportunities it provides to everyone in the department, there's still a

lot more we can learn. So, I'm also looking forward very much to listening to the observations and the experience of our speakers today.

And I'd like to recognise them now and acknowledge them. First, Kerry Hartland, Secretary Department of Jobs and Small Business, Dr Michele Bruniges, AM, Secretary Department of Education and Training and Liz Cosson, AM CSC, Secretary Department of Veteran Affairs. But I also want to welcome all the other colleagues here today, including agency heads, senior executives, guests, members of IPAA and anybody else who's joined us, including media colleagues.

Now let me tell you a little bit about each of our speakers. Kerri Hartland, as I mentioned, is the Secretary of the Department of Jobs and Small Business, a role that she commenced a year ago, in September 2017. Prior to this role, Kerri was Deputy Secretary Business Enabling Services at the Department of Finance. And she brings extensive experience at senior levels, having worked in eight different Commonwealth departments and agencies.

Michele Bruniges is the Secretary of the Australian Department of Education and Training. As you might know, the Department administers the Australian's government interests in quality early learning, schooling, higher education, international education and reach out to schools in training. Dr Bruniges has held this position since April in 2016 and prior to this she led the New South Wales Department of Education and held senior roles in the Australian government, ACT and New South Wales government.

Liz Cosson is the Secretary of the Department of Veteran Affairs, a role she commenced in May this year. As part of this role, Liz is also president of the Repatriation Commission and chair of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission. Prior to her appointment, Liz has also held a role as Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer DVA since 2016. Before that, she worked in the public service but also had 31 years of distinguished military service in the Australian army.

If you could please now join me. I'd like to welcome all of our speakers to the chairs up here for an informal discussion where they can make their observations.

Kerri Hartland:

Thanks Hala for the intro. I think, Hala, actually, deep down, she didn't know what I was going to say in these opening remarks but gave me a really nice segue because I did want to make just a few comments about the changing nature of leadership. The Department of Jobs and Small Business has a specific responsibility in terms of looking at the future of work and so I've been able to spend a lot of time in thinking about what that means in terms of the broader economy but also from a departmental point of view.

We know the world's really rapidly changing around us, we know that people are seeking greater mobility, they are looking at more flexibility and choice about the hours that they work. We know that the concept of routine work is changing rapidly, so we're going to see less routine work which means that there's going

to be a lot of pressure on to see good levels of education and high skillsets, which is where Michele comes in.

And at the same time, all that means is that there is a greater emphasis on a range of skills in that soft skills category so around relationship building, around creativity, being able to analyse, being able to understand data. So those skills are coming more and more to the fore. So, for me, that raises questions for all of us as leaders about our leadership style and what that means and how we are going to adapt ourselves as leaders.

We also need to understand what those trends are and how best to ensure flexibility in our workplaces to meet that demand. And it also means leadership, I think, in the terms of how our programmes and policies that we're doing are structured. So we know people are wanting to use apps a lot more and probably, if you're like my 17-year-old daughter, all the time, unfortunately.

But that means that we need to understand that customer base and how that customer base is changing. The second point I want to make then about this is that I've had the pleasure of sitting with a group of secretaries on a productivity roadmap initiative that's been run by the Department of Finance under Rosemary Huxtable. And a stream of that that I've been involved in, along and leading with Peter [Wolcott] has been looking at workforce and culture.

And I guess for us then it's looking at how that future world is looking and then what that means in terms of the public sector, specifically. So, many of the issues that I've just mentioned, and probably all of them are really resonating for us day in day out. So, for me, again, I want to make sure that from an organisational point of view, we're an exemplar of what's happening in the world more broadly. So, what does that mean in terms of flexibility? Am I modelling the right sorts of behaviours? Am I using technology in the way that my peers and all colleagues in the organisation expect?

And I think for a lot of us the answer is now. We're still locked into ... I was going to say a nine to five day, it's probably a lot longer than that. But we're being watched by particularly junior staff to sort of say, "Well, you've got all this great technology that's around and why aren't you utilising that?" And is this the right behaviour to model?

I'm really trying hard to ensure that wherever I go, I'm taking my laptop with me rather than paper. But you know, it's a big transition and so I am trying to model that, but we've got some way to go. But I think there is also then an imperative on us as leaders to really understand the data and the systems that we're dealing with, so we're not left behind which raises the point around the nature of learning and development is changing really rapidly as well. So, it's no good for us just to hit it off and got our degrees and then think that everything is fine. That continuous learning and lifelong learning comes into play and again, we need to be really looking at that as leaders in how we're actually applying that in our organisations.

The final comment I wanted to make was one of the areas I'm really passionate about has been around collaborative leadership and in the past year, so I've just celebrated my 12 months in this job, and I've had two major changes, both of which have actually not involved machinery of government changes where the government has put in place different arrangements for us to work.

The first of those was working with the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science and we shared the same group of ministers. So that meant that Heather Smith and I had to find a very different way of working together. It meant that we had to find a different way of ensuring that we were leading across a broader portfolio of interests, that we were briefing our ministers, our shared ministers in a way that wasn't causing either confusion for the organisation or for the ministers, more importantly, and that our systems, we were learning and putting in place the best systems to do that.

More recently, Michele and I have then found ourselves in a similar situation where we're sharing a minister on the Small Business and Skills and Vocational Education side. So, again, I wanted to mention these things because they're different ways of working for the public service and one where I know David Thodey has asked us to do a case study around this for the APS Review.

But it also means a different style of leadership, a different way of looking at risks, a different way of looking at our systems. So with that, I'll pass over to Michele.

Daniel Sloper: Thank you.

Dr M Bruniges: Okay, well, thanks everyone and good afternoon, everyone. Can I add to some of the comments that Kerri has said. Ditto, ditto on all of the above, I think it's incredibly important but I wanted to touch on today is just the privileged position we are in as public servants and our capacity to be both influence and to change and to really look long and hard at the public agenda in each of our areas of responsibility and I think that's a privilege. We need to be able to have the confidence to use our public sector voice to inform the government of the day with our very best thinking. And I don't think we should every forget that power that we have as public service.

I think the other thing I'd have to say that for me, leadership resides at all levels in an organisation. And to me, that's really, really important that we need women leaders at all levels, in role models and mentors at all levels and looking not just to the SCS level within the organisation, but often you find that the leadership, if it comes within units, within teams, then it's far reaching and longstanding in a distributed leadership model in organisations is really important.

And so, the essence of that is you don't need formal authority to be a leader. Much of what we do each day requires leadership for all of those different levels and I think it leads to far better outcomes and the important point that Kerri touched on but the importance of modelling. And I think just last week, it was Louise Taylor, sworn in as the ACT Magistrate and the Territory's first Aboriginal

Judicial Officer and how fantastic is that. And I think it was the Canberra Times that indeed reported on her speech where she said there was a belief, and let me quote, "You can't be what you can't see."

And I think that resonates so much across, not only the public sector but society at large and women's role there. So, the power of modelling is really strong. The second point I'd like to make is about being authentic and in preparation for today, I reflected on how long it was since I had done a speech, particularly around, explicitly about women in leadership. And my experience as a female leader.

And for me, that whole integrity and being authentic, no matter what your gender is, and I think Hala, your bit at the beginning about is it the defining characteristics of both men and women and what does that mean for leadership of the future? But I think it probably applies to women more so probably to women. And why do I say that? I think because women's leadership and leadership style of women and behaviour, they are sometimes subject to more scrutiny than those of male counterparts and we could all think of examples where that's forefront and I think that's really important.

I think the other bit that goes with being authentic is about self-awareness. And when you know, in your own self-awareness, about what are the triggers in a leader that are either going to upset you or cause you to react a way. And you've got to do a really deep think about what they are and how you are going to manage those. You need to understand what people stand for and they're going to stand by you in all of those things and I just use one example of my past. I had to do a public apology around a coronial inquest of a death of a student from anaphylactic shock at Ashfield Boys High School in New South Wales. It was the most heart wrenching public apology in terms of the systems had failed, they had clearly failed and were reported in the media.

But I think your internal calibration as a leader about how you do that public apology and how you say sorry to parents who send their child to school and didn't come home was really a self-calibrating feature and I think made me really reflect on the decency and the humanity of what you have to do when you're really under the pump in situations and you have to find a way through. And I don't think we often tell some of those personal narratives enough to help people through or articulate some of the key messages there.

And that really goes to probably my final point and that is, bring yourself and your own set of experiences to your role. You know, sometimes, we all have to dig deep and really understand, as I said, and recognise and value the experiences and life experiences that you bring to the nature of the person you are to the role. As an educator, I've been an educator all of my career, I'm very very privileged, I'm living with four generations of women in my family and often reflect on the differences between my mom's world and those of my grandchildren's world as you navigate changes in society and what does it look through those lenses and what different leadership characteristics are going to need into the future.

So, leadership is indeed very much about knowing about ourselves. So, I'll pause there and hand across to Liz.

Liz Cosson:

Thank you. Well, good afternoon everyone and thank you very much for this invitation to join you. And I thought I might just start giving you a little bit of my history, serving in the public sector for nearly 40 years. As you heard, I was in the military for over 31 years and I joined at the age of 20 and loved my military service in the Australian Army. And I feel that what I am doing today as the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs is an extension of that military service.

When I joined in 1979, job opportunities for females in our military was about 23%. We weren't really given the opportunity that women are today in our military forces. And throughout my military service, I saw that change quite a deal with not only women being able to demonstrate that they were up to the task of the military service but importantly, we had a lot of male champions who wanted to give those opportunities for females in military because they recognised 50% of the population females and the importance of having diversity, not only gender diversity but diversity in thinking and diversity in approach in our military forces.

So, I was very privileged to also be the first female promoted to the rank of Major General in the army and I was very proud to achieve that. Little did I think that when I joined service in 1979 that I would have that privilege. But during my service, I learned a lot about leadership, not only formally but just by having the opportunity to observe the different styles and I also learned that I had to adapt my leadership style, depending on the circumstances where I was serving.

If you looked at the different opportunities that I had through the military service, I recognised when I went on an operation into Bougainville in Papua New Guinea that I had to change my style. But, picking up on Michele's point, what was really an important foundation piece for me was that authenticity. Sometimes, during my service, I recognised that ladies changed their style because they thought that's what was expected of them in a very much male-dominated even.

They felt they needed to be more masculine and use language that potentially they wouldn't normally use in their environment. And when I observed that, I recognised that that wasn't my style. So, I had to understand who I was and be authentic. But still adapt to a change in circumstance which in Bougainville I did.

We were a military force in an environment that had been warring for over 10 years and our government of the day chose for our force to go there unarmed and in order to be able to operate in an environment such as that, we had to have really keen situational awareness. And I was responsible for managing the headquarters at the time. So, I had to be quite conscious of my style which was a little bit more directive but still being authentic to myself in that style.

But when I left the military, I then went to the Department of Veterans' Affairs and I call that a very soft landing. It was a little bit more of the military hierarchical environment and I was very comfortable there. But then going on to

the Department of Immigration and Citizenship as it was and became Border Protection, it was a huge shock to my system. A different style of leadership, again, to what I had experienced in the military and my first couple of years in Veterans' Affairs. There was certainly, before it became Border Protection, there was no rank. We were civilians, serving the public in a very scrutinised environment, policy-rich environment.

And for me, that's when I became quite conscious of the role of the public servant. And I'm very proud of the role we play for this country in shaping the legacy for future Australians, future generations. And I learned about my leadership style in that environment.

And I think that's when I became quite keen to return to Veterans' Affairs. I knew I wanted this job, it's the only job that I wanted and when I was interviewed by Dr Parkinson, he said, "Well, [inaudible] if you are successful after Veterans' Affairs?" I said, "Nowhere, Dr Parkinson, this is the job I feel I want to do, where I can make a difference because as public servants, that's what we do every single day. We make a difference and I'm very proud of that."

But before coming back to Veterans' Affairs, I went to Department of Health. I knew that I needed to understand the health system to be able to contribute to any role in Veterans' Affairs. So, I did that and then I came back to Veterans' Affairs for two years as the Deputy and very, very privileged to be invited to assume this role as the Secretary. It is my passion, I come from a long line of family that have served in the military. My father served for over 30 years, he's still alive and gives me a lot of grief. He's great on technology, loves his iPad, found his new girlfriend on RSVP. What do you do?

And sorry, [Becks], Becks heard that story before. But, my father served, my husband also served for over 30 years in both Gulf wars and he commanded our forces in East Timor. And so, I am passionate about leading a big transformation in Veterans' Affairs. And once again, a leadership style that needs to adapt and I can assure you that it needs a different leadership style when you are trying to not only change a system, a process, but a culture where you've got stakeholders that don't want you to change and when I had the opportunity to address the staff of Veterans' Affairs and our stakeholders, I offered three priorities for me as a leader.

The first one that we will put our veterans and families first in all our thinking, in our design, in our policy and programmes and service delivery. And that is not where we have been for many years and that's no fault. It's just, we've built up an environment that is based on process and claim and not the individual where we're going to more citizen-centric, that's at the heart of what we do.

My second key priority was about finding our purpose. We are a small organisation that actually does a lot of health business, human services, social services, NDIS, you name it. We do a little bit of it, but we don't do it all well. And so, my key focus is to leverage others that do it well, so we can focus on our purpose. And to drive our agenda to make that difference that we need to make.

And the third is really to understand the nature of the military service and to recognise and respect and use data to do that better. We can find that purpose by understanding the unique nature of military service.

So over 40 years, I have learned a lot about leadership. I've learned to adapt my style, but I've also learned who I am in that process and I think if there is anyone takeout is to know what your values are that drive you as a leader. Like Michele, I've made mistakes. One very public mistake and I learned very quickly the importance of learning from that but who am I? And what drives me? And what brings me to work every day? And I'm certainly very proud to be in this room.

Daniel Sloper:

Thank you very much. Actually, thank you to all of you for very rich comments and I've got a few questions but hopefully, others have evoked from the presentations and are putting something forward.

It seems to me one of the key things is that leadership in the public sector is inclusive and it's adaptive, that is it's not the traditional hierarchical model some of us might think of. Can I ask you reflect on your personal journeys and Liz, you may have touched on this a little bit, but how has your personal leadership style evolved or how has it changed because of the challenges you've faced, and I think Liz just outlined some so we might start with Kerri. And then, are there new challenges for the leadership in the public sector, more broadly?

Kerri Hartland:

Yeah. Thank. So, I think you do grow as a leader and every job you do, you learn. And it's a constant learning experience which is what I love and you're working with people so you're learning from them and you're making mistakes all the time and you're learning from those mistakes, hopefully, you're not making as many mistakes as you're actually achieving things. So to get that balance right is good.

So I think it's a constant process. I guess some of those points that I picked up before, I suppose for me, that growing importance of relationship skills and there's nothing that ... no policy or no programme that we would deliver that we're not working with others across the public and private sector.

And so, I think if I reflect on the sorts of things that might have been looked at in the leadership and for the SCS when I first came into the public service, I'm not sure that those issues around relationship skills and collaboration would have been as strong as they are now. So, I think that's a couple of key areas that I'd say.

The other one I would say has probably grown in importance is, well, too, resilience. It's tough, it's a complex environment. Anyone who says moving into a Secretary's role is easy I think is probably kidding you to say that. In any leadership role, you know, in any new role. So having that resilience factor and lots of changes in a political climate and I think judgement with that has also grown in importance.

Daniel Sloper:

Thank you. Michele.

Dr M Bruniges: I was just going to say, just adding to that, Kerri talked about resilience, you know, there is a professional resilience and there is a personal resilience. And I think you really have to understand, and I go back to self, what your tipping point is. Do you know when you really need a break? Do you know when it's time to actually stop and do something a little bit different?

And so understanding what those are to help you deal with the nature of the day in a way that at the end of the day you still feel robust and a full person. The other thing I'd say just the decency in relationships. You know, I've said often to staff in the Department of Education and Training, workplaces are really, really important places. You don't know what someone has just come from when they enter the workplace and you don't know what they're going home to.

And so, the decency of interaction in a workplace and our relationships as Kerri said are really critical to make sure we get that right for every one of us in every setting that we can is incredibly important.

Daniel Sloper: Liz, did you want to add anything?

Liz Cosson: If I can just pick up on that point as well, on the resilience. And also, how difficult it is to move into a Secretary's role and I'll quote a previous Secretary when I was catching up with him and he said to me, and I related to this, he felt arrogant enough, he was arrogant enough to consider that he was ready to be a Secretary. And I think I fell for that. I was arrogant enough to believe I was ready to step into the role.

It is extremely challenging, but it is also so rewarding. And just to be able to have that network and that comradery and that collaboration is what makes it easier for you to make that transition. Without that, I really don't know how secretaries would do it because it's not an easy step up.

Daniel Sloper: Thank you. I was going to ask another question, but I think I might open to the floor because I think most people are here to listen to you and then interact through those questions. Perhaps we'll open up and there are roving mics available but take one or two questions or maybe three from people and then return to the panel. Has anyone got a burning issue they want to start off with. There's a microphone just coming.

Lisa Weston: Hi, Lisa Weston from Department of Defence. I found some of your comments, ladies, very interesting so thank you. A couple of years ago, I heard Peta Credlin speak in a private forum with a bunch of women in defence and she made a comment that she didn't think there was any issues being a woman, a professional woman until she was in the top job.

And that's when the criticism came because that was a little bit too senior for ... you know, and that was outside, of course, the public sector. But noting her comment, how have you found stepping up in that sector? Have you found increased criticism? Have you got any frank comments to make about working with your male and female peers and that criticism that you may or may have not received?

Daniel Sloper: Thank you. We might go to another question or two and then come back to the panel if that's all right just to allow you to respond to a few of them. No other questions? Please. Down the back I think.

Lisa Charles: Lisa Charles, the ACT Government. I just had a question for Kerri, you made a comment about thinking differently in leadership around risk. Would you be able to elaborate on that?

Daniel Sloper: Thank you.

Kerri Hartland: There's one up there. Oh right at the back yeah.

Daniel Sloper: One more question. I think we'll go to the back and we come back afterwards.

Moira Campbell: Moira Campbell from the Department of Health. This is a question for all of the panel. I'm interested in the concept of adaptive leadership and the argument that it is a practise, not a position. In the hierarchy of the public service, how do you create an authorising environment for leadership at every level?

Daniel Sloper: Thank you. So we have three issues, one specifically for you. So we might start off with that and then come back to the points about criticism and how managers or leaders can respond to that and adaptive leadership. But Kerri, first, just on the risks associated with the issue.

Kerri Hartland: Thanks Lisa, nice to see you. So what I was talking about there is that if you're leading in a collaborative way across a portfolio, then there's a shared risk. You're taking a shared risk. And looking at things through a shared risk lens. And that's not a way that we normally work. You know, we look at our risk frameworks in our silos and we don't look necessarily across portfolios.

So, Heather and I are now ... Michele and I have to be very aware of that and I know from doing some work with some private firms around here that I was doing when I was in finance in the service delivery office, that the public service probably isn't as adept at doing that as the private sector is. So I think we've got a bit to learn there.

It made us think about having to get together and really looking at our risk thresholds and our risk appetite in a team sense across agencies. So that's what I was talking about there. Just around the female issue that you raised, look, I think that probably Liz and I have been very fortunate to come into the Secretary's group if you like and the Secretary's board when we've had a 50/50 split. And that time, and I note that Steve Kennedy who is one of the other new Secretaries ... thanks for coming along, Steven.

You know, that equal gender balance I think has been a really important thing and we were reflecting on it a little bit in the lead-up to having this discussion today. I can't imagine what it would have been like for Helen Williams who was speaking here not so long ago, how she would have been able to find her voice in a way that we can pretty easily find our voice. And for me, it's been a great support mechanism having the other female Secretaries there.

Michele was often catching up with me via WhatsApp in those first little while when I was up, before Esther [inaudible] committees and saying, "Are you okay? Do you need a coffee? Maybe something stronger?" So you know, it's a really supportive group and that's really important.

Daniel Sloper: Michele, why don't we move to you, both in terms of the criticism issue but also if you want to talk about how to create and authorise an environment, if you like for adaptive leadership?

Dr M Bruniges: Yeah, look I think the criticism, I think Kerri is spot on. And you know, my first appointment as a Chief Executive was some years ago now, back in the ACT actually as Head of Education and Training here. So I'm going back 13 years.

I then proceeded on to New South Wales and I was the second female to be appointed Director General since 1881. The first was Jan McClelland who proceeded me probably just a few years before. And I think there is nothing more daunting than looking at the photos outside the office in New South Wales, in Bridge Street, just thinking, "My Goodness me, there is such a long history and a way of doing things, will I ever crack it?" And I think Jan lasted 18 months in that role. So at this stage, I think I did the five years and the longest standing female Director General in the New South Wales.

But it was tough. I think the expectations that came with a long history and so I think Kerri is spot on in what she says around the gender balance in the board and what that actually means for a network of people. Look, I think there can be sometimes a passive resistance which is really hard to crack where, you know, I've been in several forums over a number of years and probably more so in the earlier days and my field is mathematics. And it wasn't the easiest one.

I remember walking in to universities to talk about my PhD and probabilistic theory and so forth and people waiting for Michael Bruniges to arrive. You know? It was the [inaudible] because it was mathematics, it had to be male and that's going back a number of decades. But today, I think we've got a really strong network. I think there's a sense of comfortable in our own stride and overcoming that and I think having the diversity and the gender balance is really helpful.

On the adaptive thing, I might just move to that question about how to engender that. Oh, it's over here, wasn't it? This way. Sorry. In terms of how do you engender that. You know, I never ask my staff to do anything I wouldn't do myself. So I found it quite shocking when I first came to the Commonwealth, I went to shred a pile of paper at the end of the day and they went, "Oh, what's the Secretary doing, she's shredding paper." I said, "It's okay, I'm cleaning up at the end of the day."

So I think there's something about being an authentic leader and you know, I have a personal principle that says I wouldn't ask my staff to do anything I wouldn't do myself and that can be ... that kind of engenders a way of working that hopefully gives people a licence to innovate freely. But it isn't easily

received. Sometimes people will build up a whole thing and you've got to work really hard at organisational culture.

And this year, we've done a big lot of work in the department around the cultural traits in our workplace, how do we do it? How do we collaborate? How do we work smarter, how do we work that? So we've got a great big theme running this year about trying to engender that trust and way of working and approach to working that actually gives that licence to innovate at all levels in the organisation.

Daniel Sloper:

Thank you. Liz, do you want to please add some comments?

Liz Cosson:

Thank you Daniel. If I can go to Moira's question about the authorising environment, Moira. We did it when I was in Health and we're doing it in Veterans' Affairs, as well, where we're asking staff to tell us about what they want to see changed and through staff reference groups, we've got over 100 of our staff who want to participate in that. And [Rebekah], who's sitting in the audience, came along to an executive management board with a couple of her colleagues and the courage it took for them to share with us, as a leadership team, what they wanted to see change, I admire them so much because we wanted them to feel quite comfortable in sharing. But what they did was courageous and importantly, what we then did in return was demonstrate that we had heard, and we'd listened to be able to make the change.

So I think authorising staff to tell us what they want to see change and that the leadership is at every level as we've heard. It's not just for the executive management board, any member of our staff can shape and influence the future direction of the department. And I've certainly seen over the last two years some incredible change being made as a result of the senior leadership listening to staff. And I think that is really great.

So just on resistance. I can say that I felt that in my military service a lot. But I learned very early that I needed to show that I was actually proficient at my job. And if you have that capability and the confidence, then you'll bring people with you. If I know, and I learned very early that leadership wasn't about being popular with everyone either, there was some people that were going to find fault in what I had done, what I achieved and perhaps didn't think I was as worthy as someone else to be promoted to different ranks or positions.

But I just recognised that that was there because it's those that are around you, the network that supports you that you recognise you are worthy. And you don't just listen to the nay-sayers, sometimes, we're our own worst enemies as females because I've heard other females try and cut down females in senior leadership appointments and I think that's just disgraceful.

We should embrace and celebrate success. And I always knew I wasn't the best, but I was the best I could be. The old saying goes. And I didn't try and prove that I was better than my male colleagues, I just wanted to be the best I could be.

Daniel Sloper: It's quite sobering, I think, Madeleine Albright said, there's a special place in hell for some of those people.

We might move to questions again and I didn't mention before, but I think you all picked up but if you could just identify yourself and if you have questions, specifically for one member of the panel, make that clear, otherwise all three will have the opportunity to respond. A question just here, please.

Emily D'Ath: Hi, my name's Emily D'Ath from Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. My question is maybe not so much about in your leadership positions now but when you were on your way up through your career and if you have any tips for calling out inappropriate behaviour, whether it's talking over colleagues, whether it's appointing females to do the administration work over some of the more rich policy work. And how we can actually approach our peers but also our superiors to change that culture.

Daniel Sloper: Thank you.

Maureen Greet: Maureen Greet from Prime Minister and Cabinet. My question goes to your point on resilience and your own wellbeing and I would really love your tips and advice on how you've picked yourself up, dusted yourself on and cracked on with the next day. And not just alcohol related, so anything else that you could do, that would be lovely. Thank you.

Daniel Sloper: Thank you. I think we have one more question further along in the row.

Sally Whyte: Thanks. I'm Sally Whyte from the Canberra Times. And I think my question follows on from the one just before in that although we have 50% at the level of Secretaries of women and men, if you look at all level of the public service, we have more women than men, I think, up until EL 1 Level and then that sort of goes steadily in the other direction.

As you have moved up the ranks, what are the barriers that you have seen that have led to there being more men than women in the room and how have you dealt with those barriers?

Daniel Sloper: Liz, shall we start with you just to reverse the order?

Liz Cosson: Sure. So, calling behaviours, sorry, who asked that question? The calling behaviours. Emma. I've had to do that, certainly from the beginning of my career where women weren't really well embraced in the army. In my first position, it was with Vietnam veterans, all Warrant Officers, Sergeants, Corporals and they didn't want this young 2nd Lieutenant Officer coming in and bossing them around and, in those days, there were posters, nude posters up on walls. And I had to call it. And it took courage.

But also, it was in an environment where I asked for equal respect. They respect me, and I respect them. And throughout my career, I've had to just call behaviours. Where people talk over you, I still deal with that at the moment where some people just like to be heard and I let them. And then I say, "Okay,

now, I'd like to offer my opinion." I don't try and compete and talk over them because they're wanting to have the louder voice. But it's making sure I find my space to actually make that point.

But never be afraid and do it respectfully when you're calling a behaviour. I've never done it openly or lost my temper, I called in private and I've had to do it a few times. And it's not just males, by the way. I've called female behaviour where a lack of respect ... I just won't tolerate. So yeah, calling that.

Resilience, Maureen, yeah, for me, certainly my experience is, and I think Michele touched on this, it's knowing my triggers and knowing when I need time out. And I know when I have taken myself off my path that keeps me resilient, for example I know I have to do the gym. I have to get and do a treadmill or a walk or do something physical because that's my time out.

And sometimes, I get caught up in the moment of work where I have forgotten that time for me. So I need to get back on that treadmill as they say and spend that time for myself. But I also have a husband at home who's retired and reminds me all the time when we need to go on a holiday which we just did up to the Gold Coast on the weekend. That was our time out. So getting that balance in my life is really important to keep my personal and professional resilience going.

Finally, the barriers. Well, I haven't experienced them personally. Barriers, I think that through having really strong networks and having people that champion you and you're prepared to have the courage to do something different, I know when I was offered the position to go to Bougainville, my initial response was no, I didn't want to go, I was terrified. It was going to take me completely out of my comfort zone, even though I'd served in the army for 20 years, I thought, "Oh my goodness, now I'm not up to that."

But what I did is just talk to those that had supported me, my mentors, my champions and they said, "Don't be ridiculous. Step up, you can do this." And it's having the courage to do something different because that will break down barriers and I know, when I reflect on my career, that broke down a lot of barriers for me because I did have the courage and I was proficient in my trade.

And I know that if I continually learn, I will continue to succeed but I've never been complacent in my purpose, my goals and my ambition to get ahead.

Daniel Sloper:

Thank you Liz. Michele.

Dr M Bruniges:

The call it out question. Yes, I come from a teaching background so disruptive behaviour and all of those things. And you know, I think positive reinforcement goes a long way when things are going really well. So celebrate, thank people, a whole range of things of that. And on the other side, then you have to explain why someone's upset by the actions or what's been said. So that's probably my personal thing. There shouldn't be a personal sense of fear of failure of doing either of those things.

You know, we do it in classrooms all the time with other people's children and talk about the values and appropriate behaviour and non-appropriate behaviour and I'm not sure why we can't rely on those fundamental principles in the workplace. So that would be my view on that.

Resilience, what do you do to keep your resilience? A bit like Liz. I think I have a little mantra that says I always do the hardest thing in my day first. And I think that was really important because otherwise the anxiety can build and I can remember, and I think it was Sally from the Canberra Times, you know, I remember when I had to do a media interview in past jobs and it'd be the hardest one to do because ministers got to do good media and senior bureaucrats got to do not so good media if it was a really hot topic. You know, it was either talking about asbestos in schools or something, it was really tough to be able to do.

And I found myself, if you tended to put those things off, then your own internal mechanism, it got harder as the day went on. Whereas if I dealt with it first in the day, it was done and dusted, and it would take off a pressure or a stress. So I always think about that. Do the hardest thing that you've got to do in your day first is a way of dealing with self-calibrating and getting that resilience there.

I think the triggers, Liz and I and Kerri have spoken about the triggers. You've got to know yourself. What are the things that are upsetting you? We all come to work and there are things that have happened in the home and life in general and you're balancing some of that. You know, if you carve out of your day to do something for yourself, something for someone else all the time and live by that, you can get all of those things done that build up in your personal life, deal with them in a way that helps you rebalance or recalibrate.

And just on the barriers question, thinking of our careers, we make personal decisions about when you're prepared to accelerate, when you need to plateau, when you need to do something else and it might be change, a different thing that you need to do. And I think we should never think it's always up. It's not. You need to be out and realise that that's okay, you need to just pace yourself and make quiet, deliberate, personal decisions. And don't set up artificial barriers or don't feel that personal sense of fear of failure that you're not always going up.

Sometimes, I think, Liz, I noticed your comment, you went out to Health because you knew that was important in the Veterans' area and I think we learn to ... we often build up things that can prove to be barriers where there is no need to be. So try and alleviate the barriers by accepting yourself, where you are in life, what you choose to do next, never look backwards. You wear the consequence of impact of your last decision. And you've got to feel comfortable in your own stride in doing that.

Daniel Sloper:

Thank you very much. Kerri, I think this might be the last comment from the panel, but I leave it to you to cover all the issues.

Kerri Hartland:

Thank you. So, in terms of the inappropriate behaviour and calling out. I agree with my colleagues here. You can't walk past it. And I think one of the things that I've learned, though, and I was just reflecting that one extreme situation that I had was a colleague that, every time another colleague, and these were both male colleagues, when the other colleague spoke, this person would always just open the newspaper in front of the ... so far beyond passive aggressive.

And it's about timing of calling things out. So had I have called that out in the meeting, it wouldn't have actually had a good outcome. So it was about then calling it out after the meeting, having a private word about how this might be impacting on this other ... it's sort of the stuff that you also tell kids about bullying in playgrounds in a way as well.

So, I think there is something around timing. And I think one of the hard things, though, is that people don't always realise that you've called it out. And it's like dealing with underperformance also in the workplace. There might be a million things that are actually going on underneath but for privacy reasons and because of the way it's being handled, you're not actually able to share that. So some of those things are sort of tricky. But I think the timing and how you do it is really important.

In terms of the resilience, wellbeing. Similar thing. You know, I'm very strict about making sure that I go to the gym, if I don't then I know that I'll be crankier and feel sort of less well in myself. The other thing I'd say is family is a great leveller. You know, you only have to walk in the house. I often tell a story, I think I was telling it to [Joe], one of my deputies, about having to go home one day and it had been the worst day in the world and I had to make a carrot costume for the next day.

And everything else ... but you know, painting a white sheet orange and making a carrot costume was really ... meant that I had to focus on other things and it was the important thing. My family wasn't going to go away, and I had to, damn it, make this carrot costume so I did.

The only other thing I would add to what Liz and Michele have said around sort of that the stoppers, if you like, the ceiling potentially at those EL levels. I think we're not going to stop some of that balance or lack of balance until we find that it's socially acceptable for our male colleagues to be in part-time roles.

So, I think one of the big lessons for me in one of the organisations I was working for was having a focus group with several young males in the organisation who were so frowned upon for asking for time off. I was quite despairing. And we had to find role models in the organisation to say, "It's okay to do this." And to really make sure that they had supervisory support.

So, I think it's still a big social problem and I don't think we will change that balance, particularly at that sort of EL 1-ish level where life decisions are being made until we alter that.

Daniel Sloper:

Thank you very much. Actually, thanks to all of you for a very rich discussion. I think everyone here will walk away with a few things that will stick in their mind. I'm just thinking myself about that. Adaptive leader, you've all shown, inclusiveness and the collaboration, but actually genuineness and decency and courage came through as a very key thing for me in all the presentations that you gave and the response to questions.

But lastly, courage. And I think there will ... that is, women in leadership is actually for all. If we can learn from that, we will all be better off in the workplace. So thank you very much for joining us today.